

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
SEXUALITY AMONG A GROUP OF MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF SEXUALITY AMONG A GROUP MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN**

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In this study, construction of sexuality has been studied among middle class, educated women who are living considered 'normal', in a social structure assumed where sexuality from one side is talked about a lot and from another full of unknowns about perceptions and experiences. Certain conclusions were derived on construction of women sexuality following the interviews performed with twenty nine women whose ages vary from twenties to fifties.

**Keywords:** Sexuality, Female Sexuality, Construction of Sexuality, Intimacy.

## ÖZ

### CİNSELLİĞİN YAPILANMASI HAKKINDA BİR GRUP ORTA SINIF KADINLA YAPILAN BİR AMPİRİK ÇALIŞMA

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Yüksek Lisans, Kadın Çalışmaları

Tez Yöneticisi: Dr. A. Adnan Akçay

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Bu çalışmada cinselliğin bir tarafı ile çok konuşulduğu bir tarafı ile de gerçek algı ve yaşanmışlıkların hiç bilinmediği varsayılan bir toplumsal yapıda ‘normal ‘ tanımı altındaki kentli eğitimli orta sınıf mensubu kadınların cinselliği yaşama ve algılama biçimlerinden bu grubun mensubu kadın için cinselliğin nasıl kurulduğu anlaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Yaşları yirmili ile ellili yaşlar arasında değişen yirmi dokuz kadınla yapılan söyleşiler sonrasında kadın cinselliğinin kuruluşuna dair belirli çıkarımlar yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cinsellik, Kadın Cinselliği, Cinselliğin Kuruluşu, Mahremiyet.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has a chronological order. It is a study of how we experienced and perceived our sexuality, which social practices influenced us and how we filled our subconscious ever since we remember ourselves. In order to preserve the harmony with the study, I would like to present my acknowledgements in chronological order as well.

I will start with my friend Aynur Gedizli who supported me during my most difficult days. It was due to her support and encouragement I became a student of Women's Studies. When the time came to start thinking about my thesis, I was not sure if anyone would be willing to talk to me on this difficult and personal subject of sexuality. Her response to my doubts was always "absolutely yes!" and she supported the project by personally recruiting her friends and acquaintances. During this time of uncertainty, my friend Zerrin Gürk k also supported me strongly by helping me find more women to talk to and she introduced me to many wonderful people. Zerrin was always a phone call away and offered her support generously every time I needed it.

When the time came to write the thesis, I spent many days with my dear friend G nseli Őahin. She opened her office to me and provided every imaginable comfort to the point of spoiling me like one would do for a hardworking child. She fed me, served me drinks, read my chapters over and over again, edited them and provided much valuable feedback.

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When it was time to translate the thesis into English, my cousin, Mehmet C. Öztürk, whom I grew up/couldn't grow up with, who has been a constant source of support in every difficult phase of my life, offered his help generously and helped me to meet my deadline by working with me day and night on the thesis. I would also like to help his wife Hatice Örun Öztürk, who sent me related literature earlier. The translations of the literary texts in this thesis would not have been possible without her help. I would like to thank all of these people once again for believing in the necessity of this study and supporting it wholeheartedly by generously offering their help.

So far I listed my acknowledgements chronologically but I have to add here that my advisor Dr. Adnan Akcay was with me all the way, from the beginning till the end. He accepted me as his student without knowing who I was and constantly reminded me to be the one 'who tries to understand ' instead of the one 'who knows '. I hope that I didn't let him down.

My children kept my spirits high with their delightful humor. My son Mert kept asking me how many pages I have written, to check how close I was to his limit of 100 pages after which he could look forward to my



attention again. My daughter Özgün served as my personal assistant to the library and carried the books back and forth without any complaints.

My mother and father stepped in whenever I needed their help, my husband Levent helped me with my word processing needs, my sister-in-law Şükran Atıkcın offered her office as a workspace for me and my niece Cansu helped me with the books I needed from Bilkent University library. I am thankful to all of them.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In our lives, sexuality is a closed box on one hand but a heavily discussed subject on the other. We talk so much about sexuality yet we know so little. The aim of this study is to understand how middle class educated women living in the capital city of Turkey perceive and live their sexuality and which meanings are attached to sexual perceptions and practices.

In metropolises, we live in a social environment that severely lacks sincerity. In our exchanges with others we seem to prefer to focus on insignificant details of our daily routine rather than sharing any of our intimate feelings with them. In this modern world, psychiatrists/psychologists became the ones who listen to our monologues and understand how we feel.<sup>1</sup> We rush to them only when we realize we can no longer deal with our problems. When we seek therapy we believe that we are the only unfortunate people suffering from these problems.

We have sexuality sprayed on us from all directions all the time. Billboards covered with beautiful, sexy women in tiny bikinis selling one

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<sup>1</sup> Baudrillard states that in USA people no longer look at each other, but there are institutions for that. They no longer touch each other, but there is 'contactotherapy'. They no longer walk, but they go jogging.  
Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacre and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 13.

product or another, one group wants to cover them while the other tries to reveal as much flesh as possible<sup>2</sup>, TV programs educating us about the secrets of a healthy sex life, fashion magazines that provide creative ideas to make us look sexy yet virtuous at the same time, porn industry teaching us new sexual tricks and our jokes with heavy sexual content... “We are about to say, ‘a glass of water but if possible, without any sex please.’”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, we know very little about the effects of the sexual bombardment. How does a young girl, for instance feel about when she sees these perfectly air brushed pictures of women? The women in these pictures wait for their men with their seductive gazes in an already seduced or ready to seduce manner. These women appear to be desirous at all times. They move their lips in certain special ways as they eat, they have mastered getting off cars in a few elegant moves, they curve their bodies suggestively as they talk on the phone. They are always ‘sexual’ even when they are busy with the most ordinary of things. At the same time, they are ‘virtually’ dressed porn stars. They are the forever seducers. They are the masters of being hyper yet asexual at the same time. Female pop stars who sell their sexuality on TV and then cover their heads and turn in to temporary mothers and housewives suggest that this dilemma is not limited to the billboards. Does a young girl desire to grow up into one of those wonder women? Or does she think that she is missing something essential if she does not feel like joining them? How does she feel when she has a boyfriend or when she does not have one? How do married, divorced, widowed women feel?

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<sup>2</sup> *Hadjis*, upon going to pilgrimage, complaint about “Zeki Triko’s” commercial showing a girl with a bikini on the bilboards at Atatürk Airport. Then the bilboards were covered during the pilgrimage period. The bikini producing firm filed a suit for a damage of 100 000 YTL and thus the subject became a very popular material for the media.

İnci Döndaş, “Adriana’nın seksi bakışı adliye koridorlarında,” *Sabah Gazetesi*, Aralık 25, 2004, Sabah Yayıncılık.

<sup>3</sup> Hasan B. Kahraman, *Cinsellik, Görsellik, Pornografi* (İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2005), 16.

How do they survive in this sexual culture? It is ironic as well as tragic that in this environment where sex appears to come at us from every corner, we know very little about sexual lives of real people.

While sexuality appears to be everywhere, it is a taboo at the same time. According to Foucault, sexuality was not perceived as a list of taboos until the 17th century. During the 18th century, we begin to see moral values infiltrating into sexuality.<sup>4</sup> Christianity defines sexuality as the domination of flesh over mind and dictates the believers to stay away from it except for the purpose of reproduction. In Islamic discourse, we do not see such prohibitive rules. Instead, Islamic discourse views sexuality as a means of providing satisfaction to the desires of the body after which the body is purified leading to a cyclic phenomenon. Human beings are considered as sexual creatures. They live their sexualities, they get satisfaction and they pray to God as the only supreme creator as they clean themselves<sup>5</sup>. The desire-satisfaction-purification cycle continues throughout the life of all believers of Islam. In Islamic tradition, the sexual desire is praised and repressed at the same time. Woman's aggressive sexual desire carries the risk of upsetting the social order since it can never be completely satisfied. Woman is *fitna*: an embodiment of destruction and chaos for social order.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, women must be

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Cinselliğin Tarihi* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Fatma Mernissi explains *fitna* as chaos provoked by sexual disorder and initiated by women as Quasim Amin translates it but she adds also that *fitna* also means a beautiful woman – the connotation of a *femme fatale* who makes men lose their self control. Fatima Mernissi, "The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality," in *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies* ed. Pınar İlkkaracan (İstanbul: Women For Women's Human Rights, 2000), 22.

controlled and confined. In Islam, women are perceived as hypersexual beings<sup>7</sup>.

Turkey got its share from westernization, and it has been influenced by the prohibitive Christian discourse.<sup>8</sup> In urban areas and especially large cities, westernization has resulted in a culture, which became a mixture of Islamic values and modernity. In this cultural environment the idealized western model, the nuclear family structure was accepted by the middle and upper classes of the society. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, women were encouraged to take part in the development process, to get involved in public life and have professions. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that, in modern Turkey with its Ottoman heritage which included a clear demarcation between the sexes and the men's honor strictly depended upon women's behavior, the entry of women into public life has been legitimized by attributing women a 'sexless' identity or even a masculine one.<sup>9</sup> The Republic's 'unveiled woman' adapted

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<sup>7</sup> In Islamic erotic literature the female sexual is pictured as aggressive with her unsatisfied desire. The women in *Perfumed Garden* could not reach orgasm with a male sexual organ and needs a member of an ass. Similarly, in *Binbir Gece Masalları* starts with the adultery stories of two brother princes' by their wives who slept with lots of slaves. The young woman locked up in a box by an *iblis* deceives him, frees herself and sleeps with the two princes and advises them not to trust any women as they go after their sexual desire only. Then after the one upon throne decides to kill all the women in the country. Fatna A. Sabbaj gives the story of a woman who could not reach orgasm after having sex with three hundred slaves and makes sex with asses or bears having a member as big as an ass, portraited in Mawla Ahmed Ibn Süleyman's (also known as Ibn Kemal Pasha) erotic booklet.

Şeyh Muhammed El Nefzavafi, *İtrılı Bahçe/16. Yüzyıl Arap Seks El Kitabı* (İstanbul: Söz Yayın, 1998).

Alim Şerif Onaran, *Binbir Gece Masalları Cilt 1/1* ( İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2001), 49-59.

Fatna A. Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> Adnan Akçay, "Cinsellik:Yasaklamadan kışkırtmaya," *Birikim* 49 (1995): 98.

<sup>9</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Slave Girls, Temtresses, and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel," in *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, ed. Pınar İlkkaracan (İstanbul: Women for Women's Human Rights, 2000), 91-106.

herself to new modes of behavior: dark colored costumes, short haircut, no make-up.<sup>10</sup> This way, ‘professional’ woman had to be stripped of her sexuality to maintain her respectable status in the society.

The notion of elite, respectable, professional women formed during the early years of the Republic is equivalent to the college educated women in contemporary Turkish society. This image of the woman in the millennium which is constantly referred to as / reminded of being modern, over which *Kemalist* policy has been generated, appears with blonde dyed hair, in newspapers, especially in Sunday magazine supplements, carrying computer bags, wearing mini business suits. We read the life stories of these ‘fit, fabulous and successful’ female professionals who are doctors, lawyers, engineers, artists, business women, managers, marketers, executive secretaries, etc. How does this woman who runs from one achievement to another in public domain feels about, live and perceive sexuality? Even though the answer to this question is somewhat covered in newspapers under headings such as ‘the sexual lives of contemporary women,’ my concern is to explore the sexuality of the woman labeled as modern. The goal of the study is then to understand what is there behind the perceived ‘normal’.

### **1.1 Research Method**

This task, to explain what is lived under normal, required talking to average educated working women. Who would they be? Would I be able to find women who would willingly talk about their private lives? With the help of two close friends, I started asking friends and acquaintances

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<sup>10</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, “Ataerkil Öüntüler: Türk Toplumunda Erkek Egemenliğinin Çözümlenmesine Yönelik Notlar,” in *Kadın Bakış Açısından Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1995), 381.



around us if they would be willing to participate in interviews in which every detail and every aspect about their sexual lives could be questioned. However, they would not be forced to talk about anything they are not comfortable with. Before I started the work, I had serious doubts about finding sufficient number of women for the interviews. My friends assured me that their friends would not let them down and insisted that I would not give up. They insisted, “You should not give up on this project, we will find the women to talk to you.” They kept their promise. Nearly every woman we have approached accepted our request for the interview. I have added new women to the group thanks to the help of the women I have interviewed. Almost every woman suggested a friend or a relative for the study. They wanted to help me and they wanted to help their friends because they sensed that the interviews would provide some relief to them. “You should talk to . . . ., there is a lot she has to say, it would be very good for her.” or “If you know another study like this, I would also like to participate.” were common remarks I heard at the end of each interview. They were all curious about the outcome of the study and asked me to share my conclusions with them. In some cases, the interviews turned into friendly exchanges during which we have shared our own experiences with each other. I quickly realized that my fears of not finding participants for the study were baseless. The women wanted to talk about their sexual lives. During the interviews, they sometimes felt embarrassed, sometimes their eyes welled up in tears but nevertheless, they all talked. Some of them talked about incidences or feelings that they had not shared with anyone else.

This way, I have interviewed twenty seven women. I knew some of these women very well before the interviews. I had met several of them before but did not have the opportunity to spend much time to form friendships. On the other hand, I met some of them only during the interviews. Their

ages ranged from early twenties to fifties. All of the women were from the middle class; they were all professionals with college degrees; the group included engineers, lawyers, clerks, managers, accountants and business owners. Only one of the women who had just graduated from college did not yet have a job. Because I promised the women that I would not disclose their identities, I have included a chart, which only shows the age of the women next to their assigned names. I would like to stress here that while forming sexuality/freedom/independence relations, all women considered here were members of a social group who could stand on their feet and not require in the proper sense the financial support of a man. As I mentioned before, the focus of this study is to understand how the sexuality in lower middle-class workingwomen is constructed. Therefore, I want to remind again that my conclusions will be limited to this group. My arguments may or may not be valid for rural/worker/artisan/bourgeois women...

Only three of the women we approached did not wish to be interviewed but they did not provide an explanation for their refusal of my request. All three were women that my friends and I knew from our work places.

As I mentioned before, majority of the women told me that they benefited and felt relieved as a result of talking about their experiences with me. I believe the fact that they were the participants of a 'scientific' study helped the women relax and provided justification to talk. When the participants approached their own friends, they did not have to do much to convince the newcomers. They said to their friends, "I have talked. Would you also consider participating in a scientific study about female sexuality?" and usually the answer was: "If it is a scientific study, of course I want to participate; I would want to contribute too, Why not?"

If you had trusted the researcher, I would trust her too. ” Since their friends were able to trust me, the new participants came forward too.

In the end, women talked in a circle of trust, since they believed in me and their friends but they did not talk to people outside the group about the interviews. One of the participants whom I had not met before talked to her husband the day after our interview. Not surprisingly, her husband’s reaction was “How can you talk about private things that belong to us with strangers?” When I asked her if she regretted her decision, she said she did not; however, my guess is that if she had shared her intentions with her husband beforehand, she would not contribute to the study. My intention was that none of them talked to their husbands/boy friends/lovers about the interviews.

Aside from whom to talk to, I had to decide on the questions I would ask. I have decided not to prepare any questions. Since sexuality existed virtually in all facets of life and at every age it was necessary to talk about everything related to the subject, good or bad, meaningful or not. It was necessary to decide on the starting point. This was important because it would most likely set the stage for the rest of the conversation and make the participant feel comfortable or not. Remembering Freud, who claimed that sexuality started with birth, we have decided to go back in time as much as the participant could remember. Therefore, I have started the conversations by asking questions about how they perceived, felt and lived their sexuality in their early childhood. We have talked about their experiences in the family and school environments. The second part of the interviews focused on the puberty and teenage years. The third and the last part covered the adulthood and their current state with respect to their sexuality.

Beginning the interviews with the early childhood had an unexpected impact on the participants. For many of the women, this provided the opportunity to take a look at their lives and question the impact of some of their experiences for the first time. I also believe that starting to talk from childhoods helped the women to get into this difficult and intimate subject. Interestingly, the early childhood experiences took much of the time. I leave it to the reader to decide whether the reason we spent so much time talking about those years was due what Freud had said about our adult lives, that they are pretty much shaped by our childhood experiences or a sign of our inexperienced lives spent by discussing sexuality rather than living it as Foucault said.

Because the oldest participant was in her fifties, there weren't any women among the interviewees who was 'freed' from her sexuality and would agree with Bunuel, who said when he was eighty that he was freed from a dictator with the end of his sexuality.<sup>11</sup> I do not believe if I had decided to focus on an older age group women would tell me that their sexuality was over and that it did not bother them anymore. When I was talking to a friend of mine about this study and the interviews, her seventy five years old mother who was also in the room jokingly said, "I know as much as you do if not more about this subject. If you like, talk to me as well." Contrary to the general belief, sexuality does not come to an end at any age. In the contemporary world, sexuality is related to power and in practice, perceived as the penetration of the penis into the vagina. We then have the tendency to equate sexuality to the ability to have intercourse. The truth is, we live to our last day as sexual beings whether

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<sup>11</sup> A.Adnan Akçay, "Şişme kadınlar, alo seks ve biçâre cinselliğimiz," Birikim 43 (1992): 66.

intercourse is a part of our lives or not.<sup>12</sup> Among the women I have interviewed, those who had stopped having sex with their husbands were not openly willing to accept their current status although they said it did not bother them. They appeared as if they were hopeful about having sex again one day.

We have followed a somewhat chronological order in discussing their experiences, desires, and feelings starting from childhood up to today. I have asked them how they perceived themselves, the men in their lives, family members and friends. I have tried to understand the meanings attached to these people by the participant. All of the women had heterosexual relationships with men. Only one of the women mentioned that she was deeply attached to another woman during a period in her life. Another women whom we thought was a lesbian did not want to participate in the study. Therefore, all sexual perceptions and experiences were constituted within heterosexual relations.

I also had to think about where the interviews would take place. According to Reinharz, a feminist study had to be informal, personal and even confessional.<sup>13</sup> This happened quite naturally. Majority of the interviews were conducted in coffee houses or similar places. Some of the participants were too busy, so that could only join me during their lunch breaks. I had to talk to them for several days in a row to finish the interviews. Except during one of the interviews, I did not use a recording device. The women usually felt uncomfortable in talking to a machine. I stopped suggesting this after the first few attempts and started taking

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<sup>12</sup> Milosh Forman tells us in his very well produced film “People vs. Larry Flint”, the sexual togetherness, the love between Larry Flint, the owner of the Hustler magazine, and his wife after her husband became paralyzed.

<sup>13</sup> Schulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 259.

notes even though this was not easy to do. At times, it was difficult to catch up with the speed of the participants, when they rushed through their experiences in excitement. I did not like it when I had to continue writing when the woman before me was in tears, so I usually stopped and waited for her to recover. And sometimes, I got carried away with the intensity of the things I was being told and forgot to write.

A large majority of the participants said that they had not shared their experiences with any other person before. Some of them perceived themselves as deeply wounded. During some of the conversations, their eyes welled up, they cried and their hands were shaking. I had encountered situations in which, I did not know what to do. All I could do was to offer them another cup of coffee or tea. A friend of mine warned me not to insist on continuing the conversation in such cases in order to avoid a crying spell, which could potentially be harmful for them. I did not pay attention to this warning and I tried to continue the conversations until the participant openly said that she did not want to continue the interview. This happened only once when a woman said that she was really not able to and did not want to talk anymore about her father.

In my opinion, it is better to confront the troublesome issues that bother us and talk about them. When we do not talk about them, they do not remain buried as they were first lived or perceived; instead, they are constantly modified in our imaginations, like a rolling snowball they continue to grow turning into avalanches that sometimes bury their owners under them. During the conversations, my doubt was to be perceived as a psychologist. I constantly questioned myself. Since I was not trained as a psychologist I was afraid that I would say something wrong as I continued the conversations. There were times during which,

our conversation was a pure monolog created by the incessant desire of the participant to tell her story. As Schulamit Reinharz said, a confession and a following catharsis was taking place. Some of the participants were commenting on how glad they were for being a part of this process. Others said that they had shared things with me that they had no intentions of talking about. This feeling of relief resulted from our mutual trust, sincerity as well as having lived through similar experiences. Some of the participants needed approval for the things they had done or perceived. I frequently was asked the question, “Have you ever not felt this way?”

In the end, twenty seven women talked about this intimate subject. They answered every question I asked. My impression was to speak was a condition to be a subject and those who wanted to say, “I exist!” spoke. The ones who had the courage spoke. The ones who believed that this work would be useful spoke. The ones who still had hope about life spoke. Here, I would like to thank each and every one of them one last time for the courage they have displayed.

Thus, I have tried to form a ‘story’ out of twenty seven individual stories. From their commonalities and differences a single story emerged and this story too, just like the conversations, started at childhood and spanned all their lives. Instead of including every single story, I chose a few typical stories and inserted excerpts from others wherever appropriate in order not to bore the reader. This is the story of the middle class women about how they experienced their sexuality at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Turkey. Surely, there might be stories quite different than the ones included in this study but this is my story about twenty seven women’s lives from the capital city.

## CHAPTER 2

### APPROACHES TO SEXUALITY

Today, when the word ‘sexuality’ is mentioned, Freud is the first name that comes to our minds. According to Freud, sexuality is our most important drive and we live our lives by chasing our sexual desires while according to his opponents, sexuality is a social construct. The question we need to ask is then whether sexuality is lived instinctively or is it socially constructed. As we search for an answer to this question, we face another one “what is instinct? Is it controllable or not?” According to Russell, instinct is a very vague concept and its use can be wrong and quite misleading whenever human beings are in question whether they are natives or members of civilized societies. Russell accepts baby’s suckling as the only instinct.<sup>14</sup> A certain behavior be it instinctive or socially constructed should not be the subject matter of discussion as Walby stated. Instead, the important question is how much the sexual practices are influenced by the society and/or how they impact the social life in return.<sup>15</sup>

#### 2.1 Followers of Freudian Approach

Freud was the first person who studied how sexuality is perceived, lived and constructed. After Freud, sexuality became a topic of discussion and

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<sup>14</sup> Bertrand Russel, 1999, *Evlilik ve Ahlak*, Cem Yayınevi, 11

<sup>15</sup> Slvia Walby, 1990, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Blackwell, 109



many theoretical and clinical studies were conducted.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Freud was first to claim that children are sexual beings. In his times, since sexuality was regarded as a purely reproductive activity, children were not considered sexual beings.<sup>17</sup>

In orthodox Freudian thought, sexuality is a biological drive and due to their anatomical differences, it is different for the two sexes. This drive or 'libido' as Freud refers to it, strongly affects the social structures. This drive that exists since birth, influences our behavior. According to Freud, we are all born bisexual but in time different parts of our bodies namely oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital are eroticized. In boys, the genital area is eroticized in one phase whereas in girls, this takes place in two phases, first clitoral and then vaginal.

According to Freud girls and boys are different in many ways. Both sexes first show interest in the mother. In boys, the bonds with the mother weaken in time with the fear of being castrated by their fathers. In girls, the penis envy turns into the desire to have a baby and since only men can provide what they need, they break their ties with their mothers. In girls, the development of ego is different than in boys and they have a weaker super ego.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The works of Kinsey, Masters and Johnson and Hite constituted the milestones in this arena.

Alfred C. Kinsey ve arkadaşları, *Kadınların Cinsel Hayatı Hakkında Kinsey Raporu* (İstanbul: Seksoloji Yayınları, 1951).

William H. Masters ve Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1966).

Shere Hite, *Kadınların Cinselliği Konusunda (Masters ve Johnson ile Kinsey'den sonra) En Kapsamlı Araştırma* (İstanbul: Cep Kitapları, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 132.

<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, "II. Çocuksu Cinsellik," in *Cinsellik Üzerine*, (İstanbul: Payel Yayınları, 2006), 82-119.

Freud's universal theories, which he developed by studying the data from his Viennese lower and middle class patients without considering any social and cultural dimension, were later severely criticized. Furthermore, because his sample size was limited to a few patients, his studies do not qualify scientifically to generate universal theories of the subconscious.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 Alternative Readings of Freud

In later years, Lacan and Mitchell consider the cultural dimension of Freud's theories and suggest that a different reading is possible.<sup>20</sup> Especially, Juliet Mitchell<sup>21</sup> points to the importance of the theory of subconscious and argues that without analyzing our subconscious, which has been formed under the influence of the patriarchal ideology from generation to generation it is not possible to understand the oppression of women. On the other hand, Juliet Mitchell asserts that because femininity and masculinity are not universally defined, sexuality is defined more socially than biologically.<sup>22</sup>

Lacan claims that societies are governed by a series of symbols, roles and rituals, which he refers to as 'symbolic order'. Children internalize this symbolic order through language and the rules are placed in their

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<sup>19</sup> Freud's theory of penis envy, his assertion of "anatomy is destiny" and his reductionism of sexual drives only to biology were highly criticised especially by Frieden, Firestone and Millet.

Betty Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1974).

Kate Millet, *Cinsel Politika* (İstanbul: Payel Yayınevi, 1987).

Shulamith Firestone, *Cinselliğin Diyalektiği* (İstanbul: Payel Yayınevi, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Walby, 113.

<sup>21</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Kadınlık Durumu* (İstanbul: Kadın Çevresi Yayınları, 1985), 228-235.

<sup>22</sup> Juliet Mitchell, "On the Differences between men and women," *New Society* (1981): 234, cited in: Ayesha M. İmam. "The Muslim Religious Right ('Fundamentalists') and Sexuality." In *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, edited by Pınar İlkkaracan, İstanbul: A Publication of Women for Women's Human Rights, 2000), 125.

subconscious as much as they assimilate the linguistic rules. As long as the members of the society speak the language of the symbolic order – as long as the social sexuality and class relations are practiced – the society reproduces itself.

Assimilation of the symbolic order and acceptance of the patriarchal rule takes place in three stages. The imaginary period during which the child is unaware of the boundaries between the self and the mother, the period during which the mother becomes a mirror for the child and finally the oedipal period, which marks the separation of the child from the mother. During the oedipal period, the male child identifies himself with his father who represents the symbolic order. Due to her anatomical differences, the female child can not fully internalize and assimilate the symbolic order. As a result of this, women either stay outside the symbolic order or they are repressed by it.

### **2.3 Post Modern Feminists**

Post modern feminists who are also referred as ‘French Feminists’ focus on woman’s ‘otherness’. The otherness is much more than oppression and inferiority; it should be a way of being, thinking and speaking for difference. The condition of otherness can/should enable women to criticize the patriarchal norms, values and practices imposed on society. Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray are the advocators of this concept. They are impressed by Lacan’s and Derrida’s references to the ways in which language excludes the ‘feminine’<sup>23</sup> and they admit that it is extremely difficult to challenge the symbolic order when the only words available to do so are words that have been issued by this order.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 196.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 199.

Cixous draws connections between male/female sexuality and masculine/feminine writing. She describes masculine writing like male sexuality as phallogocentric and challenges women to write about themselves, their sexuality and their body out of the world men constructed for women and considers this is the very possibility of transformation of western social and cultural standards.

Irigaray's aim is to liberate the feminine from masculine philosophical thought. She notes that today what we know about female sexual desire we know from a male point of view. She describes the woman we know as the 'masculine feminine' or 'phallic feminine', woman as man sees her and claims that it is impossible to understand 'feminine feminine' within the structures of patriarchal thought. If women want to experience themselves other than a 'waste' or an 'excess' in the masculine world<sup>25</sup> women have to create a female language eschewing gender-neutral-masculine language.

She does not consider the clitoris/vagina the only libidinal organ in women with a Freudian critique, as the penis in men and stresses the multiplicity and diversity of erogenous zones in female body. "Woman has sex organs more or less everywhere."<sup>26</sup> As women explore the multifaceted terrain of the female body, they will learn to think thoughts and speak words powerful enough to place the phallus.

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<sup>25</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

## 2.4 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionists consider sexuality as a social construct and give more emphasis to sociological processes compared to biological or psychological processes. Instead of being a drive that shapes the society, the sexuality itself is shaped by the society. It exists in all human beings, which may or may not flourish. This theory has three focal points: to give meaning to, the process and interactions. The analysis of this meaning given explores the difference of the meanings attributed to an object or practice. For example, sexual intercourse may carry different meanings for a child, mother, father, teacher, doctor, lawyer, judge, single woman, single man, married woman, married man, virgin and a prostitute. There are no concise meanings. The objective of the theorists is to conceptualize the ways sexual meanings are structured. Certain sexual practices find place in daily life as a result of socialization. The interactions between the self and the others are essential to the meaning attached to the practice.

While behavioral psychologists defend that people behave according to their instincts, symbolic interactionists suggest that human nature can change. We learn about sexuality through interactions. In any society, at any time, people are sexualized as a result of their interactions. Therefore, we become sexual beings during a process that begins at puberty as opposed to being born with it as Freud claimed.

The epistemology of the interactionists refrains from abstract conceptualizations and universal truths about sexuality. It seeks multiple facets of truth under specific conditions.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ken Plummer, "Symbolic Interactionism and Sexual Conduct: An Emergent Perspective," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Christine L. Williams ve Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 20.

Gagnon and Simon defend that research on sexuality must be taken out of the ivory tower and must be carried out in its natural environment. Sexuality must be studied as an ordinary phenomenon using ordinary theories instead of using theories that define it as a strong drive that shape the universe and the human character.<sup>28</sup>

The followers of the Freudian thought accept the ‘instinct’ metaphor and consider sexuality as something that is waiting to wake up by itself or to be awakened, which also happens to be immutable. It is considered a key element of a society and when the order is upset, the followers of the Freudian thought act as conservatives. Symbolic interactionists accept the ‘symbol’ metaphor and consider sexuality as a byproduct of continuous interactions between cultural meanings and personal experiences. The interactionists who consider sexuality as a phenomenon, which is influenced and repressed by the governing bodies can be considered the liberals. In summary, according to the interactionists, the social order defines the sexuality not the other way around.

While the symbolic interactionist view is important for its criticism of the Freudian views’ biological reductionism, it assumes that sexuality is experienced as a result of these interactions and ignores the systematic power relations and the way they form.

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<sup>28</sup> Plummer, 22.

## **2.5 Foucault's Approach**

According to the interactionists, sexuality is formed according to the social needs of the individual. Foucault defines sexuality as a method to gain power. Foucault's analysis of sexuality resembles that of interactionists, however, Foucault defends that sexuality is formed by institutionalized discourses of social practices. Sexuality is controlled, not repressed. Foucault points to the continuity between the practice of psychoanalysis in modern life and confessionals of the Catholic church. While sexuality is confessed as a sin at the church, in psychoanalysis it is considered as the most intimate reality of human beings and the most essential component of their existence. It is studied under a scientific framework.

According to Foucault, the societal actors and the scientific knowledge they produce, limits the freedom and achieves social control. Whenever sexuality is mentioned in discourses, control and production are simultaneously realized. The experts of this subject (doctors, psychologists and clergy) and their discourses are the centers of power and control. According to Foucault, sexuality can be discussed only within these discourses. This way, expressions of sexuality change from being liberating to restricting. Unlike Marx, Foucault does not view capitalism and the class structure as agents of power. According to him, power is relational and everywhere.

While Foucault's discourse analysis and the interactionists' socially constructed view of sexuality make important contributions to better conceptualization, they are incomplete because they do not consider gender socialization in sexual discourses. Men and women perceive

sexuality differently and produce different discourses. In discussions of power and control, the focus is on the particular class and how they control or they are controlled but not how one gender controls the other within the same class. The discourse analysis overlooks socialization of gender and analyzes male discourses.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.6 Radical Feminism

The relationship between sexuality and patriarchy is formed by radical feminists.<sup>30</sup> Sexuality is divided into two categories: the one that contains such positive practices as love and desire and the other that contains violence through objectification in pornography.<sup>31</sup>

Radical feminists argue that women's' sexuality can not exist and flourish in this heterosexual culture and heterosexuality can never liberate women. According to Jeffrey's in heteropatriarchal societies it is not possible to experience sexuality in equal terms<sup>32</sup>. Mc Kinnon supports a similar view. Sexuality creates gender.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Walby, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Especially Rich, Millet and Mac Kinnon state that the sexuality we live today is patriarchal.

A Adriene Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminist bir Devlet Kuramına Doğru* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003).

Kate Millet, *Cinsel Politika* (İstanbul: Payel Yayınevi, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> Wendy Chapkis, "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. C.L. Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 208.

<sup>32</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her enemies: Feminism and Sexuality*. (Londo: Pandora, 1985), 1880-1930, cited in Wendy Chapkis. "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed., C.L. Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 209.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminist bir Devlet Kuramına Doğru* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 150.



Pornography is objectification and subjugation of women. It is the exercise of men's power on women. Men cease to see women outside the pornographic view. While men sexualize women, they oppress and humiliate women. Pornography and prostitution has infiltrated into our imagination. Therefore, prostitution has to be forbidden not just to avoid objectification and humiliation of women but also to clean eroticism from pornography. Sexuality is not just an area where men oppress and objectify women. Women are constructed through sexuality and symbolized through prostitution.<sup>34</sup>

When the woman's body becomes a commodity in the capitalist marketplace, the sexual rights of men are institutionalized and men's entitlements and ownership over women are lauded by the society.<sup>35</sup>

This group's radical wing totally opposes heterosexual relationships and claims that women's liberation is possible only through intimate relationships with other women. Patriarchal ideology supports compulsory heterosexuality and suppresses women's opposition to patriarchy while creating a medium that discourages intimacy amongst women.

According to the other wing of radical feminism, which accepts heterosexuality the society must get rid of pornography and prostitution and a new eroticism of women must be established. Therefore, both

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<sup>34</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*. (New York: Free Press, 1987), 134-135, cited in Wendy Chapkis. "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. C.L. Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 211.

<sup>35</sup> Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), cited in Wendy Chapkis. "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed by C.L. Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 210.

groups view pornography and prostitution as key factors that destroy sexuality of women.

## 2.7 'Sex radical feminists'<sup>36</sup>

While radical feminists consider prostitution that denigrates women and suppresses her sexuality, supporters of sexual freedom consider 'whore' as a symbol of women's autonomy and see it as a threat to patriarchal control of women's sexuality. Kaplan says that in a capitalist world, where the women's body is devalued, to demand money and to have access to this body is a way of self actualization.<sup>37</sup> The whore is the woman man hates since she is not in his control. Califia says: "The whore sells her time, not her body she has time of her own to sell whereas a housewife's time is worthless."<sup>38</sup>

Paglia defends an opposite view to radical feminists and talks about liberating qualities of pornography and prostitution. According to her, the victim is not the woman, who works at the strip club rather the man who goes to see her.<sup>39</sup> Paglia opposes the analysis of prostitution by radical feminists and considers the man who tries to buy attention of this woman weak. Money is not a symbol of power; it is the symbol of weakness. If

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<sup>36</sup> Wendy Chapkis divides feminists who are conceptualizing sexuality into two groups as 'radical feminists' and 'sex radical feminists'. Wendy Chapkis "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, edited by C.L.Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 207.

<sup>37</sup>Rebecca Kaplan, Wendy Chapkis, 2002, "The Meaning of Sex", C.L.Williams and A. Stein, 2002, *Sexuality and Gender*, Blackwell Publishers, UK. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Pat Califia, *Macho Sluts*. (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1988), cited in Wendy Chapkis. "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed, C.L.Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 217.

<sup>39</sup> Camille Paglia, Wendy Chapkis, 2002, "The Meaning of Sex", C.L.Williams and A. Stein, 2002, *Sexuality and Gender*, Blackwell Publishers, UK. 213.

woman direct the sexual relations with men and get pleasure out of it sexuality stops being a social or political power.

According to McKinnon, sexuality has to be conceptualized within the social areas in life that it depends on in daily life settings. It should not be analyzed in historical texts like Foucault's or within the concept of social psychology like Lacan did or within the current language like Derrida did.<sup>40</sup> Sexual meanings are not considered by words or texts alone. They take form within social power relations in the world, the same process that forms gender.

Going from this argument of McKinnon, as I mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to try to understand how the sexuality of urban women in Turkey is constructed and how gender is formed during this process and how within the framework of gender how sexuality is lived / signified. The story presented in the next section from all the narratives is a result of this effort.

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<sup>40</sup> Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminist bir Devlet Kuramına Doğru* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 152.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTERVIEWS AND EMPIRICAL STUDY: SEXUAL PRACTICES AND MEANINGS ATTACHED TO THEM

#### 3.1 Experiences of Childhood Period

Ayşegül is thirty eight years old and she is a lawyer just like her father. Her mother worked as a high school teacher. Her sister is a dentist. Ayşegül is the second daughter of the family. She had a divorce after a short marriage and she is now working in a law firm. As she talks, she is quite sincere, not minding showing her tears or bursting into laughter.

Ayşegül was raised in a family environment where the existence of sexuality was completely denied. While she grew up, her parents asked Ayşegül and her sister to leave the room when there was a kissing scene on the television. Her father tried to fulfill his desire to have a son by raising Ayşegül as a boy. Father is the authority in the family. He is the one who decides on what is the acceptable behavior in the family. His wife's status in the family is submissive and similar to that of their daughters.

When she was five or six years old, Ayşegül and one of her girlfriends were playing house, which involved being naked and touching each other. Later on, Ayşegül felt embarrassed for playing such a game and felt remorseful. She also remembers touching herself during those years. She still feels her first strong sense of embarrassment vividly. After a

year when she was seven years old, she had a red dress revealing her back, and she was playing with her friends again. When one boy lightly touched her back she felt extremely embarrassed. She says, “Even now I feel the same shivering in my body...”

### **3.1.1 Games/Perceptions/Feelings of Guilt**

Ayşegül’s father, in his own words, wanted his daughters to be raised well. He demanded that they excelled in school, have a prestigious profession and become respectful members of the society. Her mother too, shared the same ideals for her daughter.

While Ayşegül’s family fulfilled their desire to raise both of their daughters as respectful members of the society, they quietly preferred to ignore the fact that their daughters were sexual beings. They believed that if their daughters’ sexuality was invisible or better yet, it did not exist, then they would not be perceived as sluts in the society. In 1970s’ Turkey, during which Ayşegül was a child, the television was new to the country and the importance of the television set was equivalent to that of a family member. The whole family watched a single TV channel when they gathered at home in the afternoon. (Even today, the TV maintains its importance in the Turkish society; the only difference being the number of channels and often, the number of TV sets in the house.) Nothing was present resembling sexuality in the family environment, but as they had no control over the programming on TV, when there was a scene that included a sexual act, typically no more than kissing, the girls were sent out of the room.

Ayşegül’s childhood memories are quite typical of the women I interviewed. Almost all of them told me that they were raised in families

in which their sexuality was veiled. They all remember episodes of turning off the TV set or switching the channels when the ongoing shows included the slightest hint of sexuality. The children of course do not have the power to react to or challenge their parents' behavior, instead, unable to make any sense of their actions, they accept and get used to them. In doing so, children learn to perceive sexuality in a negative manner.

Even though their families denied the notion of sexuality, almost all of the girls engaged in plays with sexual overtones. These games would include sleeping together in the same bed, playing doctor, which would involve inspecting each others' bodies including examining or even touching the sexual organs, occasional trials of kissing and reading books on sexual health. Bahar, whom I will talk about later in this chapter, read the sexual health books she found in the house with one of her friends. She remembers that, she disliked and she was horrified with what she saw in these books. She vividly remembered how she felt when she saw pictures of a woman giving birth to a child. Bahar felt sorry about her secret actions and she was very afraid that her parents would find out what she had done. Suna and Naz sketched couples having sex while both were in elementary school. Soon after the sketches were made, the girls were ashamed of their artistic products. Naz decided it was Suna who convinced her to sketch such despicable things and decided not to talk to her ever again.

What was common to all these plays were that they were all played secretly, they were never, ever mentioned to the adults. These games could also include the opposite sex. Kissing attempts were the most common of all. A napkin or hands were typically placed between the lips during kissing. What were also common among the women were the

strong feelings of guilt when the games were over. Only Güzin, who was raised in a more permissive family environment, the parents joked and even kissed each other in the presence of their children, did not feel much shame after engaging in plays with sexual content.

The main reason for their strong feelings of guilt, which they still remembered today, was that the sex was imitated in those plays, an act which was certainly categorized as bad and evil by the parents. Children had done things not approved by their families and they felt guilty as a result.

Only a few women I interviewed had not engaged in such sexual plays. These women explained that either it didn't occur to them or that they were too serious to even consider such plays and that they looked down on the other girls who were not like them. Let's remember how Naz blamed her friend for the sketches they made together and stopped talking to her entirely. Here, in early childhood, sexuality is learned to be perceived as an obstacle to being a serious, respectable person. Thus, two different types of girls were created, those who engaged in sexual plays and serious girls who looked down on them. The first group felt already guilty for their actions when they were young and some carried those feelings to adulthood. Hence, both groups attached a negative meaning to sexuality.

Sense of embarrassment from the self and/or the body might also stem from instances that involve ordinary plays as in the case of Ayşegül's remembering when one of the boys put his hand on her back when he tried to catch her. This was enough to send a chill down to her bones. Her shivering was so engraved in her that she would have to talk to a psychiatrist many years later. During the interview, she insisted to tell me

all about this incidence and said, “I have to tell you about my feeling of embarrassment, my trembling.” When I asked the question, “What do you remember related to sexuality from your childhood?” Funda remembered how she reacted to removing her underwear at the hospital when she was very young. She had to cry so much to avoid showing the doctor her genitals. Berna remembers how embarrassed she became when she wore a strapped dress revealing her shoulders or a mini skirt showing her legs. Berna, Funda and Ayşegül in their early childhood internalized that it would be bad for them when their bodies were touched or seen.

Hülya told me that she masturbated with her girlfriends, which made her incredibly ashamed of herself at the time. Today, Hülya is forty two years old yet she still feels the same shame. It was truly difficult for her to talk about this with me. She talked in a hurry and wanted to gloss over the subject. When she found out her daughter’s masturbation, she took her to a psychiatrist in panic without losing any time. During the interview with the psychiatrist she told the doctor that she could ‘never’ accept such behavior, insisted that her daughter has to be treated. Esra remembers how her relatives stared at her as if they were seeing something utterly strange or disgusting when she rubbed herself against the rails of their balcony. She was no more than five to six years old then.

Sema never played any sexually oriented games, but when she was around five years old, she saw her parents as they were having sex in their bedroom. She ran away and she never said anything about it to anyone. She felt very guilty for witnessing this event. Even though her parents did notice her, they behaved as if nothing happened and never opened the subject with her. When she talked about the incidence for the



first time with me, she said that she still remembered the scene quite vividly.

Müge registered sexual intercourse as a bad thing in her childhood memories. When she discovered her dad's condoms, she hated his father but she felt pity to her mother.

Hülya thought that her parents would never do such a bad thing when she was young but she was forced to admit to it as she grew up. Even then, her tendency was to say "they had to do it to bring us to life but they probably did not do more than twice."

Aysel, Meray and Bahriye were raised in families that closely followed the current political affairs. The masculine members of these families, their fathers and brothers, attached a highly positive quality to this involvement. In this environment sexuality was considered as a useless component of the bourgeoisie life. These families enjoyed and praised the masculine traits that their daughters displayed. As we have seen in the case of Ayşegül's parents, they wished to have a boy, her father encouraged Ayşegül to act like one. He would proudly state in public that her daughter was as strong as a man.<sup>41</sup> In some cases, such feelings were transferred to the children as well. When she talked about her childhood, Meray proudly talked about how she climbed the trees just like the other boys in the neighborhood. When Müge was born, her mother was deeply disappointed for having a baby girl and she was unable to keep these feelings to herself. Consequently, Müge tried to act like a boy to please her mother.

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<sup>41</sup> Ayşegül told that her father told, when patting her back, "I have a daughter like ram." which is an idiom in Turkish language resembling sturdy-young man.

From the stories of these women, we understand that they grew up in environments, in which they received no help in discovering and accepting their own sexualities. Further, their environments attached negative meanings to sexuality. Bahar was scared when she saw the graphic images of childbirth and she might have associated sexuality to what she had seen in those pictures. Sexuality is either a ‘frivolous’ notion as in the case of Aysel, Meray and Bahriye or a ‘disgusting’ act that our parents had to go through only to have children as in the case of Hülya or something to be ‘embarrassed of’ as in Ayşegül’s story. The games, which involved sexual experimentation, were played secretly, never shared with adults and the participants always felt guilty for being part of them. The guilt was carried to adulthood because they never felt comfortable in sharing their experiences with others; they assumed they were alone in having such shameful childhood memories. Consequently, these girls started their adult lives with a strong sense of guilt, which was voiced as “We did such things...you know, it was quite childish...”

On top of the overwhelming sense of guilt, the fear and disgust were two other emotions, which were implanted in the brains of these young girls. Funda’s mother advised her daughter that if she played with her vagina a little too much, a dark stain would appear on her forehead and then everybody would understand why. Bahriye’s aunt touched her vagina with her knitting nails and told her that it was sealed and she was not supposed to show it to anyone. As an inevitable consequence of this incidence, she never visited the school’s bathroom, had to rush home everyday after school.

### **3.1.2 Denial of Sexual Abuse/Feelings of Guilt**

“He was about eighteen...” said Ayşegül, when she talked about the abuse she suffered when she was six or seven years old. The neighbor’s son, Hüseyin, and his younger brother invited Ayşegül to the basement. They both showed Ayşegül their penises and asked her to touch them. Ayşegül got very scared and she could only talk to her older sister about the incidence. She too was scared and they never brought this up in a conversation again. When I started the interviews, her sister told me that she still could not talk to Ayşegül about it. Ayşegül was very afraid of her father’s potential reaction. She thinks he could have killed the boys if he found out what they had done.

Around the same time period, Ayşegül went to a bookstore with a girlfriend. There was an old and friendly clerk at the store who told her friend that he would show a toy in the storage room. He then took her friend to the room and promised Ayşegül that he would take her there too. Ayşegül left alone was disappointed for not being the one who was picked - she too wanted to see the toys and own them. In the back room, the clerk showed his penis to Ayşegül’s friend and made her touch his penis. When her friend and the clerk returned to the show room, Ayşegül immediately felt that something was not right, remembered the previous incidence with the brothers and they ran away in fear. Again, she did not talk to anyone about this incidence.

Aysel is a thirty six years old woman, who is tall and attractive. She works as a secretary in a private company. She was a swimmer in the national team when she was in her teens. She went through a divorce four years ago. She has a daughter and a son both living with her. Her father

was a government employee and her mother was a housewife, she has a sister and a brother.

Aysel learned 'sexuality' when she was nine years old with a twenty years old boy, Veysel, who was the son of her mother's favorite neighbor. Veysel took Aysel to the basement and made her sit her on his lap. Aysel was scared and she ran away. During the interview, she said, "I felt the 'sex' in his gaze and was very afraid of him." She could not continue her story however, she took a deep breath and burst into tears, her hands were shivering. When she was finally able to collect herself, she said "I feel very shy now, I can not look at you, this is the first time I am disclosing this to anyone." I asked her why she did not tell anyone up to now. Her response was "If I had told my mother, she would never believe me, he was our neighbor's son and they were our good friends, she would assume that I was making it all up to accuse Veysel" Interestingly, she closed the subject by asking the following question, "I wonder if I encouraged him in any way."

Ayşegül started her sexual life by playing games after which she felt remorseful about. She has met the aggressive side of sex when she was six or seven. Aysel, on the other hand was a bit 'luckier' than Ayşegül, she had to face aggression from the opposite sex when she was a little older – she was nine. During the interview, unlike Aysel, it was not difficult for Ayşegül to describe how she was sexually abused at that young age. Ayşegül explained that she had to work very hard on herself to cope with this experience. She worked with a therapist for a long time and studied herself. On the other hand, Aysel did not share her experience with anyone; instead, she chose to internalize the shame. It was difficult to talk for Aysel just like the other women who had their own stories of childhood abuse.

Only five of the twenty seven women I interviewed said that they were not sexually abused or harassed when they were young. They did mention incidences of rubbing or groping in crowded places, slight touches to the neck or breasts at the hairdresser when they were in their teenage years, however, these encounters did not affect them. They got used to such behavior and chose to ignore them as components of their daily routine.

When Sevgi was about seven or eight, two brothers living next door showed their penises to her and made her stroke them. One of the boys was sixteen and the other one was a few years younger. The story is similar to Ayşegül's. The meetings continued for about a year until the boys' family moved to a different town. Sevgi too did not share this with anyone. Similar to Aysel, she did not think that her mother would have believed her. After the move, Sevgi's parents continued their friendship with their former neighbors, and they paid occasional visits to each other's homes. Sevgi felt extremely uncomfortable every time she had to see the brothers, she felt the shame in her bones. She told me that even today; she could not look at the faces of the boys. She had another experience when she was a teenager. This time it was another 'neighbor', an older man who was sixty five to seventy years old. One day, he asked Sevgi to come over to help him hang a picture on to the wall. As they worked on the picture, he came close to her and whispered in her ear seductively, "How much you have changed..." This time, Sevgi did tell her mother what happened; the outcome was not surprising to her. Her mother did not believe her and ignored her story by telling her that she must have misunderstood the old man's perfectly innocent gesture.

The stories of the women in this study have common threads between them. In all the case stories, the girls had not yet reached puberty (five to ten years old) whereas their abusers (fifteen to twenty years old) were considerably older, in many of the cases, adults. These abuses were not causal events. The abuser, himself or with his brother - as were the case for Ayşegül, Sevgi and some others - chose a young child whom he/they knew as the victim. Almost invariably, the harassers sense that these girls will not be able to inform their families. They were correct of course since we know that almost none of the girls shared their experiences with their parents or friends. Consequently, the girls had to resolve everything within themselves, felt shameful and guilty.

Families knew nothing about these childhood abuses as they did not know about the games that their girls played. Because sex was socially denied and regarded as a 'bad' thing, it was inevitable for the children to keep these games to themselves. The children were voluntary participants of these games, as such they feared for engaging in plays that would not be approved by the parents. Secretly taking part in such an act might be the root cause of guilty feelings. In harassment cases, the situation is different. The girls are no longer volunteers; there exists a power imbalance between the partners due to the age difference. The abuser is usually an adult; hence, the act is not a childish game anymore. Even though abuse is condemned by the society, the girls felt guilty and they were not able to share their experiences with their parents. Some of them like Ayşegül, thought that their fathers would get upset and hurt the boys; others like Aysel and Sevgi thought their mothers would not believe them, yet others were simply too embarrassed to talk about what happened.

The women who participated in this study also remembered that they did not show any resistance to their abusers. None of the women mentioned the use of any force or even verbal coercion. Their stories almost always ended when their harassers decided to stop. It is likely that they felt shame, guilt and internalized the event because they had not shown any resistance to their abusers. Women openly talked about their intense feelings of shame, fear and guilt but none of them mentioned any feelings of anger or rage toward their harassers. Let's remember here Aysel's words, "I wonder if I have encouraged him." This made me think that women might have unconsciously concluded that they were the initiators of these events. Some of the women, like Sevgi cannot even face their harassers after so many years have passed. It is still very difficult for the majority of them to even talk about this subject. This indicates that they still feel the same intense shame and still they do not show any sign of anger.

I believe that majority of the women I have interviewed internalized the abuses they were subjected to and carried the same feeling up to now. I could see this in their embarrassment as they described their experiences. As they talked, they would often burst into tears telling me that this was the first time they talked about their experiences with anyone. One might argue that the impact of these abuses on the women might be even more traumatic now than they were in the past. Some of them told me that they could barely talk about their stories of abuse after they had seen their therapist or psychiatrist.

While they are not as common as the harassments cases involving neighbor's sons I have come across harassments by neighbor's daughters, too, where the older girls harassed the younger ones. In these cases, the age difference between the harassers and their victims were similar to the

difference between the older boys and the girls. Funda remembers how an older girl approached and showed her vagina and even wanted her to touch it while she was with her friends. Funda was about four when this incidence happened. Güzin remembers how the daughter of a family visiting them after dinner volunteered to put her to sleep, lied down next to her and caressed her body and genitals. Unlike the women who were harassed by boys, the women who were harassed by older girls did not seem so affected by their experiences. They were able to talk about the incidences in a comfortable manner and none of the women appeared to have any feelings of fear or guilt neither at the time it happened nor today.

Harassments or abuses that came from high school teachers were also experienced by some of the women in this study. The teachers typically harassed the girls verbally; some threatened the girls with failing them if they did not agree to a favor. Interestingly, these experiences did not have a serious impact on the girls. Again, the women were able to talk about these incidences comfortably and even joke about them. We can say that they were actually used to this. Nurcan did not take the threat from her history teacher to fail her in the course seriously. She said, “He did fail me in history that year but it was not important, I repeated the course and passed it the following year.”

By the time the girls are at the high school age, they are *used to* such everyday harassments. Furthermore, they no longer feel powerless as they did when they were younger. Consequently, they do not register these verbal attacks as harassments and internalize them. Many of them did not think much of them and they told me that they were not subjected to harassments of any sort. As we talked, they started remembering some



incidence and said things like, “That was indeed harassment...sure, that one too, how could I forget it?” we would laugh together.

### **3.2. Examples to Adolescence Experiences**

Another commonality between Aysel and Ayşegül is that they both thought that they were ugly when they were teenagers. Even though Aysel’s swimming trainer told her how suitable her body was for competitive swimming, she saw herself as an ugly girl amongst her team mates. Ayşegül also thought that she was fat.

It was mentioned before that Ayşegül’s father attributed positive meanings to masculine traits girls might have and praised her daughter when she showed one. Ayşegül argued that he did so to fulfill his desire to raise a son. There were boys in school whom Ayşegül fancied. However, she kept these feelings to herself, she did not disclose them neither to the boys nor to any girl friend. As she grew up, she started looking down on girls who let them being kissed by the boys. She thought those girls wasted themselves. She slowly adapted to the limitations imposed by her father. In the root of these limitations, there lied the belief that the danger lurked outside the protected family environment, hence, a good, cautious girl was not supposed to go to unknown places with people outside her family. She started self-imposing these limits on herself. She had become a believer.

Similar to Ayşegül, Aysel grew up in an environment where sexuality did not exist as a phenomenon. It was the political issues of the time that took most of her parents’ attention, whereas sexuality was considered as a frivolous issue. Unlike Ayşegül, Aysel did have a boyfriend when she was a teen. She constantly questioned herself during this time. Was she

behaving properly? Was she up to her family's standards? Her brother frequently reminded her that girls were no more than objects of sex for the boys; hence, she had to watch out, be cautious. In spite of all odds, Aysel shared very pleasant memories with her first boy friend, Fatih. She remembers that she liked how he smelt and she also remembers her first kiss with him. She recalls how they were both embarrassed when it first happened. Aysel did not trust her boy friend. She was afraid that he might disclose their relationship to others, which would certainly make her feel extremely embarrassed. She did not want to create any trouble in the family.

### **3.3 Becoming an Adult**

When Aysel was twenty years old, Fatih proposed to her. Aysel still did not trust him, so she chose to marry a man who was twelve years older than her. Aysel remembers how horrible the first night was. She expected 'experience', some romanticism, some foreplay, some preparation for the intercourse. He was able to provide none of it. After the intercourse, her husband of one night openly questioned her virginity, the absence of bleeding was a proof enough for him. Aysel cried a lot, she wanted to convince him that he was the first but he turned his back and slept. The following night, there was clear evidence of virginity on the sheets, defloration was achieved, but 'apology' that Aysel so desperately needed did not come.

During their marriage, which lasted fifteen years, they had sex every other day. She kept up with a routine in order to avoid any conflicts. She agreed to oral sex, even though she did not like it. She began to cry and could not continue when I asked her about anal sex. Moments had to pass to let her compose herself and continue the interview. She talked about

how much it hurt during and after and how she felt degraded. Her husband consumed alcohol quite liberally; he hit her when she did not want to have sex. Aysel explains that she had a tight vagina but he was not able take 'advantage' of it. Aysel does not have any good memories from this marriage. She points to her son and daughter as the only positive outcome of this experience.

When she was in her teens, Ayşegül looked at men around her as potential 'husbands'; her family also desired her to marry someone. Ayşegül wanted the marriage, too. She wanted to gain her status as a married woman in the social hierarchy by marrying a man, even though she did not feel sexual desire to any of the men around her. This would continue to be the case throughout her college years.

Ayşegül did not date anyone until she was in her thirties. She was satisfied with her life, which was essentially limited to her family and her profession. One day, she fell in love unexpectedly. She did not refuse his wish to kiss her and she did enjoy being kissed. They had sex without puncturing the hymen. According to her, he 'protected' her by paying attention to it. Her lover was a divorced man with a child. As she tried to talk, her eyes were filled with tears, "I was like an angel, I convinced him to go back to his ex-wife. That was what I had to, that was what my society expected from a virtuous woman and I congratulated myself." She continued her story in tears, "Years later, I met him again and I realized that I was still in love with him..."

After Ayşegül gave up her love, she had a very difficult time period and saw a psychiatrist. Then she met with Mustafa, her future husband, at an exhibition. After remaining engaged for a few months, they got married. She was fearful about her first intercourse, "Would it hurt too much..?"

How frequently would she have to do this?” She did not think they had a satisfactory sex life and she felt bad about it because she thought she was the one to blame. She thought that her husband did not have any concerns of making her feel special. She wanted to sustain her marriage no matter what. She sincerely thought she had something and missing and could make her husband happy. She watched porn to learn new tricks to please her husband. Unfortunately, nothing worked. They got a divorce soon after they had a baby girl. It was very difficult for her to get over the divorce. She felt worthless. She again needed the help of a psychiatrist.

After her divorce, Ayşegül fell in love with another man. According to Ayşegül, oral sex can be experienced by both parties, but it is women who should mostly do it. She felt uncomfortable when her partner desired to please her orally. “I didn’t like it, I felt worthless during oral sex.” In contrast, she said she enjoyed anal sex. She smiled as she explained how her mother warned her that if her husband ever demanded anal sex she had to avoid it. She continued by saying “in fact, I believe the thing had really made me happy was the fact that I had done it, I had rebelled against my mother ...”

When I asked Aysel what she thought about the brothels, she said: “Brothels should exist to help satisfy men’s perverse desires and keep them from attacking innocent women. Aysel thinks that all men are perverts to some degree and that their sexuality is connected to their sick minds.” I asked her if she felt the same way about her beloved son, she said: “Yes!..., I feel the same way, he is a man just like the others”. She firmly believed that the men’s genitals had switched places with their brains. Aysel argued that when a father changes his daughter’s diaper, he looks at her vagina as if it is that of a woman. “Even the father perceives his own daughter as a sex object.”

Aysel told me that if she ever married again, she wanted her sex life to be absolutely good. According to her, a healthy sex life affected other aspects of life. A year after the interview Aysel married again. When I saw her for the first time after she got married, she said she was very happy. Her new husband was preparing her son to a brothel to prepare him for future life...

### **3.3.1 Identification of Sexuality with Being Unclean/Refusal**

Hülya is forty two years old. She had a divorce a few years ago and she now lives with her two daughters. Presently, she is going through a difficult period in several respects. She has loans from her previous marriage and she is struggling financially. It was very difficult for her to meet me for the interview because she is living far away from the city center and she has to arrange baby sitter to look after her children. In spite of all the obstacles, she managed to carve out some time for the interview for she believed in the importance of this study and she desired to contribute. She says, “I really believe in the importance of this study for all women...”

Hülya’s mother was a teacher and her father was an engineer. Hülya’s sister studied law and now she works for a law firm. Hülya graduated with honors with a bachelors’ degree in business administration from a well known university in the country. She worked for several banks before she got married. She quitted her work when she got married. After the divorce she started working again, she is now employed by a private company.

She too was raised in a family environment which denied sexuality similar to the families described in our previous examples. When she was a little girl, she could not believe that her parents would engage in that disgusting act called 'sex' to have children.

I asked her if she was sexually harassed when she was young. Her response was short, "Let's pass this subject, I can not talk about it." Of course, her story involves others including her sister. She agreed to talk only when I told her that I knew her sister's story. Their neighbor's two sons had shown their penises to her younger sister and they had wanted her to touch their genitals. When her sister disclosed her story, she panicked. Being extremely scared she told her sister that nothing had happened and all of this was a bad dream. I asked her why she was so scared. At the time, she thought their father would be so angry that he would have killed the boys. The subject was closed never to be opened again between the two sisters. She volunteers that she is still not able to talk about this with her.

When Hülya was in primary school a man forced her to a corner in an alley and dropped his pants. When the neighbors heard Hülya's screams, they came and took her to the police station. The police officer at the station asked Hülya what she had seen and asked her to sketch the man's penis. After a while he took her to the next room and put a stamp on her arm. She was very very scared during this whole process. Upon hearing what had happened, her father rushed to the station to take her home, he arrived soon after the stamping. Her family behaved as if nothing had happened and not a single word was shared between Hülya and her parents.

Hülya masturbated when she was in the elementary school. She did with the other girls as part of a play. She felt guilty about it and stopped masturbating when she was in the middle school. Now, she cannot stand her daughter's masturbation attempts at a similar age to herself. Hülya is not willing to accept her daughter's masturbation so she takes her to a psychiatrist to have her fixed. She does not change her mind even when the psychiatrist tells her that this is quite normal at her age. She screamed, "This has to stop now, I can never accept it."

Even though Hülya was interested in a few boys and young men platonically, she did not date anyone. While she was working in a bank she was introduced to Boran. They liked each other and were engaged not long after they were introduced. When Boran kissed her she felt she hurt and did not enjoy the kissing. Then she asked a relative who had studied abroad whether she enjoyed being kissed by her fiancé. When she said she did, Hülya thought that it had to be related to her time spent abroad in a modern country. She gradually got used to kissing. Then, her fiancé, Boran wanted to have sex with her. She felt 'insulted'. "I told him that I didn't want to do it before marriage, I felt as if I would be doing something banned by the law, something illegal." They got separated soon afterwards.

The fact that the relationship did not end up in a marriage was very upsetting for Hülya. Everybody around her expected this union, hence, when they were separated, it felt as if she had separated from her husband. She was also very bothered by the fact that she was kissed by a man, who did not end up being his legal husband. She told me that she had to take many long showers after the separation; she had to cleanse herself. Her words were: "I washed myself and my body dozens and dozens of times..."

Although they were separated, after a while, they started seeing each other again. Hülya felt extremely relieved. “I thought that I would clean myself if I married him.” They did get married. Hülya was very afraid of the intercourse. Her husband told her proudly that this would not his first time. He suggested going to a psychologist together; she was even scared of doing that. When I asked her how she managed to have her first intercourse, she told me that there was not much to say about it. She could not look at my face and talked hurriedly as she held my hand: “Write down! There was pain but it passed in a week. This is all.”

They had a bad marriage, the quarrels always ended in the bed with sex. One could see how upset she was when she talked about it. It was difficult to talk for her... Avoiding any eye contact with me she said, “I accepted being beaten by him, I used to ask myself what I had done to deserve this.”

I asked her what she thought about oral sex, she said that she knew that it was the kind of sex done using the mouth and she said she did not know much. “I did it once when I was drunk. Boran asked me to put his penis in my mouth. I did it but I do not remember much, I was drunk. When he asked me again at another time, I refused, No! Never! I do not know how I did it that time... It is not the kind of thing I can get used to ever.”

Pornography disgusts Hülya. “...when I see it, I feel horrified. I learned that Boran had some tapes as well, how disgusting...” However she is not against prostitution. “I do not have any strong opinions about prostitution...Some women do it...I feel pity for them...Specifically, such women must be insured...Yes, of course there should be brothels...Otherwise, what will men do in our society.”



We finished our occasionally distressful conversation with smiles. When we looked around in the cafe, we noticed familiar faces from work. They said we were too busy to notice them. We smiled at each other and told the other that we were discussing an important matter. At the end of the interview, Hülya said she did not feel any discomfort about the things she had told me. As we parted, she said: “I am so glad we were able to talk, I feel really relieved now.”

Hülya originally did not enjoy kissing her fiancé but thought that she should get used to it, which she was able to manage eventually. She felt dirty for kissing her fiancé only after the engagement was broken. She wanted to cleanse herself from her sexual past and be a pure girl again. The sense of being soiled associated with sexuality surfaces with kissing. Her repeated showers were a reflection of her desire to clean her soul. Hülya does not realize here that she is actually denying her sexuality. She grew up thinking that her parents had sex no more than twice; she internalized sexuality as a dirty thing. She subconsciously associates womanhood with to be soiled by men. Her feelings of disgust were so visible in her expression when she talked about oral sex. She felt relieved when she started going out with her former fiancé again; she would be clean again after marrying him who had slightly soiled her, by performing a socially approved mission, marriage, the accepted behavior in the social perception and legal arena in her own words...

It was difficult and emotionally devastating for Esra to clean herself from the sex she never desired to experience. She is now a twenty five years old, successful engineer, who had a difficult life while growing up. She was sexually abused when she was only five or six years old. Again, two brothers, who lived in their neighborhood and who were at least ten years

older than Esra invited her to their house, asked her to take off her clothes and ejaculated on her body. She was horrified and worried about getting pregnant. She obeyed them for a long period of time. She kept going to their house until they moved to another part of the city. She was not able to come over the deep feelings of guilt. “I used to go to there myself; they did not force me to do it. How could I humiliate myself like that...?” She could not sleep well, frequently woke up crying with horrible nightmares, did not want to live in that house any more, she eventually started eating soap bars and drinking shampoos. Her health began to deteriorate when she was in college. She finally agreed to see a psychiatrist upon insistence of a close friend.

Interestingly both Hülya and Esra carried the desire to masturbate frequently during their childhood years. Hülya felt shameful about these urges and she managed to quit masturbating all together on her own. Esra however was caught while masturbating, she was forbidden to do it again but she continued to do it secretly. The urge to masturbate in both Hülya and Esra may be a mere coincidence; I do not believe we have to link the urge to the need to cleanse.

Purification is definitely not easy and in some cases impossible for “*kirletilen kadın*”, soiled women, an established idiom in Turkish language. Semiha was proud of her husband’s preparations on the wedding night, “He had planned everything for that night... Towels, soap, shampoo, condom, everything that we would need were available in the nightstand drawer next to our bed”. These were the first things that came to her mind when I asked her about her first intercourse, therefore, subconsciously; her positive recollections were related to the cleansing that she would go through after the intercourse. Here, it is important to note that in Islamic tradition, the followers are required to perform *gusül*

*abdest*, take a bath after each intercourse, which symbolizes the perception of sexuality as an unclean phenomenon.

According to Catherine Mac Kinnon sexually abused women either lose their interest in sex altogether or they feel the urge to have sex in an uncontrollable manner.<sup>42</sup> We cannot tell for sure if Hülya lost her interest in sex due to the abuses she has experienced in her childhood. It is important to remember that not only she lost her interest but she also felt the need to clean herself. Could Nurcan be a good example for the latter case? Prior to her marriage, Nurcan had had sex with someone without ‘rupturing’ her hymen. She married to someone else years later when she was twenty. On their wedding night, intercourse was not realized, after which her husband insisted on watching a porn movie together. They did watch the movie together and had sex. Nurcan was disgusted with what she saw on the movie but she assumed that, that was how it was supposed to be something she would get used to, hopefully.... She also felt that her husband was having sex with the women on the screen, not necessarily her. She is now married to him for almost twenty years and is used to having sex with him as well as watching porn without getting disgusted. In fact, she admits that they seldom have sex without watching porn together. Nurcan is also having occasional, extramarital sex. She explains that she enjoys the sex with her partners, but not their personalities, and presents her anger and rage to them. She says, “I can stand the life with the help of my lovers. Sexuality is a carnal, brutal act in the end.” She perhaps tries to combat her objectification she experienced with her husband by claiming that she is enjoying the sex and while presenting her rage to her lovers when she sleeps with them.

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<sup>42</sup> Mac Kinnon, 172.

### 3.3.2 Oral/Anal Sex and Hygiene

Associations made between certain sexual practices and hygiene comes to surface again in another respondent, Oya who has been married only for a few months. She is twenty seven and she loves her husband. She is disgusted with oral sex. “Mouth is a clean organ...I think it is quite improper to take a penis into your mouth, I mean, such an organ.” Her husband thinks that she will get used to it with time. She said: “Perhaps, he is right, I may get used to it.” She relates her disgust with the male organ, to being raised in an environment where everything was considered shameful. She flatly refused to have anal sex and never let her husband try it. “I think that it is sinful.” I asked her if she would try it if it was not considered a sinful act and she said: “No, I would not try it...”

Güzin had oral sex with her boy friend before they got married. She told him that she did not enjoy it. After the marriage, he demanded both oral and anal sex. She agreed to oral sex even though she did not enjoy it at all. She is against anal sex. She considers it sinful and unhygienic. She wanted to try it but she was afraid so she went to her mother for advice. While her mother believes that a woman’s job is to make her man happy by fulfilling his sexual desires, she too is against anal sex. She never let her husband do it.

Ezel saw oral sex in books and magazines. She finds it ridiculous and disgusting. Her boy friend asks her to do it; she refuses. “Even I if my mind agrees to it, I can’t get rid of this feeling, I think it is disgusting...” She asked her friends if they enjoyed oral sex: “Many of them think it is disgusting...” Ezel considers anal sex both sinful and unhygienic similar to Güzin and Oya. Women who refuse to have anal sex like Güzin, Oya and Ezel are not few among the interviewers and they explain their

behavior by asserting that it is sinful and/or unhealthy. Unhealthy could either mean dirty or perverse. Sema said: “I never did it and I do not believe I will be able to try it ever. My husband did not desire to have anal sex to this day either. I think that it is carried out by people who are a bit on the perverse side, I also think that homosexuality is an illness and it should be treated.” Meray considers anal sex sinful and unhealthy just like Güzin, Oya and Ezel. She never tried it either. She credits her former husband for not demanding to have anal sex. Let’s recall now how Ayşegül did it to go against her mother’s advice.

Although the question “what do you understand from oral sex?” is usually answered as the sexual acts that involve the mouth and the sexual organs, in practice, it generally refers to a woman taking her lover’s penis in her mouth. Müge said: “When somebody mentions ‘oral sex’, the first thing that comes to my mind is the fact that it is an act that I do not like. I do not enjoy oral sex when a man does it to me. I do it when the man desires it. She tried anal sex with her boy friend and she did not like it.

When the demand comes from the man to have anal sex, the woman refuses it by stating that it is either sinful or not hygienic. If it is not demanded by the man, he is praised for it and the subject never comes up, it is not a preferred form of sex for women. I sensed that the women used hygiene or religion as excused to avoid anal sex, not that they are true believers. I realized that in all the interviews, the subject of religion never surfaced until I asked questions about anal sex. This made me think that religion had no influence of the perceived or real sexual experiences of these women. Some of the women who do not wish to perform oral sex also used hygiene as an excuse. The others do not object and comply to please their partners even though they do not enjoy it themselves. As mentioned before, oral sex is performed primarily to satisfy the men.

Majority of the women in this study liked oral sex performed on them by their partners.

Anal sex by all and oral sex by the majority are considered as bad/unfavorable forms of sex by women, which may have to do with the fact that they are conditioned to view sex in their subconscious as an unclean act. Since the presently praised form of sex involves penetration, oral and anal sex could be labeled as unhygienic. It is perhaps more difficult to object to intercourse, not that it is viewed any cleaner than oral or anal sex.

### **3.3.3 Virtuous/Whore Dilemma: Did I Encourage Him?**

Funda is another interviewer who is fort five years old with a similar family pattern with the before stated examples. She is an engineer like her sister. Her father was a doctor in the military and a well-known musician. Her mother is a housewife. Funda works in her consulting firm with her partner.

Even though she remembers some romantic scenes with her parents from her childhood, Funda also thought that her parents would not have anything to do with sex. Her mother taught her that the ugliest part of her body was her vagina. Her elders instructed her that she should not play with her pussy or insert a finger in it as she took a bath. Otherwise, people would understand that she did from her forehead and she would lose her chance to get married to a man for good.

Funda got sick very often when she was a child. She had tonsillitis. Her mother took her often to their family doctor. During one of these visits, the doctor touched her breasts. She did not want to go to that doctor again, she threw tantrums; she tried to hide her illness even if she did not

feel well, but her mother always insisted to take her to the doctor. When Funda became a grown up woman in her forties she told the story to her mother and asked why she had insisted to take her to that doctor. Her mother was shocked, she blamed herself and admitted that the same thing happened to her when she was a child, how couldn't she notice it?

Funda had a boyfriend, Hüseyin, when she was a teen. Both of them were good students but Hüseyin was from a lower social class. She felt guilty about this friendship. She thought they were very young, they did not have a profession and there was a class difference between the two so she decided to end the relationship unwillingly. Hüseyin could not swallow being dumped by his girlfriend. His older brother then came to the school and complained about Funda to her teachers. Her physics teacher was a friend of the family. He was close enough to choose the prep class she would attend after school. One day, while he visited her parents he was able to whisper to her ears "If you do not do what I want from you I will tell your parents about Hüseyin and you know what your father will do to you..." However, Funda was already experienced from her past experience with another schoolteacher, so she replied: "If my family learns about my boyfriend, then they will also learn about the things my physics teacher tried to do..."

Funda worked for a government agency for a while. One day, she saw a post-it note on her computer, which said: "You are so sexy today that I can not have enough of you." The notice was put by the office bus boy. One of her friends at the same work place was harassed in a similar manner. She did not tell anyone in the office until she found an artificial snake in her drawer. Even though Funda was a feminist and worked on women's issues, she thought: "Even though I was a woman working on sexual harassment issues, I had no idea how women felt when they were

harassed...I couldn't keep myself from thinking that perhaps I had done something to encourage him." She felt guilty. Her friend could not hide her screams when she saw the snake and then people around realized what was going on in the office. The worker was sent to another institution. Funda never told anyone her note thinking that nobody would believe in her.

Later she fell in love with Mehmet. She married him in a year just after her graduation from the university. Funda did not want to have sex with him before marriage. However, they had sex without rupturing the hymen as in some of the previous examples. She felt the pain during her first intercourse attempt on their wedding night.

They had a good sex life for six to seven years. Funda enjoyed sex. After giving birth to her two daughters her husband did not desire to have sex with her any more and the subject was closed never to be opened again. Funda felt very hurt. She said without hesitating to show her tears: "My body was deformed, I had become old but he too was getting old...he somehow raised me to a sacred mother role..." Funda was treated for major depression soon after giving birth to her second daughter.

She fell in love with a man and had an affair with him. She remembers the short-lived sexuality with him as the most cherished memories of her life. She does not reject any form of sex. She does not deny anal sex either but she is not sure if it was the right thing to do.

After I interviewed Funda we became close friends and shared many moments together. However, I always felt that something was missing in her story; she agreed and said she would tell me about it some day.



One day she surprised me by saying “Are you ready to listen?” She described a very complicated relationship with her father during her childhood. He was insulting but compassionate at the same time. He violated her physically by hitting her, but loved her, and became her close friend. Her mother never intervened. Each time he got physical punishment for no obvious reason. Funda learned to live the next day as if nothing had happened the day before. She learned to deny and forget what she had lived through. All these left their marks on her. She reacted to voices; she became anxious, fearful... When she talked to a psychiatrist about her childhood she was shocked to hear the doctor’s analysis... The psychiatrist argued that her father was sexually attracted to her, but he never acted on it because he was ashamed of these feelings and he tried to deny them...Her mother thinks that all of this is nonsense...

Funda’s stories of harassment are different than those of Aysel and Ayşegül. She did not tell anyone about being touched by the family doctor but she showed a reaction. She protected herself from her physics teacher’s moves; she even managed to threaten him. When she was harassed by the office boy, she was an adult in her mid thirties. We would expect Funda to overcome this situation easily, but Funda explained that she wore a black suit that day and she did not have any make-up on – she felt guilty, she considered that perhaps she was the one who encouraged the man, she did not think people would believe her, she hoped the subject would disappear on his own.

My general impression from the interviews is that women are not too surprised when they are harassed. They have come to accept this as a component of their daily lives. When they are harassed, “Did I encourage him?” is the first question they ask. In her study on harassment, Funda

mentioned that women commonly used sentences like “It wasn’t even dark... my clothes were not even too revealing...” to comfort themselves. Aysel asked similar questions even after she was abused as a child. Gamze thought it was unfair that she was abused and that she did not deserve it.

In social perception, women are categorized in ways that do not exist for men. The categorizations bring the labels, married/single/divorced according to their marriage status; girl/woman according to the state of their hymen and virtuous/whore according to their behavior. While some of the subgroups are preferred in the social perception, any woman, who is a member of the subgroups of the first two categories, can find herself a place in the society. However, the virtuous/whore dichotomy is like black and white. While the members of the first group are praised the others are not valued and looked down on. The placement of the two groups in the society is also different. While the virtuous women can benefit all resources of the society, the whores can not even show up in public. The women of the two groups live in different districts of the city and do not interact with each other. Men on the other hand can interact with women in both groups. In the perception of a virtuous woman, the society maintains a constant threat on her to downgrade her status to the other group. Thus if the virtuous woman wants to preserve her place in the first group; she learns to watch her behavior. She questions herself continuously with the fear of losing her status and expects praise from the society for her virtuous behavior.

The woman/child, who internalizes this dichotomy, accuses herself instead of accusing the abuser with the fear of receiving the ‘whore’ label. Ayşegül became jealous of her friend when the salesman showed more attention to her. She then tried to reduce her jealous feelings by attaching the label, ‘whore’ to her friend. She continued to feel this way

about the ‘loose’ girls in her high school, the girls who kissed with boys and wasted themselves. While Ayşegül labeled her friends as ‘whores’, she never questioned the integrity of the boys. The virtuous/whore classification did not exist for them. It is likely that Ayşegül adapted this position to protect herself against her father’s oppression by creating a mechanism of self-defense based on idealizing the father and adopting his discourse and behaviorist style.<sup>43</sup>

Necla burst into tears when she told her story. She had a boy friend, whom she loved when she was eighteen. Their relationship started a gossip in the small neighborhood that they were having sex together. The gossip reached her father who then beat her. When she told her story, she underlined the fact that she had not even touched his hand. “I was stigmatized for no reason; I hadn’t even touched his hand.” While she mentioned that she was stigmatized without any ‘valid’ reason, by highlighting the word ‘valid’, she wanted to say that she did not act like a whore and desired to receive the listener’s approval.

While Necla expected to hear that she did not behave like a whore, Berna carried the guilt of having behaved like one and desired to find a justification for her behavior. When she was sixteen, Berna dated a boy. When the boy touched her hand, she became excited while she kept telling herself that it was not right to feel that way. “I shouldn’t have been excited so much, I shouldn’t have felt such deep feelings, I shouldn’t have seen him as a sex object.” Later, when he kissed her, she felt good but again she gave herself hard time for feeling so. She had to explain why she felt that way by saying that there was not much love in her family, the kiss made her feel ‘valuable’. But when she arrived home,

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<sup>43</sup> Melaine Klein decided that in young children over idealization is a result of fear from oppression. Melaine Klein, *Haset ve Şükran* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1999), 37.

there was tremendous guilt in her. She tried to explain that the sexual feelings she had for the boy could not be right. She related her enjoyment of the kissing to the lack of care in her family. “Did I behave like a whore?” was buried in her subconscious. When this question was answered as “yes” by her, she was able to justify her behavior as, “I did but I had an excuse.” the lack of love and interest in her family. When the boy wanted to have ‘more’, she refused; she would not be able to justify this to herself and undoubtedly she would feel like a whore...

Berna did not live with her family while she was in college. The school she attended was in a different town; she stayed in the dorm. Berna believed that many college girls had boyfriends because they did not want to appear left out. Some of these girls were so attached to the boys that they could give everything they had to have a steady boyfriend. While Berna questioned if she behaved like a whore in the previous story, now she was accusing these girls by being loose, by being dependent on boys. These girls became the ‘others’ for her. “The proper girls did not form friendships with them.” We can see the virtuous/whore classification put into practice in her words. When she was a junior in college, she felt ‘lonely’ and she found a boy friend. They made love without removing their underwear, they touched each other’s sexual organs; she enjoyed this encounter very much. Her boyfriend suggested masturbation, which she did not want to do. She explained her unwillingness as: “I don’t know. The man was important for me, I knew that I would not enjoy it, it is not a proper thing to do.” She did not think she would be able to succeed anyway. Her boy friend also suggested oral and/or anal sex, which she refused too. She thinks that she could now perform oral sex on a man she loved and concludes that she must have not loved him enough to go that far. Anal sex on the other hand was out of the question. It is not sex; it is perversity, violence, carnal, brutal...

Whenever somebody approached her with the suggestion of having anal sex, she felt bad about herself, she felt used, exploited. Only whores would perform anal sex, since men pay them, they do anything they want, even anal sex. When a boyfriend suggests anal sex, isn't he reducing her to a whore?

Berna is thirty two years old. She hopes to have a good relationship and get married one day. She says, "I have to have confidence in myself to give up my virginity before I get married, I do not feel that way yet."

Ezel is forty years old. She did not have a relationship with anyone until about ten years ago. She fell in love with a man on their first date. They kissed and made love without removing their clothes. "It was a wonderful feeling." When the man wanted to take their love making to the 'next level', she refused fearing that she would be categorized as a 'slut' by him. She looks at herself through the eyes of her lover. This time the virtuous/whore dilemma is questioned over the other. He had to respect her in order to convince her that she was respectable. If she admitted her own sexual desires, she would feel like a slut. She felt remorseful, disturbed, injured, exploited when she separated from him. She felt bad for a long time, but after a while she decided that he did not deserve her pain and suffering. She had given herself to someone who did not desire her. She could not perceive herself as a subject in her relationship; she experienced sexuality not for herself rather for somebody who did not deserve it. If she admits her own sexual desires, she will feel like a whore. Ezel had a similar experience a few years after the first one. Again, even though she enjoyed kissing and being caressed by her boyfriend, she felt guilty after each encounter. Just like Berna she felt used. Interestingly enough, she can not even explain why she behaves this way. She told me that she was raised in a fairly modern family and

that her behavior really does not make sense, yet, she can not seem to break the habit. The fear of being viewed as a whore plays a key role in this dynamic. When she gives in to her bodily desires, she feels exploited and guilty; she denies herself the enjoyment of bodily pleasures. Her actions and feelings do not belong to her.

Let's remember here Esra who tried to purify herself by eating soaps and drinking shampoo to overcome the impact of the sexual abuse she lived in her childhood. It was very difficult for her; she had to go through intense therapy. Years later she had a boy friend and she had sex with him. After a while they separated and when she met her second boyfriend, she felt a strong desire to talk about her former relationship and that she experienced intercourse with her previous boy friend even though her new boy friend did not show any interest in knowing more. According to her, because she did not approve of her first relationship as realized with her own free will, she wanted to get the approval from the new guy. She knew that her progressive boyfriend would not be bothered by her former experience. What we need to focus here though is that she is the one who needs the approval and she has to receive it from her new boyfriend.

Starting from childhood, women experience the innocent/slutty dilemma, which changes to virtuous/whore later, in every aspect of their loves and learn to question their actions constantly. The childhood symbolizes innocence; the parents can not possibly be doing that thing. When Müge found a condom in their house, she accused her father and felt pity for her saint-like mother because she had to give in to the sexual hungers of her husband. Girls are embarrassed when they play games with sexual content and they blame themselves. During and after puberty, when women feel sexual and sense any sexual desire in them, they are fearful,

shy and questioning themselves. Could it be OK to feel that way? What is the right thing to do when a woman experiences such feelings? What is worse than being seen as a slut by the other? Did she encourage the guy in any way? After having sex with a man, a woman seldom questions if she is the one who used the man.

### **3.3.4 Prostitution Institution**

Since childhood, women learn to live questioning their own as well as other women's sexual feelings and behavior. The virtuous/whore categorization is always at work in their minds. Berna holds others responsible for her own sexual desires. If she ever puts one of her desires into reality, she will recognize herself as a prostitute forever. What are these women, who fear to be perceived like a prostitute, thinking about prostitution?

Berna is not against prostitution or prostitutes. Here are Berna's thoughts on the subject: "Turkish men are sex hungry and they can not satisfy their hunger in this society. After they get married, sex is secondary to Turkish women, they do not give any importance to it, as a result, they leave their men unsatisfied. Turkish women in general do not support their men, they do not feel the need themselves and they think sex is a useless activity. Actually, they should wear sexy lingerie, excite and sexually satisfy their men. Nevertheless, married men should not go to brothels, yet we must definitely have brothels in Turkey. If we don't, women will be harassed even more on the streets. In eastern Turkey, women can not say 'no' to their men. It is different in the west. Eastern men are lucky."

When I asked Berna if she thought that women are created to be sexually more passive than men, she does not agree. She believes that both sides

are created equal, while this belief is clearly in conflict with her views on prostitution. She believes that men get aggressive if their sexual needs are not met. She is also denying women's sexuality by stating that they do not put much thought into it after they get married. According to her, women must do things so their husbands do not run away. Ezel thinks in a similar way. She says that brothels are necessary in Turkey, but she also believes that men should not learn about sex in those places. Sema questions how men will satisfy their needs if the brothels did not exist. According to Suna, prostitution is an institution that protects the society. Güzin thinks rape would increase in the country without brothels. Only those women who were familiar with feminist texts were against to prostitution. This was the case without an exception. Therefore, it can be argued that the feminist work was able to influence these women and perhaps make them move away from the clichés of the society. The important question that we need to find an answer for is the former one. Why do those women think that men will be hostile to them if they are not sexually satisfied? What makes them think this way? Why does Aysel think that even her own son may have some perverse traits in his character just because he is a man? Why does she think it is all right to send him to brothels?

In another example, Sema had a serious traffic accident and she had to go through a series of operations. Because she would not be able to 'satisfy' her husband for a long time, she told her husband that it was all right for her if he slept with other women. She believed that her husband had to get his sexual satisfaction from somewhere.

If women believe that men, our brothers, sons, fathers, friends can become hostile and potential 'rapists' when they are not sexually satisfied; is it possible that this belief does not have a very negative



impact on their sexuality? Clearly, women are not equal partners in this game. They exist to satisfy their men's sexual hunger, as such their captive prostitutes. According to Dinnerstein, our culture's gender arrangements strongly influence how men and women conceive of themselves and each other, and the resulting portrait is not pretty. In it women are 'mermaids' and men are 'minatours'. Dinnerstein wrote: "The treacherous mermaid, seductive and impenetrable female representative of the dark and magic underwater world from which our lives comes and in which we can not live, lures voyagers to their doom. The fearsome minatour, gigantic and eternally infantile offspring of a mother's unnatural lust, male representative of mindless, greedy power, insatiably devours live human flesh."<sup>44</sup> We do not know from our study whether men conceive women like mermaids as described, but I think that our perception of men like a 'minatour' is similar to Dinnerstein's metaphor.

According to Turkish Sexual Education Healing and Research Association<sup>45</sup>, there 3000 women work in 56 brothels in Turkey. It is believed that the actual number can be as high as 100,000 including women who are not registered. According to the most recent census data collected in 2006, 25 million men live in Turkey within the ages of 15 to 65. This roughly corresponds to 250 men for every prostitute. This number decreases to 100 when only single men are considered going to brothels. However, women in general perceive men as creatures who are in need of sex all the time. Contrary to this picture, three of the married women said that they stopped having sex after forty; closed the subject and they never talked to their husbands about it.

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<sup>44</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minatour: Sexual arrangements and Human Malaise*, NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1977, 5, cited in Rosemarie Putnam, Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998),140.

<sup>45</sup> Cinsel Eğitim Tedavi ve Araştırma Derneği (CETAD)

Finally, women who want to be the members of the 'virtuous' group perceive prostitutes as a miserable, poor group of women needing health insurance. Prostitutes are women ensuring a more safe life to others. Men are perceived as insultants in women's subconscious. Perception of sexuality as an equal share between parties does not exist.

### **3.3.5 Desire To Become a Princess/Search for a Father**

Gamze is fifty five; she was divorced five years ago. She has a son who lives with her. Her parents were both high school teachers. I did not know Gamze prior to this study. She has a very meaningful face and surprisingly beautiful blue eyes.

She too thinks that her parents did 'that thing' once or twice only to have their children. Her stories of sexual abuse are also very similar to those of the other woman. She was forced to look at the genitals of a neighbor's eighteen years old son when she was seven. She remembers how afraid she was, she felt guilty like the other women. An older neighbor made Gamze and her friend sit on his lap and touched both. She did not mention this incidence to anyone similarly.

In high school she was fond of a few of the boys but they never shared anything sexual. Toward the end of high school, she had a boyfriend. After high school, he was able to enter the University, but a lower ranking one than Gamze was admitted to. He felt jealous and ended the relationship, which left Gamze with a broken heart.

Gamze accepted the dating offers of several boyfriends when she was in college; she enjoyed the attention she received from them. These were all

short relationships because she realized that they would not lead to marriage. As such, they were limited to kissing and touching, however, she enjoyed the sexuality she experienced and remembered that she especially enjoyed being kissed by one of the boys very much.

She then realized that the son of a close family friend was interested in her. Her family approved and encouraged the relationship between them. According to Gamze, they encouraged her to fall in love with him. The prospective groom was also approved by her father. They got married after staying engaged for five months. During this time, she did not enjoy it when her fiancé held and kissed her hand. She thought she also had to have sex with him if necessary. Besides she felt guilty towards him. She told him about her former boy friends but did not ask him about his former relationships.

She got very scared on her wedding night. Her husband walked around naked proud of himself. Gamze thought her penis was too big to fit her, she remembered all the horrific stories she had listened to before, she was scared. They were able to have the first intercourse only a week after the wedding night. Because it hurt a lot, she had to see a doctor. The doctor told her that her hymen was very thick and that it was still intact. The pain reduced with time.

Gamze enjoyed having sex with her husband and they had sex whenever he desired. Interestingly, when Gamze expressed her desire to have sex for the first time, her husband did not refuse her but made her know that it would not happen again. Gamze was deeply hurt by this and she never expressed her desire to him again. She started crying as she told me this story. "I did not ever desire to have sex with him once more; I had lost something at that point."

Her relationship with her husband worsened with time. They did not share much and they rarely had sex. He would just take care of his sexual needs and would continue his business. After a while they stopped having sex.

After separating from her husband, Gamze met someone eleven years older than her. She did not reject his desire to have sex with her. "He was a tender person, like my brother or my father, even though I felt fat and ugly before, he made me feel world beauty, I loved my body with him." She tried oral sex with him for the first time and enjoyed it. She resented her lover's desire to watch a porn movie together and she ended the relationship for this reason.

Gamze has another boyfriend now, who is twenty three years older than her. Gamze loves him so much, and enjoys the occasional sex they have. I asked her: "Do you see him like a father to you?" and she said: "Maybe" but she did not continue. This was the trigger; she started crying uncontrollably. When she was able to calm down moments later she asked not to talk about this subject, about her father, his fatherhood.

She feels sorry for the prostitutes: "I wish they were able to earn their living in another way, I wish sexuality was free... In an ideal world there would not be any brothels but where will the men with all that sexual hunger go? But it is necessary for sexually aroused men... they do not need much to be aroused, they need to be satisfied."

Girls grow up reading stories of little princesses and their strong fathers, whose main mission is to protect their daughters from any kind of evil. The father figure is later replaced by a handsome prince who appears on

a gorgeous white horse and rescues the captive princess. The heroines of the stories in the text are those women who were in hope finding that prince, who would bring an end to their misery, love, cherish and protect them forever. Snow white for instance appears to be very happy serving the dwarfs (symbol of child/man) until her rescuer appears. Cinderella on the other hand finds her prince in a dance and she is convinced that he is the one without exchanging a single word. The sleeping beauty is awakened from her sleep by the handsome prince and returned to her princess status. All these heroines are passive; they do not react; they wait silently. We do not know the continuation of these stories after the arrival of the rescuer. Were they really able to live happily ever after?

The long awaited prince of Gamze discovers her just at the right time, as she slowly moved into adulthood as a college student. Like many other girls of her age, Gamze was already primed for her prince. Even though she desired to have a boy friend, nobody had approached her until that time. As such, when the prince arrived, he was the one, who would end Gamze's long waiting of a man, who would desire her, he would become the rescuer. Her husband was close to her age, only three years older than Gamze. This relationship did not last very long, however. Gamze did not say much about this brief relationship; however, things apparently did not go very well between the two. Soon after her divorce, Gamze moved into a second relationship. He was eleven years older than Gamze and this relationship was different. She said that she felt happy, she felt like a 'woman' with the new man. She added that he was always good to her, kind and protective like a brother, or a father. This relationship did not last long either. Her third boyfriend was even older - they had an age difference of 20 years. Increasing age of the boyfriends may be a coincidence too but not very likely. Gamze was not interested in finding

an equal partner. She was in search of a protector, a father. Gamze was not the only woman I have talked to who expressed their preference for older men. Meray is interested in mature men. Berna finds men of her age so childish in their behavior. Gamze asserts that a man must make you feel like a woman. It is very common amongst the women I have interviewed that it is the man's job to bring a woman to have sex. The women are not typically ready to for this. They have to be rescued by their prince, who will introduce to them the forbidden fruit. The women do not take part in this, they do not have any responsibilities, they just wait for their prince to come, lead them into sex and satisfy them. In essence, I believe these women are not interested in desiring sex. They do not want to be in this position; this is not what is expected of an innocent girl. If men are the ones taking the lead, they are the ones to blame. These relationships are not the kind we would expect to find between equal partners. Instead, they remind us the dynamics between a father and his daughter. This forever desire to preserve the innocence of a woman can not be restricted to the woman's sex life. It extends into every corner of daily life. How does a woman sit or even laugh without being suggestive? Does a proper woman just extend reserved smiles to her surroundings or can she freely laugh without being categorized.

Innocence is identified with childhood and women are expected to remain as children. As Rosalind Coward described in her book *Female Desire and Sexual Identity* so well, this expectation leads to the desirable woman figure, which is a cross between that of a child and a grown-up woman<sup>46</sup>. As such, the desire to stay innocent shows up in women as a desire to stay as a child, at least appear like one. Women commonly switch to a cute, child-like voice when they are on the phone with their

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<sup>46</sup> Rosalind Coward, *Kadınlık Arzuları Günümüzde Kadın Cinselliği* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1993), 44.

boyfriends. At the same time, this 'Lolita' figure is desirable to many men, which puts an interesting twist to this already complex problem. Should the women forever stay as innocent girls or should they cross to the other side, which is mainly populated by woman prostitutes. The 'Lolita' on the other hand is a character who can occasionally jump to the other side and then return to her child-like image satisfying both sides' demands.

Shaving the hair under the armpits, around the vulva and legs is also a manifestation of the desire to stay as a child. By shaving them, any signs of their passage to the womanhood are periodically erased. In commercials, we are told that our skin will resemble the silky soft skin of a baby with their products. We will have the soft skin as well as the asexuality of a baby... Pelin told me that her husband loves it when she shaves her pubic hair. It does not seem to bother her when her husband tells Pelin that she looks like an innocent child without her hair. Before breaking up with her relationship with Müge, her boyfriend chose to give her a final advice: "Shave your hair, I have accepted you the way you are but I doubt that another man will do the same."

Women try to hide it when they are having their periods. Many women behave as if this is something that they have to be embarrassed about. This may be a symbolic manifestation of their rejection of becoming women and their desire to stay as children. Especially when men are around, women do not mention their menstrual cramps; instead, they refer to a headache of a mysterious origin. On TV commercials you can see a young woman happily dancing around the flowers with her mini short because she is so happy because she finally has this new and wonderful padding which veils her period. Some men even find

women's' period disgusting. Therefore, women may be hiding their periods' to defend them against such negative feelings.

As the girls experience bodily changes during puberty they express their inner conflict by denying their bodies. Some women mention how they did not like it when their breasts became visible. They remember slouching or wearing loose fitting clothes to cover up their breasts. A similar situation comes up in Dalma Heyn's conversations.<sup>47</sup> The girls mention that contrary to the belief that they would be excited to start looking like a woman they find the sexual parts of their bodies disgusting and horrible. When Suna talks about the sexual abuse of the grocer, she connects the assault of the grocer to her newly growing breasts and says "At that time, the presence of my breasts irritated me; I wish I never had them".

Another manifestation of wanting to remain in a child's body is the desire to be pathologically thin. According to a study done in USA (1984) on 33,000 women in the 18 – 35 age group 75% of them considered themselves overweight while only 25% were actually overweight. Among those who are below their normal weight, 45% consider themselves overweight.<sup>48</sup>

The woman is busy with all these, tries to depilate herself constantly, behaves like she is not having any periods, reports her cramps as headaches, gives a lifelong battle on staying at her post-puberty weight, applies concoctions on herself to prevent sagging, loses herself in aerobic

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<sup>47</sup> Dalma Heyn, *Evli Kadınların Erotik Sessizliği* (İstanbul: Yerdeniz Yayınları, 2005), 125.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 126.



exercise craze, weighs herself day and night and if she has the financial means, considers plastic surgery and tries to get rid of signs of aging from her body. This woman who does not want to grow up and whose growth is not encouraged seeks her father in relationships. The relationships she ends up having are inevitably incestuous in their nature.

So far, we have started every subsection with a story of a woman about what she couldn't/didn't live. In this section, we are changing the pattern and finishing it with a poem on this subject written by one amongst us.

*(dis)contents*

*all of you, all at once are inside you  
your mother, your father,  
you, when you were a child,  
when you were young,  
and you as you are now.*

*if you knock on a door  
there is no way you can all get in  
especially your mother and father  
the one who opens the door  
finds a pedophile in him  
who wants you when you were a child  
wants you to do this and that*

*no one will hear you if you scream  
no one will come to your rescue  
you, wherever you are now  
grab your child and leave  
leave, before anyone sees you.*

*Hatice Öriin Öztürk  
Ocak/2005*

Does the pedophile open the door or knocks on the door? What difference does it make? Desires complement one another and in places where the father seeks the daughter, naturally the daughter also seeks her father.

### 3.3.6 Beauty/Appearance

In our day and age, women end up being pornographic in their elements. The woman who spends her life waiting also wants this waiting to come to an end abruptly. She can't rid herself from the state of constantly being watched and submits to it by presenting herself. She keeps herself busy by attending her visual image.

Freud argues that during the period children look at their images on their mirror, girls are more narcissistic than boys. They prefer being loved to than loving and the man who satisfies this need becomes the only man they accept.<sup>49</sup> Women may want to be loved more than loving because they spend their time waiting to be desired and they do not give themselves the right to love somebody. It is difficult to label them as narcissists because they constantly try to reach an ideal but can never achieve it.

The ideal woman of today is naïve, thin, waiting to be desired and child-like. Ayşegül does not accept herself as fitting to this ideal, due to her excess weight. She is not 'small' enough due to the size of her body. Aysel is tall and is a swimmer. She has a muscular body. During the period when she won several medals for her swimming team her coach complimented her by saying, "you have a very athletic body", but Aysel does not like her body, she finds it too muscular. Sevgi is Aysel's opposite. A short woman with dark complexion... She mentions the hair on her upper lip with embarrassment and on top of that her mother does

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<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Femininity." In *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, translated and edited by James Strachey, NY: W.W. Norton, 1966, 542, cited in Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Colorado: Westview Press: 1998), 134.

not let her pluck her bushy eyebrows. Gamze, who looks like a beauty queen finds her nose crooked and, does not like her legs. Elegant like a ballerina, Bahar finds her body lacking suppleness while others consider themselves overweight.

It is well known that the condition to dream about being crowned as “the fairest of them all” among a group of women or among all women and to experience that moment of ecstasy is to have never been married. This in essence means to be chaste, untouched and bestowed with a beauty that is innocent and child-like. We did not know what to call this most beautiful woman/girl due to the clear separation between meanings for woman and girl in Turkish. As a result, we changed her title to “*Türkiye/Kainat güzeli* – the beauty of the universe/ beauty of Turkey”. This is our most beautiful creature and is most desired innocent child.

The definition of how much someone fits the ideal type is like being compared to the golden mean. The one who fits to the golden mean complains about a mole on her face and gets rid of it. Contrary to what Freud said, women are not narcissists and they are not happy about their looks. There are times, when their unhappy state about their looks is supported by men as well. Sevgi finds herself short with a visible moustache and bushy eyebrows. According to Sevgi “beauty is very important, I don’t find myself beautiful. I am ashamed of being naked and I don’t like it because it makes the ugliness of my body visible.” Her boyfriend further reinscribes her views about her being/appearing ugly and allows them to take roots deep in her psyche. Sevgi asks during our conversation, “What would you do if your man wants you to change your style?” Her boy friend who is a PhD student in one of the best Universities of the capital does not find Sevgi feminine enough and asks: “You have to look more feminine. You have to care for your look. Do

you always dress like a slub?” and goes even further by saying “I will take the matter in my hands and change your look.”

Womens’ dissatisfaction with their look goes hand in hand with their inadequacy and when women enter relationships they like, they express their gratitude with the comment “He made me feel beautiful.” It is ironic that, Berrin, who finds herself beautiful both in her past and present, is till abandoned by her long time lover. With the reason that she is eight years older than him in their potential future marriage she would not be able to give birth to a healthy child. When the woman is happy about her look, the man does not want this woman who likes herself and searches for a child / woman. Just like the case in the previous section where the father searches for the daughter and the daughter for the father the perceptions are symmetrical in this situation. When the woman is not happy about herself, the man likes this state of woman not liking herself.

If women are not sufficiently ‘beautiful’ and attractive according to their norms, it is still their problem. Semiha and couple of others blame their mothers for not caring for their looks. Berna presents her view on this by saying “they do not even buy themselves lingerie, of course they do not deserve to be loved.” The subconscious message emerges, as the ones who are not/do not seem beautiful/sexual are not loved. It is also common for women to agree with men who choose to leave them by saying “I gained weight, I aged and started sagging and may be that’s why our relationship came to an end...” Women constantly perceive themselves as objects with variable worths. If the body loses its ideal worth, so does the woman. Perhaps this explains the fixation on the body and the effort to protect its worth by appearing beautiful/sexual and by being loved in return.

“I don’t have the right body, I couldn’t hold on to the body I had to have.” discourse is remarkably similar to the one of the abused, “Did I deserve this as a result of my encouragement?” In both cases, women blame themselves and approve the other. The ones who don’t have the right body are being abandoned, the abuses are questioned as “Have I done anything to deserve this?” Men are never questioned, they rightfully leave or if they abuse, there is a reason for it.

Because women are the ones who are chosen according to their bodies, they compete with one another and those who do not stand a chance in the race leave the race by saying “I deserve to be abandoned.” The ones, who have the chance, let another one who does not stand a chance, know that it is time for her to leave. In our daily conversations, we all hear about how women talk behind one another, become jealous of one another and they don’t stand a chance in forming true friendships. This discourse reproduces itself in many forms and women and men participate together in the process. “She never cared for her looks” and “my father would go to other women” discourse while justifying the behavior of men, still divides women. The beautiful and desired ones, the ugly and undesired ones, definition of desire through a sexualized body... As women are the desired ones not the desiring they do not have any other options but compete and eliminate her rivals...

### **3.3.7 Virginity**

Bahar is a very attractive woman in her early forties. She is an architect. She had her own business for a long time. Presently, she is employed by a government agency. She is interested in literature and she writes short stories. Her father was an instructor. Her mother was a housewife. Bahar is now married and she has a daughter from the marriage.

Bahar was curious about sexuality when she was young. With a friend, she read about topics related to sexuality in one of the encyclopedias they had in the house. One day, they came across the graphic images of a woman giving birth to a baby. They were scared and embarrassed. Bahar did not talk to anyone about the images fearing that her mother would learn what she was secretly doing with her friend.

When I asked Bahar if she was sexually abused during childhood, she became visibly uncomfortable but she chose to continue the interview. Her abuse story is quite complex. She grew up in a large extended family in which sexuality did not exist. She had three uncles and two aunts. The individual families spent much time together. She remembers that she always felt uncomfortable with one of the uncles; he had strange looks that bothered her. One day, when she woke up she found him lying next to her in the bed. She was so afraid that she was not able to open her mouth and utter a single word to him. Her uncle then told her to turn to the other side and continue to sleep. Bahar obeyed and he left the bed. Bahar never told this story to anyone and she feels very uncomfortable about it. They seldom see each other and they still cannot look at each other's faces. The two things she remembers from this experience were her fear and gratitude toward him. "I felt grateful to him for not doing anything to me."

After a platonic love affair she had when she was in elementary school, it was mentioned to a seventeen years old boy in her school that Bahar was fond of him. To Bahar's disappointment, the boy sends the message that he was not interested in her. Bahar felt humiliated. "This is the first and only time that I told anyone that I liked him."

After this incidence, she questions the proposals from men as to whether dating them could harm her or not. She assumed that they were proposing to eventually hurt her.

While she was a college student, she dated one of her classmates. They had sex together without intercourse to protect the hymen. She agreed to oral sex because she did not want to say “no” to her lover. This relationship lasted for more than five years. At first, she felt extremely guilty about this relationship and she was afraid that her mother would find out about it. She remembers that these guilty feelings had disappeared gradually. She fell in love with Bora who was also a member of the theater club of the University. She could never overcome the guilt she felt toward her former boyfriend for leaving him. When Bora realized Bahar was a virgin, he thought they had a very innocent relationship with her former boyfriend and accused himself for their separation. Soon afterwards, Bahar and Bora separated. Bahar found herself in major depression; she seeked psychiatric help and she had to leave school until she got better.

Almost immediately after graduating from college, she started working for an architectural firm. Soon, Bahar and the owner of the firm were dating. The two had a sexual relationship, which closely mimicked the two relationships she had while she was still a college student. Her boyfriend supported her desire stay as a virgin and did not insist to have intercourse with her. During this time, Bahar’s first boyfriend kept calling her. He was telling Bahar that he would not be able to live without her. Bahar felt guilty for her experiences and separated from her boyfriend. Bahar clearly was not interested in a relationship with him. During this time Bahar ran into a major traffic accident with him. She felt herself responsible for what happened to him. When he told Bahar and

her family that he loved her and that he wanted to marry her, she felt herself trapped and could not say “no”. Because her family believed that she had reached the age to get married and because they found him appropriate for their daughter, they encouraged the union. During this time, Bahar went through another depressive cycle during which she did not know what to do. During the wedding preparations, the most unexpected happened. The man who had spent his last ten years chasing Bahar decided to call off the wedding.

When she was in her early thirties, she desired to get married and start her family. She met Osman in a bookstore. He was also interested in getting married and he liked the fact that she was a virgin.

Bahar was afraid of having intercourse. On their first night, her husband could not have erection. Bahar felt herself responsible for this and she desired to help him, and she did with tenderness. On their second try, she was hurt so badly that the pain lasted for nearly a month. She asked me if it were possible for any woman not to feel the same pain. In the following years they came to the point of separation several times but they did not. Bahar describes her marriage as an average one with pros and cons like any other marriages.

“Prostitution is necessary... For men in our country, that is, it is a service for the... It is wrong I know but what can we do? Because virginity is valued, men have their first encounters with the prostitutes...”

When she was younger, she thought she was ugly because she was skinny. “The body is deformed after childbirth. Women are not attractive during pregnancy. After birth women are like machines producing milk...”



Prior to her marriage Bahar had sex with four men without vaginal penetration. This is similar to the experiences of Ayşegül, Funda and many others.

When I asked her why, she said she did not know and asked, “It is immoral, isn’t it?” Funda said that’s how things were during those times. Ayşegül thinks her boyfriend protected her. Semiha and Sema both had premarital sex with their husbands, who did not want them to lose their virginity either. Semiha’s husband who had thought about all the little details such as the soap bar, the towel and the condom, suggested waiting for the first night of their marriage.

For today’s middle aged women, it was not just their decision whether they would stay as virgins or not. Their lovers and husbands also believed that the virginity had to be preserved until marriage. Both women and men display a behavior shaped by their moral values. Preserving the integrity of the women’s’ hymen is used as a sign that the woman is still like an innocent child. Bahar’s case is very typical. Her second lover blamed himself for assuming that she was not a virgin. As such, Bahar’s character is reduced to that of a child-woman. The same argument is true for her husband, who was quite happy for marrying a thirty years old virgin. The important symbol here is the hymen, which symbolizes innocence, childhood and not being dirty. Men desire to marry child-women not to their equals.

Sema’s case too is interesting, which was quite similar to Bahar’s experience. In her words, her sexual experience was limited to ‘rubbing and ejaculation’ before marriage. Both she and her husband did not want her to lose her virginity prior to marriage. According to her, it was

difficult for her husband to control himself. On their first night, Sema's hymen stays intact. Sema cried out of extreme discomfort. According to Sema, her understanding husband did not pay attention to this detail for which she felt extremely grateful to him. She remembered the experiences of her uncle's daughter on her wedding night – her father had to obtain a report from a medical doctor proving her virginity. Sema thinks that her husband, Sinan has done everything he could. Her first intercourse gave her pain and this continued in the future. In the end she decided to consult with a medical doctor.

Bahriye's husband was not approved by her family due to his political choices. Bahriye married him in spite of opposition from her parents. On their wedding night, her hymen did not break and she had pain. Her husband asked accusingly: "Was there another man before me?"

Ayşenur also went to a doctor when her hymen refused to break after many tries. Let's remember Gamze too. She did see a doctor as well. Oya said she was so stressed until it finally happened. "I thought it would be difficult, I was fearful and I did not think I would be able to have bleeding because of the fears." She would have to wait for two weeks. Just like Sema, she thought that her husband was very sympathetic during this difficult time. Oya says, "My husband did not force me at all but I wanted to put it behind me as quickly as possible" and continues by adding how much it hurt when it finally happened. Oya says the following about sexuality: "I really never quite understood what was meant by sexuality. I did not give much emphasis to it, I assumed it would pass." She now wants to have a child and this is an important subject for her: "I am twenty seven years old. I must have my child before I am thirty. My husband does not want to have a child but I really want one.

Necla's husband is also one of those helpful and sympathetic husbands. She loved him and waited for him to separate from his first wife. They could not have intercourse for fifteen days after they got married.

Berrin's story is the most tragic of all. Her first lover was not approved by her brother due to his ethnic origins. When she insisted, she was badly beaten. She was afraid, separated from her lover. She then lost so much weight that she weighed as little as forty four kgs. This was followed by a major depressive episode, which lasted for more than five years. She got engaged when she was twenty wife years old largely due to pressure from her family. The relationship did not last very long. Then, she dated another man from her work place. Her family supported the relationship; they were concerned that she was getting too old for marriage. This time her boyfriend ended the relationship when he learned that she was engaged to another man before. Berrin said, "I was very sad, I lost my confidence in people as well as my conviction in love." She continued, "When I was in my early thirties, I wanted to be with a man, I wanted to have a sexual relationship." As she said this, her tears started running, "I was going to be buried without making love to a man once in my life. I began feeling sorry for myself. What was I preserving myself for?" When she was in her forties, she began dating a man, she tried having sex with him in spite of her fear and reservations – the sex was not approved by a marriage license. Berrin's first sexual experience is similar to those of other women. She had too much pain and did not enjoy it at all. The only pleasure she got out of it was the pleasant feeling of hugging someone and sleeping with him. Bahar wondered if there could be any women who did not feel her pain on her wedding night...

It appeared that majority of the women in our group had much physical pain during their first intercourse attempts... The women who happened to be drunk that day are the only ones who did not feel the pain. Güzin was raised in a progressive family environment. She had not felt much guilt as a result of the sexual games she played when she was young. She had married to a man whom she was in love with. They could not realize intercourse on their first night either. "I was very afraid, I was closing my legs, I was so tense". She explained that her husband did not give much emphasis to this. She too saw a doctor for help. Approximately seven to eight months later, they were able to have their first intercourse. She did not feel any pain because she was drunk. Meray's story was similar: "It is because I was really drunk. Later, I experienced so much pain. Even now I feel pain..."

None of the participants married someone out of their own will. They did not get into sexual relationships with men they did not want either. If that is the case, why did all these women suffer from physical pain during their first intercourses and the pain continued for some time?

In women's' perception their first attempt to intercourse is either an experience of unlimited pleasure (under the influence of media) or a painful, shattering experience. Semiha and Sema stated that they had reserved that blissful moment to their first night. On the other hand, Gamze and Oya just remembered the pain and the bleeding from that night. I had many more of examples of the latter case in the group.

Among women who seek help for their sexual problems, applying İstanbul University psychiatry clinic next to lack of sexual desire and inability to have orgasm, incidence of vaginismus are also very common.

While vaginismus<sup>50</sup> is rare in western cultures and fully curable, that is not the case in Turkey.<sup>51</sup> Vaginismus is not in rare in Turkey and its cure is not always possible. This situation shows that how undue importance given to hymen creates such crippling problems. In a study done on 44 women who experienced vaginismus, 24 of them expressed how afraid they were from their first sexual intercourse. From the same group, 35 women did not have sexual arousal problems. These findings are congruent with the experiences of women I had conversations with.

Bahar, who experienced her sexuality with four different partners talked about pain after her first intercourse in her marriage and concluded that this must be the case for all women. It is possible to conclude from the discussion above the pain Bahar felt, is a common one for all women I had talked to in this study. It is also important to note that most women who suffered from vaginismus had high school or college education just like the women in my study.<sup>52</sup>

Even though it was common for woman to have occasional feelings of guilt for their sexual experiences prior to their marriage they did not have major problems that would make them denounce sexuality altogether. The problems arose after the first penetration and the relationships that

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<sup>50</sup> Vaginismus is a condition where there is involuntary tightness of the vagina during attempted intercourse. The tightness causes discomfort, burning, pain, penetration problems, or complete inability to have intercourse.

<sup>51</sup> Of the patients who were treated in 1990, 52% had vaginismus, 25% complained about reduced sexual desire, %15 had inability to have orgasm and 2% had disparanoia. Arşalus Kayır, "Women and Their Sexual Problems in Turkey," in *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, ed. Pınar İlkkaracan (İstanbul: Women For Women's Human Rights, 2000), 260

<sup>52</sup> In a study conducted with 44 women, 23 of the women were college educated and 17 of the women finished high school;This generaliazation showed itself in other groups. Ibid, 256. Ibid, 262.

followed it. It did not matter whether penetration took place before or after marriage. Almost all women had a painful first experience of it. Since marriage is a 'legitimate' setting, we may assume that the first intercourse experience should be without pain or trouble. That does not seem to be the case; before or after marriage, legal or illegal, pain is experienced. Widespread cases of vaginismus and their not so successful prognosis is another sign of how much importance is given to loss of the virginity in subconscious.

Rape is the penetration of penis into the vagina legally or perceptively. Whether this action counts as rape is decided by women. It becomes rape when she does not accept it and it becomes sex when she does. She alone decides on the boundary. The reason why women's bodies show such a reaction to the first sexual intercourse is because they perceive penetration as rape in their subconscious. A recurring theme in all the examples cited is how women starting early on were asked to deny that they are sexual beings. They were taught that they are clean, innocent, children and what is sexual is bad and male. Raised under these social norms even when she decides to have sexual relationships on her 'free will' she can still perceive it as rape in her subconscious. The women in the vaginismus study identified their mothers as passive and their fathers as active in their sexual dynamics.<sup>53</sup> During conversations, Berna, Semiha and Sevgi, even though they were not directly questioned on their parents' sexuality, criticized their mothers for being passive in their sexuality. Müge feels sad for her mother and feels anger toward her father, when, as a young child she finds a condom in her house. Hülya, Funda and Suna thought in their childhood that their parents had sex only for as many times as the number of children they had. These narratives agree with the definitions of the mothers as clean, pure, asexual beings in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 266.

the vaginismus group. The father forces the asexual and ethereal mother into sexual intercourse. The husbands of women who suffer from vaginismus look at this problem as something their wives are lacking while enjoying these innocent and bashful women who are equipped with a virtual chastity belt albeit a malfunctioning one. If the therapy is successful and the women regain their sexual desires their husbands may not be all that pleased with the outcome. The society would like to see the woman as a mother who is stripped of her sexuality. Just as vaginismus is regarded by husbands as the woman's dysfunction, in all the incidents of pains / aches unsuccessful attempts to break the hymen, women perceive them as their own problem and continue patronizing their husbands by saying "he was very understanding." Once again, we observe that women perceive satisfaction of the male sexual desire as their primary duty. None of these women ask the question "why it hurt so much?", instead, they mention that in time, "they got used to it."

Because these women experience sexuality under continuous questioning such as how much / what form, *good / bad* , they go through their first sexual intercourse without being able to tell how much / which one, *rape/sex* ? It was observed that majority of the women in the vaginismus study (35 out of 44), had no problems with sexual desire and arousal but they felt pain at the onset of penetration. Perhaps, the women are experiencing the state prior to vaginismus with an involuntary contraction and this part is common in all cases except when they are drunk. The state of drunkenness releases the control she exercises on herself and as a result, she may not feel as much pain. Drinking turns into a practice, which can bypass the consciousness or it is eliminated altogether releasing the person from the bondage of the world constructed.

The intense pain felt during the first intercourse may be due a combination of emphasis given to virginity and perception of intercourse as rape in the subconscious. The middle aged group defended the protection of virginity before marriage with the help of their future husbands. Ayşegül's lover protects her, Gamze's fiancé, like many others believe that virginity must be saved for marriage, Bahar's boyfriends and her husband find her innocent because she is a virgin. Virginity is a symbol of innocence and a social issue.

Rüya, Müge, Ezgi, Esra obtained their undergraduate degrees a few years ago from one of the top ranking institutions in the country. All four of them are single and had sexual experiences, which included intercourse. They all wanted to overcome the virginity 'problem' during the college years. Nurhayat is their mutual friend from the same university. She is currently a doctoral student. Not having lost her virginity to this age is a problem for her and she is suffering deeply. "I did not date anyone to this day. Can you believe it? Nobody proposed to go out with me. I am still a virgin and I can not share this fact with anyone... I am afraid that they will make fun of me when they learn... What if somebody enters my life and discovers that I am still a virgin... I am so bothered by this that I will take care of this with a cucumber" She tries to laugh during the talk...

These women consider themselves free and they view virginity as the symbol of not being free. Soon after Ezgi started college, she dated a man who was five years older than her. He wanted to have sex with her but Ezgi was not so sure. His words to Ezgi were "I thought you were a progressive, free woman. I did not know how backward minded you were." These words made Ezgi feel real bad about herself and she agreed to have sex with him. On their first try, there was no bleeding. Her disappointed boyfriend is of the opinion that there could be something



wrong with her. They both wanted to finish this with ‘success’. He then suggested that it might be a good idea to drink. They succeeded in a tense environment. Ezgi had much pain afterwards and it continued for a long time. The relationship lasted for about two years. Ezgi mentioned that she perceived the style of their sexual relationship close to being raped. With the second lower, things were a bit better. With the third love she was not able to feel anything even though she had much less pain. She concluded perhaps sexuality is something like this. Müge lived her first sex that included intercourse while she was drunk. “I felt like I had to get rid of my virginity as quickly as possible... that night, I had a good sleep. I was comfortable. I do not remember a strong pain... I experienced pain in my future experiences...”

Esra remembers that when she was in her twenties, her brothers’ girlfriends made fun her by making statements like “You must be saving yourself for that lucky guy.” Esra tried too and there was no bleeding<sup>54</sup>. She went to the doctor the next day assuming that her boyfriend did not believe she was a virgin. She had pain in her first attempt and in several future attempts in her relationship that lasted for about six months. When I asked her why she continued to have pain, her answer was, “I wanted to get familiar with, learn sex.”

Rüya had several boyfriends before her first intercourse. “I am glad I had my first sex with a medical doctor, at least he knew anatomy...”

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<sup>54</sup> In 70% of the first intercourses, bleeding follows, in 30% of the situations penetration takes place without bleeding.

Selma Güngör, “Bekaret Muaynesi Üzerine,” *Toplum ve Hekim*, Nisan (1993), cited in Dilek Cindoğulu, “Virginity Tests and Artificial Virginity in Modern Turkish Medicine,” *Women and Sexuality in Muslim Societies*, ed. Pinar İlkkaracan (Istanbul: Women For Women’s Human Rights, 2000), 223.

“In my opinion, there are only a few girls who enjoy sex, most of them talk about the pain they experienced, especially the first time but the ones who sleep around are really enjoying sex.” These words belonged to a 17 years old middle-class girl from Karin Martin’s study on sexual experiences and perceptions of boys and girls from the perspective of gender<sup>55</sup>. It is a different way of stating Bahar’s “Is there a women who does not feel this pain?” The only difference is, in her study these girls are 16 to 17 years olds as they are going through their first sexual experiences. The perceptions of these teens are similar to the experiences and perceptions of Rüya, Müge, Ezgi and Esra with only a difference of time delay. Martin asks: How come the male gender dynamics force women into having sex with them and create a state of “giving in”? Despite the fact that they did not enjoy their first experience, they continue to have sex.

Women in the middle-aged group had their first painful sexual intercourse with their husbands. If we presume that they look at regular sexual activity as one of the requirements of marriage we have to ask the same question to Rüya, Müge, Ezgi and Esra. Why these women continue doing something that they do not like and then come to the conclusion that “this is what sexuality must be all about.”

According to Martin, the feelings of girls are not very clear and due psychodynamic disparity in agency and sexual subjectivity, laid upon the cultural inequalities between the genders, boys can be insisting in their demands while girls are caught up in their vagueness and are unable to

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<sup>55</sup> Karin A. Martin, “I couldn’t ever picture myself having sex...’: Gender Differences in Sex and Sexual Subjectivity,” in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Christine L. Williams ve Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 142.

claim forcefully.<sup>56</sup> Thomson, on the other hand, finds it ironical that the girls accept that their bodies are missing something instead of keeping their boyfriends responsible from the physical pain of their first intercourse while they keep them responsible from the emotional pain they inflict on them<sup>57</sup>.

The negative feelings do not change whether the first sexual intercourse is experienced within or outside the marriage and women blame themselves, while thinking that this is probably due to a shortcoming of their bodies. This negative first experience may weaken their feelings of subjectivity and their sexual subjectivity. As a result of these negative feelings, women feel like they have given up a piece of themselves and instead of seeing sex as a mutual experience they see it as something men take away from them. Let's not forget that women are the 'givers' in Turkish language. Still, these negative feelings continue to reinforce the questioning of virtuous / whore dilemma. The girls in Martin's study despite being members of a society, where premarital sex finds easier approval still report feeling "would one become a whore?" dilemma after having sexual relationships.<sup>58</sup>

The negative feelings experienced after the first intercourse indicate that the virtuous / whore dilemma buried in the subconscious is more powerful than the loss of virginity. For Rüya, Müge and Ezgi, protection of virginity does not have a mythical status. However, just like with the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>57</sup> Sharon Thompson, "Putting a big thing into a little hole: teenage girls' accounts of sexual initiation," *Journal of Sex Research* 27:3 (1990): 341-61 cited in Wendy Chapkis. "The Meaning of Sex," in *Sexuality and Gender*, ed., C.L.Williams and Arlene Stein (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 155.

<sup>58</sup> Martin, 160.

women who lost their virginity under ‘unproblematic’ conditions, such as marriage, it will not be simplistic to tie the following negative feelings to the loss of their virginity. The first experience is the emergence of everything women attributed to sexual intercourse until that day. In other words, it is the emergence of everything negative, which was shed down through their throats about sexuality. Another point of emphasis here is that women never experience their first sexual intercourse as a result of their own initiative. Sexual intercourse takes place as a requirement of marriage, as a requirement to get rid of virginity and as a response to the societal pressure to appear / to be perceived free.

### **3.3.8 Marriage**

Suna is a forty years old petite woman. She looks younger than her age. She is confident, witty and hard working. She is very successful in her work. Her mother was a teacher, her father an engineer and her brother a medical doctor. Suna has a doctorate in pharmacy; she is planning to become an associate professor in the near future.

During her childhood, she played games with her girl friends, which included imitating the kissing scenes they saw in the movies. She remembers being very embarrassed for a drawing she had made when she was about seven years old. She removes herself from games concluding that such games should not exist in a family environment.

During the initial stages of puberty when her breasts just began to form she went to the neighborhood grocery with her cousin. The grocer took her to the storage room and touched different parts of her body. She cried and was upset with her newly formed breasts. She told everything to her cousin, Erdem, but he was not old enough to comprehend what she was

talking about. “I did not tell my family fearing that they would not let me out again.”

While she was in high school, a man stopped her on the street to ask her if she knew the nearest bathroom. Before she was able to respond, he continued, “I need to find one to jack off.” Suna was extremely afraid of the man. She could not forget his eyes staring at her. At school, her teacher noticed the difference and asked her if she was all right. Suna was not able to talk about this incidence with anyone.

She dated someone during the first year of college. They did not do much other than holding hands when they were with others. She tried kissing with her second boyfriend. She did not feel anything nice even though she wanted to feel. She remembers that her lips were swollen and they felt as if they did not belong to her. “I thought anyone who looked at me would understand, especially my parents...” The relationship continued for six months. Her boy friend wanted them to caress one another without removing their clothes. Suna on the other hand just wanted to cuddle up. Her boyfriend soon left Suna disclosing to her that he was in love with someone else.

While she was in college she watched a porn movie with a few of her girlfriends, which she was not able to handle. “I saw a penis for the first time in that movie and I was disgusted by it.”

She had two more boyfriends in the college. Both wanted to have sex with Suna but she told them that she was not ready. Then came a new boyfriend. Her family was aware of him as well. As the relationship was slowly moving toward marriage, the groom candidate got sick. Her family tried to discourage Suna from marrying him. Suna insisted in her

position and they got engaged six months prior to getting married. During this period, Suna had sex with her fiancé without breaking the hymen. He ejaculated outside of her, which Suna took as a sign of his love. At that point, Suna carried no desire to have sex. She was of the opinion that it would happen regardless when the time came, when she got married. During this period however she would touch his penis upon his request. According to Suna, “this is the rule of the game.”

On their wedding night, she did have much physical pain like other women. She remembers that she had throbbing pain, which disappeared after a few more intercourse attempts. “In my eleven years of marriage, I never experienced orgasm, I never properly understood sexuality.” It became common practice for her husband to masturbate in the bed lying next to her. Her husband asked her to talk as they made love. “What could I talk about?” Even though she did not like it, she agreed to perform oral sex upon her husband’s wishes. She does not think anal sex is hygienic enough.

She divorced her husband when she was thirty four. She tried having sex with another man after the divorce: “I was curious as to how it would be with another man.” The man she was found in the internet chat rooms was thirteen years older than her. She thought the sex with him was better but she still left this relationship again without experiencing orgasm.

I asked Suna what she thought about prostitution. According to her, prostitution was a necessary institution that protected the people. She felt concerned about the women however. “Men’s sexuality is much more active than ours. I never thought about cheating on my husband. A nice

looking ass is sufficient to excite them. I on the other hand have no desire for a man's body.”

Like Hülya whose story we have read earlier, Suna did not enjoy the sexuality she experienced with her fiancé. She did not desire to be with him. Gamze did not want to think about sexual intercourse during the time of her engagement and thought that “whatever marriage comes with, it will be experienced and I will be part of it too.” Suna married with similar thoughts that “once married, it will happen.” Gamze says “he was someone who came to our house often and he was approved by my family, my father was very strict and I had no other chance” for her marriage decision. Hülya's mother did not support her daughter's marriage but Hülya says that, “At that time someone else was not an option.” Suna's family did not approve of her marriage decision but she still goes with it. She gave this struggle for someone whose sexuality she did not enjoy. Even though she knew this, while she was engaged to him she still insisted on her decision to marry him.

Marriage for women is a one-step opportunity to go from a negative environment to a positive one, sometimes, from a despotic family environment to a free one. It is a way of gaining status as married / children and sometimes it is a way of achieving the perception, which equates social success to being a mother. It is a way of realizing a longing for love or it is all of the above. Most of the time, sexuality is a requirement for marriage.

The post pubescent girls in Martin's study continue their sexual relationships without enjoyment and explain this situation with fear of losing their boyfriends. When their boyfriends leave them, they are

devastated. In their circles, having a boyfriend is the status quo. Having a husband corresponds to the same thing in idealized marriage.

While marriage is loaded with meaning, sexuality that is required by this institution is expected to take care of itself. Marriage is idealized. In her book *The Erotic Silence of the American Wife*, Dalma Heyn looks at idealization of marriage under a different lens. She studies the extra-marital affairs of women, whose marriages are seemingly functional. In these stories, women can not explain their satisfaction with these affairs by saying “we were not able to get along.” Because they do not have problematic relationships in their marriages. Dalma Heyn concludes that even though these women married their husbands with their own will, they stop being themselves after marriage, while trying to idealize the marriage and the husband as they try to be the perfect wives. In their extra-marital affairs, they were free to be themselves and they did not have to put their efforts into idealizing this person and fulfilling his wishes to make him feel good about himself.

The women in my study did not get married to men they did not want to be with but because of their faith in marriage, they picked them from those who were ‘marriage quality’. Ayşegül and Aysel married the men, who come after leaving the ones they liked, when both failed to live up to the ideals they created in their perception. Hülya married the first person she was introduced to. Oya did not change her mind even after finding her sexual experience with her previous fiancé disgusting. She became devastated after he left her. She said, “I became someone who was dumped in the society.” Gamze said similar things for the first person she was introduced to: “They worked hard on me to make me fall in love with him, I had no other choice, my father was a very strict person” and gives her reason for marriage as getting rid of the oppressive



environment of the family. Bahar first ended up with someone whom she felt sorry for. After he left her, she considered the first candidate with the mindset “I was in my thirties, it was time for me to have children” and married him. Suna’s situation is similar. She decided to marry her fiancé whose sexuality she does not enjoy. Necla, Funda and Sema have different stories. They did not ‘reason’ to marry and they did not marry people whose sexualities were bothersome to them. Necla is waiting for her lover to get a divorce and insisting on this marriage, which will not find acceptance in the society. Despite these examples, the examples from the first group and the prevalence of them show a state of dissatisfaction of women with themselves and they want to get rid of this negative state via marriage. Even though these women say that they married willingly, the decision is not given on their free will.

Semiha is a thirty five years old cute, talkative and witty woman. She is married and they have a daughter. Semiha works as an accountant in a small company. Her mother was a government employee; her father is a small business owner. She has one brother and two sisters.

Similar to the family environments we have discussed in other stories, Semiha grew up in an environment, which almost did not include sexuality. She remembers though that her father was too much interested in sex. Semiha blamed her mother for this. She thought that her mother had no sexual desire and she did not try to make herself attractive for him. She remembers that her father was violent against her because of this.

During puberty, Semiha was overweight. She found herself unattractive. When her periods started, she could not tell her mother. One of her friends helped her. She felt that she was so humiliated.

When she was in high school, she did not interact with the ‘loose’ girls, whom she referred to as ‘sluts’. Her family had successfully convinced her that the evil would only come from outside the family. One of her friends wanted to take her out for a date. He was a computer engineering student in a prestigious college. She turned him down thinking that he belonged to a higher class. She thought that she would have to work too hard to make herself like him. She firmly believed that the person she would marry would have to come from her social and economic class. Her goal was to pick an appropriate life companion after graduating from college. While she enjoyed the fact that she was continually receiving proposals from the men around her, she did not wish to give up her plans. She finished college and started working. Muharrem who was an *Alevi*, worked in the same company, they started dating. Her family was against this relationship. Muharrem really liked the fact that Semiha had no prior experience with men. Muharrem prepares her to sex slowly. She enjoyed kissing; she liked it when Muharrem caressed her breasts. Soon they had sex without intercourse. She said that she would reject him if he had insisted on having intercourse. “If he died or we separated, I had to remain a virgin. He did not ask; we willingly saved the intercourse for that day.”

They dated for more than five years. Semiha always thought that they would separate one day because of their different religious sects. To her surprise both parents were able to put this difference behind them and support their marriage. Semiha was afraid of the first intercourse. She wondered if there would be much bleeding. On their wedding night, Muharrem had thought about every thing: the soap bar, the shampoo, the condom and the towels.

According to Semiha, “they face life challenges together.” She thinks that they are happy together. Her husband prepares her to intercourse each time they have sex. Semiha finds this beautiful. She is aware of her vaginal powers. She believes she is able to make her man happy. She describes her thoughts on this as follows: “a woman must make her man believe that she values him; there is a difference between serving the meal in a pot versus on a nice plate.”

Together, they watch porn movies and have sex. Semiha does not enjoy the movies but she describes the sex following the movie watching as superior. She is of the opinion that their bodies respond well to each other.

Semiha does not think that there exists a difference between the sexuality of men and women. According to her, prostitution is necessary. Because women’s sexuality is repressed, there is no problem for them but it is different for men. “Sexuality is a need for men, I can never say that I completely trust my husband, however, I do not believe he will try with the fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

Semiha’s story shows many similarities with the stories of other women. She too was raised in an environment in which sexuality was denied. She perceived her father/man as more sexually active than her mother/woman. As many, she was not happy with her looks during puberty, she found herself overweight. She categorized her female friends into two categories as ‘sluts’ and ‘virtuous ones’ and she did not interact with girls in the first category. She is of the opinion that women must be prepared for sex. While she does not believe that the sexuality of men and women are any different, she thinks that prostitution is necessary to protect women from men’s aggression toward them.

Let Semiha's story be our last one. She has many commonalities with others. What is different about Semiha? She did not want to be with someone superior to her. She wanted her mate to come from her own social and economic background. She wanted to be with her equal. Even though she idealized her relationship with Muharrem she started the relationship as an equal partner, at least in her perception. She had started the relationship casually, she did not have concrete plans for the future, because she never thought that their relationship would last due to their different religious sects, she did not attach a meaning to the relationship from the very first day. The relationship continued in this manner. Another difference is that Semiha is aware of the fact that she is a sexual being. When she says "I believe in my vaginal powers," she means it...

Let's conclude our story with a poem written by another one of us. Even if we end our story here, we know that this story will continue forever. This story belongs to all of us; it is the story of twenty eight women. It started with hope and courage and it will continue that way. It will lead to lives with more freedom. Isn't Ceyda's poem a sign of the future?

***Adam***

*stay with me handsome man*

*let your voice burst*

*let your madness burst in me.*

*stay with me fireworks eyes*

*let your raging eyes calm down in me*

*let your hands circle*

*the blackness of my hair*

*stay with me mad sea  
without order, without shame*

*knife lips  
whose kiss is a lake of blood in my tongue  
a blow to my chest  
a vagabond with no roots*

*stay with me you who can't fit in any part of me  
my curled up longing sleeps next to me  
while you are still with me*

*stay with me you who plays me rough  
in my strings, your mouth, an explosion gone mad*

*a veil of mystery in my body  
half ripped  
half scent  
and as many dreams as it can carry*

*even though it is hard to carry  
it is a deceit carried by many.*

***Ceyda Çarpan Kutlucan (5.3.2007)***

Translated from Turkish by Hatice Örun Öztürk.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Our intimate story started with our first awareness of ourselves. As one of my male friends said to describe the beauty of being with a woman “Unfortunately we can not remember the blissful times at our mother’s breasts.” For him to be with a woman was an expression of beauty, however, for us will it be an exaggeration to say being with a man is not so simply perceived the same? Do we have to say then, if this is the perception, don’t we need to explore the underlying reasons?

The conclusions derived in this thesis are from lower middle class and middle class women. Because I happen to belong to this economic class, I will include myself in the conclusions and use the terms “us” and “our” in my sentences. It is important to reiterate that the conclusions were derived from the stories told by these twenty seven women. It is quite possible that there are women more or less whose experience of sexuality is quite different than the stories presented here. What I tried to do was to shed light on to this seemingly functional but lived behind closed doors form of sexuality and try to explain its formation under gender and power relations.

We started questioning our sexuality since early childhood. In an interesting and unexpected way, this period took much of the time during the interviews as if to prove Freud’s thesis that claimed childhood experiences shaped our future lives. We grew up in an environment in

which our sexuality was assumed non-existent and when it did occasionally exist, we were reminded that it was not a good thing to have. Even though the women were raised as asexual beings, they were curious about sexuality and played games, which included it. The feelings left after the games were intense guilt and shame. Some of the girls had refused to play these games regarding them as 'phony' and labeled the others as 'loose'. The ones who played the games were burdened by the overwhelming guilt experienced afterwards. They concluded that they had done something wrong since they were not able to talk to a trusting adult on this matter. With these patterns, girls learned the labels 'loose' and 'serious' early on. These labels would later turn into the virtuous/whore dichotomy.

The women who are in their forties today had less exposure to sexual knowledge than the younger group and they learned their 'facts' on sexuality at a later age which had a positive impact on them. They did not attach negative meanings to sexuality during their early years due to their lack of knowledge. On the other hand, the young women in the study had more informed childhoods due to the technological improvements (availability of TV programs, internet, pre-school culture etc.) They attached negative meanings to everything they thought as sexual. For example, a woman recalled an incident of ejaculation on her while she was in preschool. Her first post-traumatic reaction of whether she would be pregnant as a result of this later changed to doubting herself whether she was a whore? Yet another one was disgusted of a condom she found because it reminded her of intercourse. Both of these women are now in their twenties. They had easy access to information on sexuality and despite the knowledge they possessed, the knowledge on reproduction and birth control at young ages, they nevertheless attached 'disgust' to the meaning of sexuality. In this situation what Foucault expressed as

discourse/knowledge/power sequence produced too much information, which had a negative effect. The ability to form a relationship between ejaculation and pregnancy or the knowledge of condom as a birth control device far from helping the preschooler resulted in great damage. This is the negative impact of too much information. According to a popular discourse today, if accurate physiological and technical knowledge were provided all problems related to sexuality would disappear. Instead of supporting this popular discourse of our times on sexuality we should call for a more thorough analysis of this subject. The part that we have to insist on understanding is why negative meanings are attached to sexuality during childhood and which social mechanisms facilitate these negative attributes.

The negative meanings attached to sexuality during childhood when joined with incidents of sexual abuse, become routed in the perception of women. The abuse mostly took place when the girls were five to six years old (at most nine to ten). Typical abusers were adolescent boys of neighbors or/and 'aged' neighbors. The identity of the abuser is linked with being neighbors and carries the motive to know/understand the neighbor's girl. The events take place with careful planning, the big age difference between the girl and her abuser, the fact that the abuser is a grown-up exploiting the gap between the powerful and the powerless are all manifestations of power relations. It is quite obvious that the abuser is at a great advantage and the girl is the victim; but the important question here is why women attach such dramatic meanings to these events. The women had great difficulty talking about these events and continued to feel shame and guilt about them. They possess no rage or anger toward their abusers; on the contrary, they chose to blame others, especially their mothers. It is possible that when they could not talk about the abuses they suffered under the overwhelming burden of them and longed to find a



protective shelter. The anger directed at mother, since she was the one who could/should fulfill this need.

Another important point to emphasize was the unconditional obedience of children to the demands of their abusers. It is possible to explain this with their young age and the fear they experienced but none of the subjects mentioned threats or coercion. The abusers mostly showed their penises and/or asked the girls to touch them. This event, which is blown out of proportion over the years usually, finds a traumatic expression when it is first acknowledged. While male sexual abuse received such loaded responses sexual abuses perpetrated by older girls (though not as common) were mentioned without much difficulty and emphasis. It will not be wrong to conclude that starting with early sexual abuses, male sexuality finds 'horrible' as one of the meanings attached to it. A telling example of this is in the story of Bahar. Bahar carries the possibility/potentiality of the abuse with her uncle in her imagination to this day along with the gratitude that she did not confront him. She is silently approving male aggression even though she still feels uncomfortable in his presence and has difficulty looking at him in the eye. Just like in Bunuel's film "Belle de Jour" where the director does not show any sexual content but constructs everything in the viewer's imagination, Bahar's imagination was a fertile ground to construct everything loaded with negative meanings.

Childhood abuses mostly take place during a period Freud named as 'latent' which start from around age six with the first awareness of sexuality and ends with puberty. It seems like during this period, when the child first experiences herself as a sexual being these negative experiences impact her life greatly. With this event, the girl starts her life by associating male sexuality with aggression. She believes in this

negative association and continues to question herself “what have I done to trigger his aggression?”

According to Freud, our childhood experiences seem to define our sexual lives as adults but is the defining factor what we experienced as children or the meanings we attached to what we experienced over the years? It is possible that if these abuses were shared with adults and if the children were not burdened with these intense feelings of guilt what they perceived today as adults may have been less traumatic. From the conversations, my impression was that the abuses continued but in later years following puberty they were able to cope with them much better in their perceptions.

Another negative meaning attached to sexuality is ‘dirtiness’. Hülya’s obsession to take a bath and Esra’s desperate attempts to eat soap and drink shampoo to achieve ‘cleansing’ are the most traumatic examples. ‘Dirtiness’ was mentioned in many accounts of oral sex. The women did not usually demand oral sex for themselves but satisfied the demands of their husbands/boyfriends even if they did not like it. They explained their dislike by saying that sexual organs were in dirty ‘places’.

To perform oral sex even though it is not enjoyable for them was explained as “to do something he wanted”. This explanation was in agreement with the results of Irigaray’s research on hysterical woman / obsessive man.<sup>59</sup> In hysterical woman’s expression “I” and “you” are inextricably related and while “I” is lacking “you” is the strong one that defines “I”. Instead of “I love you”, “do you love me?” or “I like what

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<sup>59</sup> Luce Irigaray, “Towards a grammar of Enunciation of Hysterics and Obsessives,” in Luce Irigaray Key Writings, ed. Luce Irigaray (London: Continuum, 2004).

you like”. To perform oral sex unwillingly is for “I” not strong enough and to act according to the wishes of “you”. This situation may be more so a result of the fear of losing the man than the exercise of power over a vulnerable person. This man may be a husband/ fiancé approved by the society or a ‘lover’ constructed in one’s perception. Whether the man is perceived or socially approved in depressions following the ‘loss of a man’, the man lost is the man constructed. When a dysfunctional relationship moves toward separation it becomes unbearable. Petite bourgeois solves this problem with the help of psychotherapy and medication. When the problems turn into a massive iceberg with the constant practice of cover ups and the tip of the iceberg becomes visible in the society the relief is sought from the psychiatrists. The feelings are never discussed with people who had contributions to them with the intentions of finding solutions. Women internalize and perpetuate this learned behavior that they should never talk about their childhood abuses or sexual curiosities. In the interviews, some married women mentioned that they could not talk to their husbands about the lack of sexual activity in their lives. When the problems are not solved with the ones who are part of them and instead solved by ‘medical help’ individual solutions are produced but the social structure remains unchanged.

As Foucault argued, so long as the power discourse is in the hands of medical profession true power relations will continue to exist and maintain the current social order. According to the results of a study done in Turkey with the male marriage therapists – the members of this freshly imported profession from the west aiming to create harmonious relationships between the couples – 85% of them defend their

existing/potential secret extramarital affairs<sup>60</sup>, a tragicomic position indeed.

When the topic changes to anal sex, women feel stronger about stating their objections and in addition to hygienic reasons they bring up the forbidden practice of it in religious discourse. Outside the discussion of anal sex, no one brought up the religious discourse. I will argue that religion had no effect on this group and the real reason why they objected to anal sex using religious discourse was that it would be an easy sell.

A fundamental indicator of why women have difficulty with being “I” is a never ending questioning of self and behaviors under the dichotomy of virtuous/whore. Prostitution, as the radical feminists define it, may be an institution for men’s sexual rights or as feminists for sexual freedom define it may be a radical form of existence in a capitalist world that devalues women’s bodies by wanting money for it. In this study however, the existence and acceptance of prostitution in the society came out as a polarizing force for women. Women starting in their childhoods have been dividing women as the ones who behaved like prostitutes and the ones who do not. The ‘normal’ women who performed the division did not even want to get closed to the other side. The women who live in schizophrenic state under self scrutiny of what feeling?/what action? would put me in that category, stop being a group that can express what they want and become a group that no longer knows what they want. It is a widespread belief that women’s sexuality is repressed and women have hard time expressing their sexual desires. While the part about repressed sexuality still holds true it is less of a contributor to in expression when compared with what the desires are. John Berger argues in ways of

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<sup>60</sup> Yüksel, Şahika. “Cinsellik İdeolojisi: Dün ve BuGün.” In *Türkiye’de Kadın Olgusu*, edited by Necla Arat, İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 1992.

seeing that women constantly check their look. She does so even during the funeral of her father next to his casket.<sup>61</sup> Just like John Berger's women who can not let go of checking how they look, women can't let go of checking their behavior whether they were / perceived to be whore like or not.

The woman who experiences the virtuous/whore dilemma has a strong need to feel 'innocent' when she is afraid to approach to the whore end of this divide. And since innocence is synonymous with being a child, she does not want to grow up and wants to remain a 'child' forever. She claims that she does not have any sexual desires of her own but a man can make her feel them. She also understands that the state remaining as a child will not find acceptance in the hyper sexual society where males possess continuous and insatiable sexual desires. This dilemma is then symbolized with a longing to have a 'Lolita-like' body.

The women who lived under constant virtuous/whore auto control and innocent child / mature woman dilemma had 'painful' first intercourses. This state continued for a long time for some of them. The only time they did not experience the pain was when they were drunk. The absence of pain in a drunken state is a proof that auto control is deeply rooted in them and they are not able to bypass consciousness during their first intercourse. This may have something to do with a perception of first sexual intercourse as a rape. Some of the women in the group did validate this connection and talked about how they perceived their first sexual intercourse as a rape. According to the radical feminists, heterosexual relationship is a 'rape' in its current form. Instead of bringing such a reductionist expression for this phenomenon, the efforts

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<sup>61</sup> John Berger, *Görme Biçimleri* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1986), 46.

should be used to identify the underlying mechanisms that can attribute such strong meanings to sexual intercourse and how it is possible to exercise such control over consciousness.

There was a difference in the perception of virginity between the young group and the middle-aged group. The middle-aged group acted with the notion that the first sexual intercourse must be experienced 'legally' and found support from their spouses, fiancés and boyfriends. They experienced their premarital sexuality without penetration<sup>62</sup> and were not bothered by this experience since they were able to protect their 'virginity' by not damaging their hymen. Since no penetration took place, they did not consider their experience as sexual. The situation was quite different for young women. Some of these women especially the ones who graduated from the elite universities of the capital city considered virginity as something that had to be taken care of before marriage. The slogan in the prevalent discourse was/is "free woman can not be virgins, being a virgin is embarrassing". In the name of being/appearing free women were losing on being "I". Once again, they took care of the virginity issue through the demands of the other. Under the influence of provoked 'freedom' discourse, sexuality was not experienced with free will. Virginity, which needed no resolution of this sort, turned into something that had to be taken care of. The ruling discourse in symbolic realm was "are you still a virgin?" Those who were no longer virgins were one step ahead of the ones who were 'still' virgins. This discourse certainly worked for men who wanted to objectify women. They no longer had sex with women. Because of their attraction they only wished

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<sup>62</sup>The consideration of oral sex as not a real sex in Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky's scandal is a tragicomic example of this social perception.  
Hürriyet, "Monica'dan Clinton'a Şehvet Mektupları," Yaşam 5.10.1998,  
<http://dosyalar.hurriyet.com.tr/hur/turk/98/10/05/yasam/04yas.htm>

to be at the receiving end of this give and take transaction. According to a survey given to Middle East Technical University students, 74% of the male students reported there was no relation between virtuosity and virginity but 41 % of the same group still demanded that the girls they would end up marrying would be virgins.<sup>63</sup> To emphasize the absurd nature of this situation one can argue that breaking the virginity taboo may have worked against the interests of women.

Our identities are amalgam of our personal and social identities. In our social identity, we realize our social roles and our personal identity is a result of our inner world. If these two identities are not at odds with one another we live our lives at ease free of contradictions. My most fundamental conclusion from this study is that the constant self-questioning of woman starting very early on within the virtuous/whore dichotomy results in contradictions within and get in the way of being “I”. The constant contradiction experienced within results in splitting of social and personal identities. She cannot approve what she perceives socially in her personal life or just the opposite she can’t apply what she approved personally to her social life. In this social structure, where desire is fueled and innocence is expected simultaneously women are forced to exist in constant contradiction. For women who experience their sexuality at the boundary of social and instinctual, the clear demarcation makes transitions even more difficult. Despite all odds, women do not give up on their sexuality. A reference to Freud may be in order at this point...

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<sup>63</sup> Eğitim Haber, “Gençlerin bekârete bakış açısı değişiyor,” Özel Haber Köşesi Arşiv Detayı 12 Aralık 2007, <http://www.egitimhaber.com/index.php?departman=ozelhaberdetay&id=7>

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEWERS AND THEIR AGES

Ayşegül (38)  
Suna (40)  
Naz (45)  
Güzin(35)  
Berna(32)  
Funda(45)  
Hülya(42)  
Esra(24)  
Sema(41)  
Müge(24)  
Aysel(36)  
Meray(48)  
Bahriye(50)  
Bahar(40)  
Sevgi(25)  
Nurcan(39)  
Semiha(35)  
Ezel(40)  
Oya(27)  
Gamze(55)  
Necla(47)  
Pelin(45)  
Berrin(47)  
Ayşenur(45)  
Rüya(25)  
Ezgi (28)  
Nurhayat(25)