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**EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL  
HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: THE CASE OF METU**

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**Experiences of Young People about Sexuality, Sexual Health, and  
Reproductive Health: The Case of METU**

**Gençlerin Cinsellik, Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Hakkındaki Deneyimleri:  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

AEGEE	Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDSM	Bondage, Discipline/Dominance, Sadism/Submission, Masochism
BIYOGEN	Biology and Genetics Society
CEDAW	Convention on the Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CITOB	The Office for Promoting Gender Equality and Preventing Sexual Harassment
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
IUD	Intrauterine Device
Kaos GL	Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity Association
KKM	Kültür ve Kongre Merkezi (Culture and Convention Center)
LeGaTo	Lesbian Gay Society / Lezbiyen Gay Topluluğu
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Intersex, Queer, Asexual +

METU	Middle East Technical University
METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity	Middle East Technical University Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Aromantic + Solidarity
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
ODTÜ	Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi
STIs	Sexual Transmitted Infections
TOG	Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı (Community Volunteers Foundation)
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WAS	World Association for Sexual Health

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the experiences of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 regarding sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health through the case of Middle East Technical University (METU). I analyzed the experiences of young people in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health through the experience of METU students. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 30 people from various departments, gender identities, and sexual orientations to investigate the experiences of young people as subjects. I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with a total of 18 students and graduates who participated in actions on gender equality, are/were in student societies working on gender, and are/were a student in Gender and Women's Studies Master Program to understand how METU as a venue interacts with the experiences in this field.

There is an interaction between gender and experiences about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health experiences. The patriarchal and binary gender systems dominate individuals' bodies and sexuality. Thus, sexuality is political. Government policies, health policies, and social perception affect experiences in this field. Space affects each other with these experiences.

This study claims that the patriarchal, binary, and heteronormative system restricts the sexual experience of women and LGBTIQAs (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer, Asexual +) and makes sexuality unequal. Since pleasure from sexuality is not perceived as a right, young people face discrimination and difficulties regarding their sexual experiences. This research re-emphasized the necessity of supporting young people's access to information and services in this field without discrimination and providing an inclusive service.

**Keywords:** sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, gender, sexual stratification, feminism

## ÖZET

Bu tezin konusu Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi (ODTÜ) örneği üzerinden 18-25 yaş arasındaki gençlerin cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı hakkında deneyimleridir. Gençlerin cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanındaki deneyimlerini ODTÜ öğrencilerinin deneyimi üzerinden analiz ettim. Gençlerin özne olarak deneyimlerini inceleyebilmek için çeşitli bölümlerden, cinsiyet kimliklerinden ve cinsel yönelimlerden 30 kişi ile yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirdim. Mekân olarak ODTÜ'nün bu alandaki deneyimlerle nasıl bir etkileşimi olduğunu anlamak için toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği hakkında eylemlere katılmış, toplumsal cinsiyet alanında çalışan öğrenci topluluklarında bulunan /bulunmuş ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalışmaları yüksek lisans programında öğrenci olan/olmuş toplam 18 öğrenci ve mezun ile yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirdim.

Toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanındaki deneyimler arasında etkileşim vardır. Ataerkil sistem ve ikili cinsiyet sistemi bireylerin bedenleri ve cinsellikleri üzerinde tahakküm kurar. Bu nedenlerle cinsellik politiktir. Devlet politikalarının, sağlık politikalarının ve toplumsal algının bu alandaki deneyimlere etkisi vardır. Mekân bu deneyimler ile birbirlerini etkiler.

Bu çalışma patriarkal, ikili cinsiyet sistemine dayanan ve heteronormatif sistemin özellikle kadın ve LGBTIQ+’ların cinsel deneyimlerini kısıtladığını ve cinselliği eşitsiz bir hale getirdiğini iddia etmektedir. Cinsellikten haz almak bir hak olarak algılanmadığı için gençler cinsel deneyimleri ile ilgili ayrımcılık ve zorluklarla karşılaşmaktadır. Bu araştırma, gençlerin bu konuda ayrımcılıktan uzak bir şekilde bilgi ve hizmetlere erişiminin desteklenmesi ve kapsayıcı bir hizmet verilmesi gerekliliğini yeniden vurgulanmıştır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı, toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsel tabakalaşma, feminizm

## INTRODUCTION

Although sexuality is a part of people's lives, it is a complex issue to discuss socially, politically, and culturally. The body is an integral part of sexuality, and policies produced through the body directly affect sexuality. Sexuality is a process that can be social or individual construct with gender roles, and gender inequality turns sexuality into an unequal action among individuals. Vance says,

For researchers in sexuality, the task is not only to study changes in the expression of sexual behavior and attitudes but to examine the relationship of these changes to more deeply-based shifts in how gender and sexuality were organized and interrelated within larger social relations.<sup>1</sup>

What matters in sexuality research is not just how sexual experiences change. Examining how people perform sexuality within social relations concerning gender is critical. Within the scope of this thesis, I have analyzed the experiences of gender identities and sexual orientations by focusing on space. The main reason why studies of sexuality are significant is to look at the things that affect sexual experiences.

In this thesis, I investigate young people's experiences regarding sexuality and sexual and reproductive health through the Middle East Technical University (METU) case. METU is a university founded in 1956 in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. As I will explain in the following sections, METU is a politically active university, and people associate it with the leftist movement. Student movements active in Turkey in 1968 also affected METU spatially and historically. People generally think of METU's leftist history. I will discuss this relationship in detail later in the thesis. This university has a large campus with living space for students. Student societies, in which students

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<sup>1</sup> Carole S. Vance, "Anthropology Rediscovered Sexuality: A Theoretical Comment," *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Peter Aggleton, and Richard Parker, (London: Routledge, 2014): 41. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=70791&site=eds-live> Last access June 1, 2022.

participate and organize activities in line with their interests, are essential in terms of university culture. Thanks to its historical background, various left, LGBTIQ+, and feminist movements are active in METU, influencing the space. When I first entered the university, the student society's name, METU LGBTI Solidarity, changed over time in parallel with the movement in Turkey. In the last years of my university education, gender movements at METU often used the abbreviation LGBTIQ+. Thus, I will use it as LGBTIQ+ in the thesis. Changes continued over time, and now the student society's name in METU is METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity. Different movements may also use different abbreviations, such as LGBT and LGBTI. I will write based on the abbreviation used by the person I quoted in the quotations I made on this subject in the thesis. I chose METU as my research area because I graduated from METU. I participated in many student societies, activities, forums, and events during my six years as a student at METU. Therefore, I am familiar with the characteristics of METU. Contrary to popular belief, sexuality is not just a biological and physical activity. It has cultural, political, social, and cultural aspects. The impact of policies, norms, gender roles, culture, social relations, and the living environment affects sexual experiences. Declaration of Sexual Health says, "Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors."<sup>2</sup> It indicates that sexuality is not independent of society's political, cultural, and social structure. State policies, cultural practices, and societies' perspectives on sexuality affect individuals' sexual experiences. For instance, if government policies only indicate heterosexual relationships as legitimate, society does not embrace LGBTIQ+'s sexuality as legitimate. This situation causes LGBTQIA+ individuals not to be able to live their romantic and sexual relationships visibly. Zengin talks about how the production and order of family and social life depends on family and kinship affairs, which cause

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<sup>2</sup> "Declaration of Sexual Health," World Association for Sexual Health (WAS), March 2014, 2022, <https://worldsexualhealth.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Declaration-of-Sexual-Rights-2014-plain-text.pdf> Last access May 18, 2022.

severe closures and problems for LGBTIQ individuals in their understanding of intimacy, feelings, emotions, and love lives.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, within the scope of this thesis, while discussing experiences related to sexuality, I will also discuss the effects of state policies, gender, and practices in the research field.

Another crucial point to be addressed regarding sexuality is sexual and reproductive health. Practices, thoughts, and behaviors shape people's sexual and reproductive health experiences and vice versa. If the sexuality of unmarried women is not assumed as legitimate by the state, women have difficulty accessing sexual and reproductive health services. It indicates that society's cultural, political, and social structure affects not only sexuality but also sexual and reproductive health, which is an essential part of sexuality. "Jinekolog Muhabbetleri" published by Kaos GL<sup>4</sup> (Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity Association / Kaos Gey ve Lezbiyen Kültürel Araştırmalar ve Dayanışma Derneği) mentions that gynecologists ask patients about their marital status instead of asking whether a vaginal examination can be performed. Moreover, a narrator in this book could not reach the smear test, which is of great importance in the early diagnosis of cervical cancer, in the health institution, due to their single marital status.<sup>5</sup> These practices of government mechanisms such as hospitals, based on gender inequality, adversely affect both the sexuality and sexual and reproductive health practices of disadvantaged groups such as women, LGBTIQ+, and youth. It is significant to highlight the experiences of young people with different gender identities and sexual orientations, who are one of the significant subjects of this research.

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<sup>3</sup> Aslı Zengin, "Sevginin Ölüm Dünyası: Aile, Arkadaşlık ve Trans Kadın Cenazeleri," *Queer Temaşa*, copm. Leman S. Darıcıoğlu, (İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2016): 132, (Translation of mine).

<sup>4</sup> It is a significant association working about gender and human rights in Turkey and publishes a magazine and sources.

<sup>5</sup> Aslı Alpar, ed., "'Jinekolog Muhabbetleri' ne Yansıyan İhlaller," *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri*, (Ankara: Kaos GL, 2020): 11-13. <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/2020jinekolog-muhabbetleri-son.pdf> Last access May 27, 2022, (Translation of mine).

The patriarchal system reconstructs the relationship with the body, politically, culturally, and socially. Sexuality is an integral part of the relationship established with the body. Rubin argues that sexuality has politics, inequalities, and forms of oppression and that the concrete and institutional forms of sexuality are the products of human activity. Rubin says, “They are imbued with conflicts of interest and political maneuver, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense, sex is always political.”<sup>6</sup> It is essential to show that sexuality is a political issue related to gender. People’s sexual practices can give clues about the culture, social and political structure of their society, and their perspective on gender. The state dominates the bodies of women, LGBTIQ+, and young people with the policies it produces.

Sirman and Akınerdem write, “In the hierarchy between family relations, the mother-child relationship is placed at the top. The woman and her body’s primary task are assumed to be nurturing and developing this relationship.”<sup>7</sup> This policy, produced through the body, indicates that mother status suppresses women’s bodies. Situations like these limit access to abortion, sexual health, and reproductive health services. There is a perception that people can perform sexuality for having children. It is more difficult for people who have sexual intercourse outside of marriage or homosexual relationships to access such services than people who are married and heterosexual to do so because they break out of the family structure that has become the norm. It is the reason that these people cannot access any services related to sexuality.

Within the scope of the thesis, I aim to investigate the effects of government policies, gender, and living space on the experiences and perceptions of students

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<sup>6</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality Sex Wars,” *Culture, Society, and Sexuality a Reader*, ed. Richard Parker. Peter Aggleton, (London: Routledge, 2014): 143.

<sup>7</sup> Nükhet Sirman and Feyza Akınerdem, “Kadın, Beden, Annelik,” *Kadınların Üreme Sağlığı Hizmetleri ve Kürtaj Deneyimleri Araştırma Raporu*, (İstanbul, Dissensus Araştırma ve Danışmanlık A.Ş., 2021): 26.  
[https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/kurtaj\\_raporu\\_web\\_13.12.pdf](https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/kurtaj_raporu_web_13.12.pdf) Last access May 22, 2022, (Translation of mine).

studying at METU in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. It is significant to show that sexuality is a political issue in this study. While displaying the relationship between sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, and the body, it is essential to show how this is affected by the policies produced. Rubin writes, “Once sex is understood in terms of social analysis and historical understanding, a more realistic politics of sex becomes possible.”<sup>8</sup> It suggests that it is significant to analyze and comprehend gender biologically, socially, and historically. It is necessary to investigate the relations in which sexuality is produced and constructed to grasp gender and sexuality politics within the scope of this study. This study aims to show the relationship between sexuality and gender and how it interacts. Since practices and practices related to sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health are affected by social, political, and cultural discourses and norms, people’s relationship with these policies, discourses, and norms is one of the main points. Thus, the interviewees’ individual experiences play a role in making the sexuality of young people visible and determining their needs in this field. Another point is that METU also affects people’s experiences in this field since I conducted this research within a specific field. In the light of all these, I investigated gender awareness, perception of body, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, access to information and services, the impact of government policies and the difficulties encountered, and the impact of the place.

Studies in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health in Turkey are mainly in health-related fields, such as the medical field. Studies in this field in the field of social sciences are minimal. As I mentioned above, sexuality is not just a physical or biological activity. It is a performance that has social and cultural importance by being influenced by the environment in which people live. Erol and Terzioğlu state that a significant branch of health anthropology intersects with gender studies. Although they mainly focused on the concepts of reproductive technologies,

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<sup>8</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality Sex Wars,” *Culture, Society, and Sexuality a Reader*: 149 - 150.

fertility, pregnancy, femininity, and masculinity, they say that these researches are largely heteronormative.<sup>9</sup> This study is essential to consider not only sexuality but also sexual and reproductive health from a sociological perspective within the scope of social sciences. Besides, the research aims to be inclusive in that it does not remain within the binary gender system but includes different gender identities and sexual orientations.

Although sexuality is an experience for people, it is invisible in society, especially in public spaces. Specifically, society ignores the sexuality of young people, women who are not married, LGBTIQ+ people, or anyone else whose sexuality is not seen as legitimate by society. Math and Seshadri say that sexual minorities like lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people, whose gender identity, sexual orientation, and practices are different from the majority of society, are a non-existent and form an invisible community that is not included in any social or health policy.<sup>10</sup> This study is critical because it can contribute to visible disadvantaged groups' sexuality, such as young people, women, and LGBTIQ+ their experiences and narratives. Treating sexuality without ignoring it and discussing it as a visible issue allows discussion about accessing sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health services.

Since it deals with this issue with feminism and queer theories and debates, it is fundamental to address the relationship of sexuality with gender. Discussing sexuality, gender roles of individuals affect practices. For instance, sexuality is the penetration of the vagina and penis regarding society's perception. Candan and Özbay mention that feminist theory and feminist anthropology have produced influential

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<sup>9</sup> Maral Erol, and Ayşecan Terzioğlu, "Sağlık Antropolojisi," *Kültür Denen Şey*, ed. Ayfer Bartu Candan and Cenk Özbay (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2018): 316.

<sup>10</sup> Suresh Bada Math and Shekhar P. Seshadri, "The Invisible Ones: Sexual Minorities," *The Indian Journal of Medical Research*, 137 (2013): 4.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236037424\\_The\\_invisible\\_ones\\_Sexual\\_minorities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236037424_The_invisible_ones_Sexual_minorities) Last access June 1, 2022.

works on many subjects, including motherhood, the female body, and sexuality.<sup>11</sup> Benefiting from feminist theory and feminist anthropology is effectively addresses this issue. It will be beneficial to consider the role of gender in this field, not to discuss sexuality only through male sexuality and heteronormative sexuality, which are in a position of power. With all these points, this research is vital in discussing sexuality as a visible topic in line with the subjects' experiences. It contributes to the literature, albeit a little, by feeding on feminist and queer theories.

While discussing the research method, I will especially emphasize feminist reflexivity. Since I did this work limited to METU as a space, I used feminist reflexivity to consider the effect of the space and my interaction with the work as a researcher, as a METU graduate and a feminist woman. In the method section, I will also discuss the pandemic's effects. I will discuss the theoretical framework through performativity, sexual classification, and space in the second part. The sexual experiences of individuals that society expects from them because of their gender are related. Therefore, it is essential to think about performativity to consider sexual experiences socially, politically, and culturally. Butler says, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."<sup>12</sup> Expressions, norms, and behaviors about individuals' sex construct gender identity. Expressions about sexual experience might construct one's gender during sexuality as a performativity. Sexuality is a political act. Due to individuals' gender identity, sexual orientation, and economic, social, cultural, and political status, they become advantageous or disadvantaged during this action. Thus, it is critical to address sexual stratification in the theoretical part. In the third part, I will handle the researcher's background in Turkey and METU. I will examine the campus from a physical, political, and historical perspective. I will investigate policies

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<sup>11</sup> Ayfer Bartu Candan, Cenk Özbay, "Giriş," *Kültür Denen Şey*: 25.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge,1999): 33.

and actions related to gender and sexuality in Turkey. While grasping the structure of METU on gender, sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, I will benefit from interviews with students and graduates who are active in the field of gender at METU. In the fourth part of the research, I will analyze the experiences of young people in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, based on the theoretical discussions and the background of METU, through the case of METU, as a result of in-depth interviews with METU undergraduate students between the ages of 18–25. In conclusion, I will discuss the results and suggestions in line with the analysis.

## CHAPTER 1

### METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1. FEMINIST REFLEXIVITY

I chose to do my research at METU since I graduated from there. I spent six years at METU, including two years in a preparation class and four years as an undergraduate sociology student. I also participated in METU communities, campaigns, and events promoting gender equality. I have been involved in student politics since my first year at METU. At METU, I participated in many student and political organizations. I contributed to the founding of METU Women's solidarity. I participated in numerous METU student actions for six years. I spent about two years living in the dormitories in the center of METU, and I spent nearly four years residing in a student house in the neighborhood close to METU, where most METU students live. Therefore, I am aware of what METU and the district called 100. Yıl means for a student. My experience as a researcher and a METU student has impacted the research. Neuman writes that "The feminist approach sees researchers as fundamentally gendered beings. Researchers necessarily have a gender that shapes how they experience reality, and therefore it affects their research."<sup>13</sup> My feminist identity and struggle experience about gender affect this study. Researching the interviewees' experiences includes using my experience from my six years at METU. My gender and sexual orientation affect my university experience, just like they do for interviewees.

The structure of the environment in which people live forms the basis of their experiences. A place is not just a physical place. Space regulates people's relationships, practices, and experiences. Also, people's relationships shape places. Castells writes

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<sup>13</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, "The Meanings of Methodology," *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2014): 119.

that people socialize in their local environment and establish social networks among each other.<sup>14</sup> Depending on where people live in a city, village, or town, people's relationships and experiences might change. While people socialize in their field, they learn new information through socialization. In line with this information, their experiences are constructed. Sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health affect how people relate to their environment.

Where we live, the space also affects our experiences, and our experiences in constructed spaces. The structure of spaces affects the way people engage in relationships. The areas where we can perform our behaviors are diversified if the space is large. Goffman argues, "In the Anglo-American society we live in - a society that lives in relatively closed spaces - performances are usually held in highly restricted areas, often accompanied by time constraints."<sup>15</sup> Considering this situation-specific to METU, which part of the space students uses may shape their behavior can be taken to the center of analysis. The large size of the METU campus can offer students many alternatives. The use of the space also changes according to time. Since students use the library more than other venues during the exam period, their socialization processes and the use of the venue are limited. The effects of the social and cultural structure of the place are limited to a student who uses the campus only to attend classes. Thus, the level of the relationship the interviewees establish with the campus increases the degree of influencing their experiences on this topic.

Communities decide each space's rules. Society's political, cultural, and social structure is influential in determining the rules of each place. Rules regulate our communication and actions. Goffman mentions the relationship between the rules of decency and the place and gives the example of respect for the sacred areas.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Manuel Castells, "Territorial Identities: The Local Community," *The Power of Identity*, 2nd ed., With a new preface, The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Wiley-Blackwell, (2010): 63.

<sup>15</sup> Erving Goffman, "Bölgeler ve Bölgesel Davranışlar," *Günlük Yaşamda Benliğin Sunumu*, trans. Barış Cezar, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2014): 107, (Translation of mine).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 108.

unwritten rules about sexuality at METU also control our sexual experiences. Thus, I investigated the structure of METU as space through interviews.

Features of different spaces give clues about gender. What place we are in affects what behavior we perform. Which gender role we perform may also depend on the place. Doan says that "... each performance is subject to the performer, the observer and the space in which it is performed and if that space is also in flux, then we have an infinite array of possible genders."<sup>17</sup> Our behavior is not just a performance that depends on us. How we behave is shaped by who we are and where we are. At METU, there are mostly men in engineering departments, and it is a department in which masculinity is dominant. There, a gay man may give heterosexual performances to avoid discrimination.

Based on the above points, relationships between people in METU also affect METU. METU shapes students' experiences as a living space. METU is an area where social movements, including gender equality, are strong. Social activities have an impact on space. METU has a large campus, and this campus is a living space for students. Historically, the experiences of social movements and students are among the elements that make up the space. This living space also has an impact on students' experiences. As a METU graduate, I share similar experiences. Thus, I also investigated the effect of METU as a space on students' experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health in this study. In qualitative research, researcher should include the participants' individual experiences in the research, regardless of the statistics. At this point, I should examine the researcher's position and the research sample's social, cultural, environmental, and political history. Dodgson says that reflexivity may allow considering the purpose of the research and the researcher's position. Providing information about the social and environmental contexts relevant

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<sup>17</sup> Petra L Doan, "The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces - Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 17(5) (2010): 639. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2010.503121> Last access June 1, 2022.

to the research subject is significant.<sup>18</sup> While investigating the experiences of METU students in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, grasping the experiences and expressions of different components to understand the content of METU on related issues in this field feed the research. Gathering information in the women's movement, the feminist movement, the social movements, the student clubs, the relationship of the courses with this field, and gender studies reveal environmental relations about the experiences of METU students in this field. In that regard, the feminist reflexivity approach is significant in research on sexuality. Thus, I conducted in-depth interviews with open-ended questions with students and graduates who play a role in the field of gender at METU. Likewise, I interviewed students and graduates of the graduate program in gender and women's studies at METU. All these interviews strengthened the feminist reflexivity in the research. Karababa Demircan tells that:

Objectivity discussions draw the researcher to the field of constant questioning and awareness based on their judgments and reflections on their life experience and presence in the field. People and groups whose knowledge are consulted are recognized as informed subjects rather than passive transmitters. On the other hand, the experience of the researcher gain quality that cannot be ignored in terms of knowledge production.<sup>19</sup>

Since I will do this research as a METU graduate, I must reflect on the experiences, observations, and judgments I have gained at METU. Another point is that the interviewees are in a position to convey information, not passive. Rubin says that "Society depends on space may shape experiences about sexuality. As with other aspects of human behavior, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given

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<sup>18</sup> Joan E. Dodgson, "Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(2) (2019): 220–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990> Last access May 10, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Pinar Karababa Demircan, "New Methods in Great Lockdown: Applying Feminist Self-Reflexivity During Pandemic," *Moment Journal*, 7(2) (2020): 134. <https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2020.2.129148> Last access May 10, 2022, (Translation of mine).

time and place are products of human activity.”<sup>20</sup> The relationship established by the interviewees with METU and their experiences, norms, thoughts, and beliefs in the field of gender, which this relationship produces, are essential in understanding the experiences of sexuality. I used a feminist reflexivity approach to study the relationship between interviewees, researcher, and space. The effect of METU as a space on the interviewer and the interviewees will affect the result of the research. The spatial dynamics of METU shapes people’s experiences in this field.

Moreover, the characteristics of METU students affect METU as a place. Mutual interaction shapes places and or experiences. Areas affect our experiences, and cultural and historical experiences also affect spaces. The results might have been different if I had conducted this research at another university instead of METU. Even if another researcher had done it instead of me, the result of the research might have been different. In this study, we cannot ignore the position of both the space and the researcher. The interpretation of the experience of each research person in this field with a feminist approach to the place plays an essential role in transferring the research participants as subjects.

Within the scope of this research, interviews with different units of METU give us holistic information and historical background in terms of space. It is particularly effective in transferring experience in temporal differences in space. It is also significant to consider which area of the space is used and when. Events in the past transformed the space socially. Lefebvre writes, “Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. ... Social space implies a great diversity of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> The consequences of actions that took place in the past are the cause of current actions. To understand the current impact of space, we need to consider the historical change in

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<sup>20</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality Sex Wars,” *Culture, Society, and Sexuality a Reader*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “Social Space,” *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1991): 73.

space. The past activities and actions held at METU shaped the current gender situation at METU. Thus, it also interviewed graduates who had been activists in this area at METU in the past years to address the spatial change. Semi-structured interviews with people from the student clubs, such as METU Women's Solidarity, METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, and METU Gender Studies, allowed the understanding of METU as a whole. Interviews with students and graduates who are active in gender-related actions, such as the rainbow ladder, the pride parade, and the March 8 parade, provide interesting insights into the gender structure of METU. Interviews with students and graduates of METU's master's program in gender and women's studies help us understand how academic studies affect this field at METU.

I interviewed 18 people in the profile described in this context. I asked questions about the activities of the communities in the field of gender and sexuality to interviewees in the gender-related student community. I asked questions about the content of the courses and the gender contribution of the department to the interviewees at METU's graduate program in gender and women's studies. I asked questions about how they performed the ladder actions to the interviewees who took part in the ladder actions. I asked questions about the gender structure of METU, the administration's perspective, the pandemic's effect, the change in actions and structure, and the advantages and disadvantages of METU in this field to all groups in general.

## **1.2. RESEARCH METHOD**

As I said above, I interviewed alumni and students active in METU groups and actions to understand the space concerning feminist reflexivity. The interviews I conducted as part of this study are separated into two groups: interviews to understand the area and interviews to investigate young people's experiences about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health.

For the research, I conducted in-depth interviews on the internet with semi-structured open-ended questions. Speaking openly about sexuality with strangers might be challenging. As I will argue in the theoretical framework, sexual activity is a performativity with cultural, political, and social implications in addition to its physical ones. The ways the participants express their experiences are crucial since the research must investigate the experiences within the context of social interactions. Bryman explains that qualitative research frequently focuses on words rather than numbers when gathering and analyzing data. It rejects positivist conventions and methods in favor of emphasizing how people perceive their social environments. It embodies how social reality appears to be.<sup>22</sup> In this study, I was more concerned with the motivations behind and types of experiences that each person I spoke with had than with the percentages of each type of event. This study focuses on how people perceive and communicate their views on gender-related aspects of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Most theses about sexual and reproductive health in Turkey have emerged from the health sciences and are based on quantitative methods.<sup>23</sup> Sexuality and sexual and reproductive health have social, political, economic, and cultural meanings, so it is crucial to investigate this field with a feminist perspective in the social sciences. In sexual and reproductive health, it is critical to investigate issues such as individuals' difficulties, daily practices, and experiences through their narratives. Hence, I will examine the experiences of young people in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health without ignoring the interviewees' experiences. The interviewees' experiences indicate the social, cultural, and political background of their experiences in this field. Kümbetoğlu explains that, according to feminist researchers, attaining knowledge of social reality in detail and accurately depends on including facts

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Bryman, "Social research strategies," *Social Research Methods*. (London, Oxford University Press, 2012): 36.

<sup>23</sup> Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı Ulusal Tez Merkezi, <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp>. Last access May 11, 2022.

about women and gender in social studies as a theoretical category, not as a variable.<sup>24</sup> Gender is a significant part of investigating sexuality. The feminist method is essential in this research to reveal the experiences of individuals in parallel with their own identities. Kümbetoğlu says

For example, the effort of phenomenological studies to understand and interpret the practices of daily life based on the knowledge, behavior, idea, belief, and perception that creates these practices turns into interpreting women's experiences, their daily lives, and knowledge of womanhood in the feminist method.<sup>25</sup>

When carrying out this research about sexuality, it is critical to reflect on the subject's experience with their thoughts without hierarchies by accepting them in the position of knowing. Kümbetoğlu explains that the researcher's stance involves seeing and evaluating them as knowing subjects as primary data sources. Feminist researchers claim that we can understand the world we socially construct from the experience and knowledge of women.<sup>26</sup> I carried out this study with the qualitative research method to understand young people's experiences with their discourses. I conducted in-depth interviews over the internet with open-ended and semi-structured questions. It allowed each interviewee to understand their experiences with their subject matter.

Traditional research methods put objectivity at the center and establish a hierarchy between the interviewer and the interviewee. Nowicka and Ryan says, in contrast to the positivist tradition that the researcher should maintain analytical distance from the object of study, the feminist tradition and action research encouraged

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<sup>24</sup> Belkıs Kümbetoğlu, "Niteliksel Araştırmada Farklı Yaklaşımlara Bir Örnek: Feminist Yaklaşım ve Feminist Yöntem," *Sosyolojide ve Antropolojide Niteliksel Yöntem ve Araştırma* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (İstanbul: Bağlam, 2021): 54.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

engagement with participants and self-reflexivity.<sup>27</sup> Quantitative research methods cannot make the individual experiences of disadvantaged groups such as women, youth, and LGBTIQ+ visible. They position them as objects rather than subjects in the research. Minimizing the hierarchy between me as a researcher and the interviewees is crucial. As the interviewer, my being a METU graduate enables me to share my experience with the interviewees. Interview questions consist of demographic questions and questions about the perception of sexuality, body sexual and reproductive health, gender awareness, space effects on sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health experiences.

Power relations in society have reflections on our experiences. Power relations encompass elements including the economy, status, gender, and sexual orientation. Depending on factors including gender, sexual orientation, culture, and economy, power relationships emerge during our sexual experiences. Philip and Bell say, “Feminist researchers have maintained a critical focus on the power relations involved in knowledge production; both in and around the doing of research, but also in the wider contexts of institutions and the academy.”<sup>28</sup> Power structures play a significant role in producing knowledge in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, and it is necessary to approach this critically with feminist methodology. Taking gender roles as a theoretical category in this research strengthens the gender approach of the research.

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<sup>27</sup> Magdalena Nowicka and Louise Ryan, “Beyond Insiders and Outsiders in Migration Research: Rejecting A Priori Commonalities. Introduction to the FQS Thematic Section on ‘Researcher, Migrant, Woman: Methodological Implications of Multiple Positionalities in Migration Studies’”, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung*, (16)2 (2015), para.2. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282196327> Last access August 22, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Georgia Philip and Linda Bell, “Thinking Critically About Rapport and Collusion in Feminist Research: Relationships, Contexts and Ethical Practice,” *Women's Studies International Forum*, 61 (1) (2017):72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2017.01.002>. Last access May 3, 2022.

### **1.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS**

For sexual health and reproductive health, I conducted two different types of interviews to comprehend the environment and social movements at METU and the experiences of METU students on sexuality. The COVID-19 outbreak began about seven months after I started my master's degree. I changed the face-to-face interviews I planned for my thesis to internet interviews after the pandemic started to avoid endangering both my health and the interviewees' health.

Within the scope of understanding the structure of the place, I conducted an online interview with 18 students or graduates, with open-ended questions. I completed the interviews from January 30 to March 30, 2022. The interview included participants from the METU Gender Studies Society, METU Gender and Women's Studies Master's Program, METU Women's Solidarity, and METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity. Additionally, I also interviewed people active in gender issues at METU. To better understand the practices and academic studies on gender at METU, I decided to interview the representatives of these agencies. These structures are the subjects who are active in the field of gender at METU and direct gender studies at METU. To understand METU as a location in terms of gender, I conducted interviews with subjects involved in this field. I interviewed graduates to understand better how they had changed over time.

In investigating of young people's experiences with sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, I reached 30 interviewees between the ages of 18 and 25, who are METU undergraduate students. I completed the interviews between March 4, 2022, and April 15, 2022. Young people are particularly concerned about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. In today's society, age, being older, in particular, are status symbols. Inequalities such as patriarchy also cause ageism. Young people are vulnerable in this regard due to their lack of income and ties to their families

and the fact that unmarried young people's sexuality is not seen as legitimate. People between the ages of 20 and 24 are in the fourth age group with the highest number of cases among the 16-age range, according to Ministry of Health data on the age distribution of people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in Turkey between 1985 and 2021.<sup>29</sup> This information demonstrates that young people are among the demographic groups most impacted by sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In this topic, young people face economic, social, cultural, and political disadvantages. Therefore, I determined the study's target group to be young people. As mentioned above, I chose METU as my research area because I graduated from METU and was active in student movements. I have determined the age range as 18–25 to investigate the young people's experience in this field. For the research to be inclusive, I tried to reach students from different gender identities and sexual orientations. Students from all undergraduate faculties participated in the research.

I profited from my environment and METU's social media groups for both kinds of interviews. Since I graduated from METU and am active in the communities operating in the field of gender at METU, I am familiar with graduates who were active in feminism and LGBTIQ+ movements at METU. Thus, I reached the people I would interview through my environment while reaching the graduates engaged in this field. While I was reaching students who are active in the field of gender equality and undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 for interviews, I reached them both through the guidance of people I know or interviewed and through their social media pages. I made the call to participate voluntarily in the group called 100. Yıl Evleri has nearly 30,000 members, generally METU students or graduates, and the METU Women's Solidarity Facebook group, which has nearly 2,000 members, by writing the research details. When I reached a student community, it became easier for

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<sup>29</sup> "HIV-AIDS İstatistik," T.C Sağlık Bakanlığı Halk Sağlığı Genel Müdürlüğü, Bulaşıcı Hastalıklar ve Erken Uyarı Dairesi Başkanlığı, <https://hsgm.saglik.gov.tr/tr/bulasici-hastaliklar/hiv-aids/hiv-aids-liste/hiv-aids-istatistik.html> Last access July 18, 2022.

me to reach other student communities with that connection. I used purposive and snowball samples. Kumbetoğlu argues that purposive sampling is based on the purpose of the research, and the interviewees are selected based on specific characteristics and criteria.<sup>30</sup> While reaching the interviewees, I was made a call from the Facebook groups of METU by explaining the research subject, purpose, and criteria of the participants. In line with the research purpose, I determined being a METU undergraduate student and being between 18-25 years old as the participation criteria for the interviews. It is crucial for inclusiveness that the interviewees reflect all undergraduate faculties. Since I could not reach anyone other than a preppy from the faculty of education when I completed 28 interviews, I added studying at the faculty of education for the last two interviews to the criteria. Kumbetoğlu explains that snowball sampling is the sample enlargement by reaching new interviewees through resource persons from the research field.<sup>31</sup> I used snowball sampling by asking the interviewees whether they knew anyone who would like to participate in the interview.

I was able to continue my research without interruption through the internet. I held the interviews I planned to do face-to-face with the camera on the internet. Karababa Demircan writes, “Developing technology allowed us to share the same time with people with whom we did not share the same place, as long as there was technological access.”<sup>32</sup> Technology has allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews with people I could not meet in the same place during the pandemic within the scope of my research. Although METU students usually have access to the internet, I may not have been able to reach students who do not have access to the internet or Facebook groups. The pandemic has limited the gathering of people. Due to the pandemic, I conducted interviews via Zoom. The audio was recorded with the interviewees’

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<sup>30</sup> Belkıs Kumbetoğlu, “Nitel Araştırmalarda Veri Oluşturma Teknikleri,” *Sosyolojide ve Antropolojide Niteliksel Yöntem ve Araştırma*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Pınar Karababa Demircan, “New Methods In Great Lockdown: Applying Feminist Self-Reflexivity During Pandemic,” 131.

consent via Zoom for the transcript. All participants consented to the audio recording. Before starting the interview, I explained the subject and purpose of the research to the interviewees. The most extended interview lasted 2 hours and 5 minutes, and the shortest interview lasted 33 minutes.

In particular, privacy about sexuality is essential for the participants to talk about it comfortably. It is because it was told to the interviewees that what they said would be analyzed anonymously and that they would not be informed about their identities, such as name and surname. Instead of the names of the interviewees, I coded them as numbers.

#### **1.4. PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES**

While conducting this research, I investigated the effect of METU as a space on students' experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. In this context, I examined lectures, studies, actions, activities, and seminars at METU on gender, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health. Hence, I interviewed 18 students or graduates who are activists on gender issues. The most extended interview lasted an average of 1 hour and 50 minutes, and the shortest interview lasted an average of 40 minutes. I completed the interviews from January 30 to March 30, 2022.

Students and graduates participating in the METU Gender and Women's Studies Graduate Program, METU Women's solidarity, METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, and METU Gender Studies Community participated in the interviews. Also, students who participated in the rainbow ladder actions participated in the interviews.

**Table 1.1. Information about Interviewees of Interviews for Examination of the Space**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Community/ Action/ The Department</b>	<b>Graduation Status</b>
<b>1</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program	Student
<b>2</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program	Student
<b>3</b>	METU Women's Solidarity	Graduate
<b>4</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program	Student
<b>5</b>	Rainbow Ladder Action/ METU Women's Solidarity	Student
<b>6</b>	Rainbow Ladder Action	Student
<b>7</b>	Rainbow Ladder Action/ ODTÜ Savunulmalıdır	Student
<b>8</b>	Rainbow Ladder Action/ METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity (Being Active in previous years)	Student
<b>9</b>	METU Gender Studies Communities	Student
<b>10</b>	METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity	Graduate
<b>11</b>	Rainbow Ladder Action/ METU Women's Solidarity	Student
<b>12</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program / METU Women's Solidarity	Graduate
<b>13</b>	METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity	Student

<b>14</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program / METU Women's Solidarity	Student
<b>15</b>	Gender and Women Studies Master's Program / METU Women's Solidarity	Graduate
<b>16</b>	METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity	Student
<b>17</b>	METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity	Graduate
<b>18</b>	METU Women's Solidarity	Student

These interviews are important if you want to learn about METU's background in this field and see how it has affected it.

Within the scope of the research, I also interviewed 30 interviewees who are METU undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25, between 4.03.2022, and 15.04.2022 to examine of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. I will deal with the analysis of these interviews in the fourth part of the thesis. The interviewees started at METU between 2015 and 2021. The interviewees were born between 1997 and 2003. All the interviewees are sexually active.

The faculties of architecture, the faculty of arts and science, the faculty of economics and administrative sciences, the faculty of education, and the faculty of engineering are undergraduate faculties at METU. I reached all of these undergraduate faculties within the scope of the interviews. The departments studied by the interviewees are as follows: the department of statistics, the department of international relations, the department of sociology, the department of environmental engineering, the department of chemical engineering, the department of mechanical engineering, the department of biological sciences: biology/molecular biology and genetics, the department of psychology, the department of philosophy, the department of elementary and early childhood education, the department of industrial engineering, the

department of industrial design, the department of political science and public administration, the department of aerospace engineering, and the department of physics education. Interviewees are from preparatory school, first, second, third, and fourth-grade students.

The gender identity and sexual orientation of the interviewees vary. Of those, 19 of them are women; 9 of them are men; and 2 of them are non-binary. 19 of the interviewees stated their sexual orientation as heterosexual; 6 of them stated their sexual orientation as bisexual; 1 of them stated his sexual orientation as gay; 1 of them stated their sexual orientation as pansexual; 1 of them stated their sexual orientation as pansexual, demisexual, and asexual; and 1 of them stated they do not define their sexual orientation. When asked about the sexual orientation of a woman interviewee, she said, “Opposite sex, male, but it now makes sense to be pansexual. I do not like definitions, but I would not find it weird if I were with someone other than the opposite sex.”<sup>33</sup>

The distribution of the faculties, departments, gender identity, and sexual orientation of the interviewees is indicated in the table below.

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<sup>33</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 12, March 22, 2022.

**Table 1. 2. Information about Interviewees of Interviews for Examination of Experiences of Young People about Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

<b>No</b>	<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>The Department</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>METU Entrance Date</b>
<b>1</b>	2000	Statistics	2nd	Woman	Heterosexual	2018
<b>2</b>	1999	International Relations	4th	Woman	Bisexual	2017
<b>3</b>	1997	Sociology	3rd	Woman	Heterosexual	2017
<b>4</b>	2000	Environmental Engineering	2nd	Nonbinary	Pansexual, Demisexual, Asexual	2019
<b>5</b>	1998	Environmental Engineering	4th	Man	Heterosexual	2016
<b>6</b>	2003	Chemical Engineering	1st	Man	Heterosexual	2020
<b>7</b>	1999	Mechanical Engineering	4th	Man	Heterosexual	2018
<b>8</b>	2000	Biological Sciences: Biology/	3rd	Man	Gay	2018

		Molecular Biology and Genetics				
<b>9</b>	1998	Philosophy	3rd	Woman	Bisexual	2018
<b>10</b>	2002	Environmental Engineering	1st	Woman	Heterosexual	2020
<b>11</b>	2000	Industrial Engineering	3rd	Woman	Heterosexual	2018
<b>12</b>	2001	Environmental Engineering	1st	Woman	Opposite sex, male, but it now makes sense to be pansexual. I do not like definitions in general, but I would not find it weird if I were with someone other than the opposite sex.	2021

<b>13</b>	2001	Philosophy	2nd	Woman	Bisexual	2021
<b>14</b>	1999	Psychology	4th	Woman	Bisexual	2017
<b>15</b>	2001	Psychology	1st	Woman	Heterosexual	2020
<b>16</b>	2001	Elementary and Early Childhood Education	Prep Class	Man	Heterosexual	2020
<b>17</b>	2001	Psychology	Prep Class	Woman	Bisexual	2021
<b>18</b>	2001	Physics	Prep Class	Man	Heterosexual	2021
<b>19</b>	2001	Sociology	2nd	Woman	Heterosexual	2019
<b>20</b>	2000	Industrial Design	3rd	Woman	Heterosexual	2018
<b>21</b>	2000	Sociology	3rd	Woman	Heterosexual	2018
<b>22</b>	1998	Philosophy	3rd	Woman	Pansexual	2017
<b>23</b>	2000	Mechanical Engineering	3rd	Man	Heterosexual	2018
<b>24</b>	1998	Political Science and Public Administration	3rd	Nonbinary	They do not define.	2017
<b>25</b>	1998	Aerospace Engineering	4th	Man	Heterosexual	2016

<b>26</b>	1997	Industrial Design	4th	Woman	Bisexual	2015
<b>27</b>	1998	Industrial Design	4th	Man	Heterosexual	2017
<b>28</b>	1999	Psychology	2nd	Woman	Heterosexual	2018
<b>29</b>	1999	Elementary and Early Childhood Education	4th	Woman	Heterosexual	2017
<b>30</b>	1999	Physics Education	3rd	Woman	Heterosexual	2017

## 1.5. DATA ANALYSIS

I transcribed all of the interviews for analysis. During the analysis phase, I gathered the questions and answers under categories. Kümbetoğlu says, “Inferences made from the data are important, especially when linking between categories and determining the relationship between them will involve an interpretation process.”<sup>34</sup> In the interviews to examine the space, I discussed sexist practices, harassment, and practices against harassment, academic studies and activism about gender, activities about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the transformation of the gender equality movement, and the impact of the pandemic on METU. I categorized the research questions as demographic questions, gender awareness, perceptions of the

<sup>34</sup> Belkıs Kümbetoğlu, “Niteliksel Verinin Analiz Aşamaları,” *Niteliksel Araştırmalarda Analiz*, (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2020): 93, (Translation of mine).

body- sexuality- sexual health and reproductive health, access to information and services, challenges and the impact of government policies, and space effect in the interviews to investigate the experience of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. I coded the interviewees' narratives to these categories and analyzed them by quoting their narratives. I analyzed the experiences of METU students regarding sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health according to the categories and subcategories in the table below.

**Table 1. 3. Categories Table**

<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Category 2</b>	<b>Category 3</b>	<b>Category 4</b>	<b>Category 5</b>
1. Gender awareness	2. Perception of sexuality, body, sexual health, and reproductive health	3. Access to information and services about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health	4. Policies and challenges about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health	5. The impact of METU as a place on experiences about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health
1.1. Gender identities and sexual orientations	2.1. Sexuality	3.1 Access to information about sexuality,		

		sexual health, and reproductive health		
1.2. The effects of gender identities and sexual orientations on sexuality	2.2. Virginity	3.2. Access to health care		
1.3. The effects of gender identities and sexual orientations on sexual health and reproductive health	2.3. Masturbation and orgasm	3.3. Access to sexual health and reproductive health products		
	2.4. The perception of sexual health and reproductive health			

I examined the relations between the categories and their reasons. I discussed the differences and similarities between what the interviewees said. Remarkably, I considered the gender identity, sexual orientation, departments, and duration of the

interviewees. Kümbetoğlu writes, “Analysis of research data is the interpretation of what is happening in the research area, how it is, and what it means for people.”<sup>35</sup> I should interpret how the interviewees conveyed their experiences and why they chose to state which experiences with a theoretical framework in line with these categories. At the analysis stage, I should consider the situation in Turkey and METU in terms of research.

The interviewees’ narratives to understand the feminist reflexivity and space effect were influential in the interpretation phase. Understanding spaces in terms of social, cultural, and political aspects is essential in the research analysis experience. Societies and places interact and affect each other in this interaction process. Spaces can be a social tool for understanding this interaction. Karababa Demircan says, “In addition, in my approach, the self-reflexive evaluation of socio-spatial dynamics is an important tool for perceiving the relationship between the researcher’s position, past experiences, conditions of the research field, the researcher-interviewees, and the environment.”<sup>36</sup> The influence of my experience in interpreting data is inevitable and significant. It is the reason that I also included my experiences while explaining the background of METU and analyzing the data.

## **1.6. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

Because of social, cultural, and political reasons, sexuality is a complex subject to talk about. There is a perception that people should not talk about their sexual experiences. Therefore, it took time to find enough interviewees. Since I was doing the research during the pandemic, I could not be physically present at METU. I also faced

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>36</sup> Pinar Karababa Demircan, “New Methods In Great Lockdown: Applying Feminist Self-Reflexivity During Pandemic,” 138.

difficulties in reaching the interviewees. Since both I and METU students were not physically on campus due to the pandemic, I used the internet to reach interviewees. I tried to reach the interviewees by writing the research details to two Facebook groups with a total number of members approaching 32,000. Students between 18 and 25 do not favor Facebook over other social media platforms. It may be another factor contributing to my difficulty connecting with them through Facebook groups.

Since the interviewees participated in the interview by seeing the research topic in line with their demands, they are people who are willing to talk about this subject and generally have gender awareness. All the interviewees are sexually active. I could not reach METU students who were conservative about sexuality. This case made the profiles of the interviewees similar at a certain point. Conducting the interviews online due to the pandemic may have made it easier for the interviewees to talk about sexuality. Sexuality is a complex topic to talk about in society. A face-to-face interview about this topic could make the interviewees uncomfortable and limit their conversations about their experiences. Conducting interviews online may have facilitated the transfer of experience of the interviewees. It might have provided a more comfortable space to interrupt or end the online conversation more easily than face-to-face interviews. In one of the interviews that had to be stopped, for example, the person being interviewed could not be reached later to finish the interview.

Due to the pandemic, I did not have any observations on campus as I did not have physical contact. Conducting the interviews inside METU would have affected the results of the research. I graduated from METU in 2017. Within five years, social, political, and cultural changes occurred at METU. I conducted interviews to understand METU, especially in terms of gender. Despite this, my inability to carry out these interviews at METU and my inability to contact METU physically limited my in-depth study and analysis of METU as a place. While conducting the face-to-face interviews in METU, interviewees' experiences could interact with the place. Online interviews limited both my and the interviewees' interaction with the venue.

I carried out the interviews by online interview method due to the pandemic. I observed that the interviewees living in the dormitory had difficulties finding them when they were alone in the room. Likewise, I observed that the interviewees living in the family home tried to coincide with the times when their families were not at home. Interviews were interrupted in cases where the interviewees had to attend class, their roommates came, they needed to charge their computers or phones, or they had to change places.



## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

#### 2.1. EFFECTS OF GENDER ON SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Gender changes spatially and temporally and is constructed socially, politically, and culturally. Gender roles in societies regulate many actions in daily life, such as the relations between individuals and sexuality. Connell says, “Gender relations involve the structuring of social practice around sexuality and sex.”<sup>37</sup> The influence of both the patriarchal and binary gender systems on sexuality is inevitable. While investigating experiences towards sexuality in this study, I also examined the gender awareness of the interviewees and gender practices in the space. Connell mentions that the most common process of sexual ideology is its naturalization of social practice.<sup>38</sup> Regarding gender, only women are assumed to have a vagina by nature which is socially constructed. Stone argues that “Some feminist philosophers have introduced sexual difference to capture (what they see as) the fact that, for human beings, being male or female continuously acquires symbolic meanings conveyed via language and deep shape how we experience our own bodies.”<sup>39</sup> Our sexual differences are politically meaningful and reinforced by the naturalization process. Gender shapes the actions of our bodies through both language and behavior. The arguments produced by the state about sexuality affect sexual experiences. If state discourses say that unmarried or non-

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<sup>37</sup> R.W. Connell, “İdeolojik Süreçler,” *Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve İktidar, Toplum, Kişi ve Cinsel Politika*, trans. Cem Soydemir, (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2019): 349 (Translation of mine).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Alison Stone, “Introduction: What feminist Philosophy,” *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 2-3.

heterosexual people should not have sexual intercourse, society does not assume their sexuality as “natural”.

Sexual acts are performed with the body, and the body also has political and cultural meanings. The body is always at the forefront when a policy is made over sexuality. We also encounter the effects of the policies about the body and sexuality that govern gender on sexual and reproductive health. Bozok explains that new biological knowledge and associated biomedical models collaborate with political and cultural power structures that legitimize patriarchy and homophobia. Bozok writes, “It is quite common that the medical information produced today provides a basis for gender discrimination and subordination of women.”<sup>40</sup> Health policies and biology depend on a binary gender system and a sexist structure, a problem accessing feminist and queer information and services in sexual and reproductive health. For instance, the development of many contraceptive methods, such as an intrauterine device (IUD) and birth control pills, are generally located on bodies that have vaginas. Since the health system and the information produced in health do not cover LGBTIQ+ individuals, it is challenging for them to access services in this field. If a transgender person visits a gynecologist, they may face discrimination because the healthcare system is based on a binary gender system.

Protection from sexually transmitted infections (STI) and access to treatment is also an issue with a significant political impact on sexual and reproductive health. Difficulties in accessing accurate and secure sexual and reproductive health information are reproducing discrimination against disadvantaged groups such as LGBTIQ+ and sex workers. Many discriminatory discourses on HIV are among the sexually transmitted infections produced. Heterosexist and homophobic information produced in this field, far from reality, shows HIV as a deadly infection that only

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<sup>40</sup> Nihan Bozok, “The Cyborg with Everybody and All Alone, Between Species and Without an Origin: The Possibilities of a Feminist Body Politics in Donna Haraway’s Thought” *ViraVerita E-Dergi*, (9) (2019): 135-136. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/viraverita/issue/46646/532155> Last access June 3, 2022.

belongs to homosexuals. Bersani says that television and the press confuse HIV and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), mention AIDS as venereal disease, and claim that people living with HIV are promiscuous.<sup>41</sup> Political discourses, body politics, binary gender, and the patriarchal system are predominant in sexual and reproductive health. While I investigated the experiences about sexual and reproductive health, I considered health policies based on gender inequality, patriarchal and gender binary systems.

## **2.2. SEXUALITY AS PERFORMATIVITY**

Performativity is substantial in how sexuality reproduces gender-based roles as performative. Butler explains the performativity of gender and tries to show that what we consider the internal essence of gender is that the body is produced through a series of sustainable acts and gender-based stylization. Thus, gender, regarded as an internal feature of ourselves, is produced by bodily acts.<sup>42</sup> The experiences, thoughts, roles, and duties are considered the inner essence of our gender. Naturally, the perception that we should follow these roles exists socially. That is performativity produced through bodily acts with which we must perform these roles and conduct behaviors. Therefore, it is significant to investigate how and why METU students perform sexuality. Butler says that:

... gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. .... In this sense,

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<sup>41</sup> Leo Bersani, "Rektum Bir Mezar mı?" *Queer Temaşa*, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Judith Butler, "Preface (1999)," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, xv.

gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.<sup>43</sup>

Gender is an action produced and mandated by gender regulatory practices. Indicating women's sexuality as an act of reproduction by political, cultural, and social mechanisms is a practice regulating gender and the production of gender as a body act. Butler says that there is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed, free, or determined, fixed in some sense. The performative dimension of the construction is the forced repetition of norms.<sup>44</sup> Assuming sexuality as a performative construct, repetition of gender roles in sexual acts may cause that gender-based role to restrict sexuality. This case is associated with the absence of a young, female, LGBTIQ+ friendly health service.

The patriarchal system reconstructs relationships with the body politically, culturally, and socially. Butler writes, "The 'naming' of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/ perceptual construction of bodies according to principles of sexual difference."<sup>45</sup> The body frequently turns into a political argument, and this, in turn, affects the body's performativity and sexual practices. Culture, administrative practices, and political and social structures affect sexuality in METU, so interviewees discussed these effects during the interviews. Gender is not only a norm but also a mechanism that generates gender-related norms. While performing gender roles, sexual experiences also vary depending on gender or societal status. For instance, while men are expected to initiate sexual acts, women are expected to be passive in sexual practice by the gender norms. In METU, sexual relations have different and similar points to Turkey. The regulation of sexual relations differs according to gender

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<sup>43</sup> Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Judith Butler, "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex," *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1993): 94-95.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Butler, "Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 147.

identities and sexual orientations. Butler explains that a person's gender is an index of the banned and anticipated sexual relationship that a subject socially regulates and produces.<sup>46</sup> Gender works to maintain specific reproduction modes and to prohibit other forms. Sexual intercourse between a married heterosexual couple is socially accepted, while sexual intercourse between two women is prohibited. While it is acceptable for a man to have a polygamous relationship, society considers it unacceptable for a woman to have a polygamous relationship. It is why it should be considered that gender regulates sexual aspects in research on sexuality and should be considered a category in the research.

Butler says, "In fact, the norm only persists as a norm to the extent that it is acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstated in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life."<sup>47</sup> Considering this perspective, norms related to sexuality and gender become norms with social acts and bodily practices and continue to exist as an ideal. These actions both idealize and reproduce the norm. For instance, sexuality is considered legitimate for women after marriage. Social life practices that exist as an ideal performance of this norm are what do this action and keep it going.

It is useful to examine how students act out gender roles while researching how young people at METU perform sexuality. Although METU has some characteristics, it is generally still a part of Turkey. Based on the interviews I conducted to understand the environment, I will discuss further in the thesis that harassment, gender roles, sexism, and a binary gender system exist at METU. All of them govern how METU students engage in sexual activity. Gender roles regulated by the administration or communication between individuals reproduce gender at METU. This situation causes sexuality to be gender-constructed. The dormitories are divided into only "girls" and men in METU, which produces gender based on the binary gender system. Likewise,

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<sup>46</sup> Judith Butler, "Gender Regulations," *Undoing Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 2004): 47-48.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bilgi-ebooks/detail.action?docID=183001> Last access June 5, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

the binary gender system in Turkey has also resulted in this kind of dormitory division. This situation constructs students' sexual experiences as a basis for gender. This case causes individuals cannot perform sexuality in dormitories and makes it a norm. I will look how tradition, culture, administration, practices, and places maintain gender roles while examining how students at METU perform sexuality.

### **2.3. THE SEXUAL STRATIFICATION**

Sexuality itself has power relations and a socially hierarchical structure. Rubin says, "Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top erotic pyramid. Clamouring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals."<sup>48</sup> This pyramid that Rubin mentions is influential in interpreting inequality through sexuality. It is fundamental to understand where interviewees are within the scope of the study area in the pyramid to make sense of their experiences. Considering that all the interviewees are unmarried and sexually active, they are not at the top of the pyramid. Their places in this pyramid differ regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity. Rubin writes,

Any sex that violates these rules is 'bad', 'abnormal', or 'unnatural'. Bad sex may be homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial. It may be masturbatory or take place at orgies, may be casual, may cross generational lines, and may take place in 'public,' or at least in the bushes or the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality Sex Wars," 151.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 152.

Sexuality experience may differ from person to person. While it is legitimate for some people to have sexual intercourse, sexuality is not assumed as legitimate for other people by society. The experience of sexuality also contains inequalities within itself. While the sexuality of men who have sexual relations with sex workers is considered legitimate, the sexuality of sex workers is not. The hierarchy in sexuality mentioned by Rubin affects all practices related to sexuality and increases prejudice against people in a disadvantaged position in sexuality. While researching experiences towards sexuality within METU, I handled Turkey's policy and the impact of the policy within METU. The question of whose sexuality is legitimate may vary from place to place.

In sexual and reproductive health, the sexual hierarchy had similar effects. Butler writes:

It is this already circulating trope of homosexuality as a kind of social and psychic death that is exploited and strengthened in homophobic discourses which understand AIDS to be the result of homosexuality (rendered as definitionally unsafe, as danger itself) rather than the result of the exchange of fluids.<sup>50</sup>

This discourse indicates the effect of gender norms on the discrimination produced in sexual and reproductive health. It is necessary to understand the perspective on gender and sexually transmitted infections to understand the perception of sexual and reproductive health at METU. Sexual and reproductive health as a subject in the social sciences is indistinguishable from gender roles. Moreover, Rubin tells us the state advocates sexual hierarchy. Homosexuals cannot have the same legal rights as heterosexuals on issues such as legal marriage, taxation, and inheritance. Laws enhance power structures, and meanings of behaviors, including sexual behaviors, which are forms of prejudice. Most of the daily social controls on sexuality are illegal. Less formal but effective social sanctions are imposed on "lower" sexual community

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<sup>50</sup> Judith Butler, "Notes," *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, 266.

members.<sup>51</sup> Such social sanctions are widely present in Turkey as well. Although no legal regulation prevents pre-marital sexuality, social apparatus, such as the media, constructs a perception that this is forbidden. Their critical effects regarding sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health are in the interviewees' experiences.

#### **2.4. RELATIONS OF SPACES AND EXPERIENCES**

Space is more than just a physical area. The elements of the environment, such as people or events, impact the space we live in. The inhabitants' experience of the space is also affected by it. It is critical to take space into account when doing social science research. In this study, I will examine how young people experience sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health while also exploring how they interact with the environment regarding culture, society, and history. Öncü and Weyland explain that physical space can be interpreted through "culture glasses" and is not simply an empty space without symbolic implications.<sup>52</sup> Spaces have symbolic connotations as cultural, social, and political that alter or persist over time. We should consider spaces more than just a discrete physical region with boundaries. Making sense of the area with these symbolic connotations is crucial. It is essential to think about the place's culture, history, and social structure to comprehend it fully.

We have a variety of experiences in the social areas that we use. We affect the environment through our daily actions, and the environment also affects how we live. Everyday settings like our homes, schools, and workplaces impact our experiences. The way we perceive environments affects the bond we build with them. Lefebvre

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<sup>51</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality Sex Wars," 159.

<sup>52</sup> Ayşe Öncü and Petra Weyland, "Giriş: Küreselleşen Kentlerde Yaşam Alanı ve Toplumsal Kimlik Mücadeleleri," *Mekân, Kültür, İktidar: Küreselleşen Kentlerde Yeni Kimlikler*, comp. Ayşe Öncü and Petra Weyland, trans. Leyla Şimşek and Nilgün Uygun, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2020): 31.

“Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical.”<sup>53</sup> Experiences play a role in the socialization process of the fields. How people socialize in space also affects how the space provides socialization. The degree to which a venue fosters social interaction depends on how individuals interact. Examining how intertemporal events affect experience becomes significant. All social environments that individuals are in include non-unidirectional interaction. Our relationship with the space is the result of a multifaceted experience process. When the region’s cultural, historical, political, and social aspects are all taken into account, it becomes more than just a physical place.

It is significant to comprehend what space is to study how people experience sexuality in a limited region. Space is a set of relationships not independent of people’s experiences. These connections include connections with other objects in the environment as well as connections with individuals. If we consider the situation of METU, METU encompasses not only the relationships among the students but also those between them and the campus’s administration or activities. In addition, space is a formation that contains both the relationships between space and the outside world and a collection of relations that are limited to space. The ties that METU establishes with the outside give spatial meaning. Stavros emphasized that space is an active form, a dynamic component of social relations, and a network of relationships in and of itself. Space is significant because it is integral to the manifestations and occurrences of social life rather than serving as an ineffectual container for them. It shapes encounters. It is also why using spatial comparisons could make it possible to project thoughts and values outside of oneself because space is a structured system of relationships. The most crucial way of expressing and ensuring the existence of social ties is space, which

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<sup>53</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “Social Space,” *The Production of Space*, 110.

is a system of relations between positions.<sup>54</sup> Because the campus plays a significant role in students' social lives, it is crucial to examine METU as a venue in this study. People's interactions with one another and other campus structures impact how they experience sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. These experiences affect the kinds of encounters that occur. A place is a tool that creates space for social relations and a means of expressing them. To investigate social ties related to sexuality, the METU system of relations will serve as a guide.

Spaces include social, political, and cultural structures, individuals, and communities. When considering the area, it is necessary to evaluate the relations within themselves and the relationship with each other as a whole. Individuals and administrations form these systems in space and outer circles where the area is located. The resulting mechanisms control how people interact in the place. Karababa Demircan says communities have varied and variable spaces where their experiences occur, and these spaces also have different kinds of interactions. Placing the place at the core of the study offers a rich reflection of the experience of various communities in the research because of the intensity of these relations.<sup>55</sup> People have diverse experiences in different places. While the same experience on a given topic may take on a different shape in one location, it might take on a different shape in a different location. Social, cultural, and political structures in areas affect this situation. Since I will be examining the experiences of a specific group on a particular issue, it is crucial to consider experiences through location when considering my thesis. The experiences of METU students about sexuality occur through different types of relationships established with METU. A student living in a dorm at METU engages with the university differently than a student living in a district outside of campus does. This case influences shaping experiences differently. Spaces are places where people perform their experiences.

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<sup>54</sup> Stavros Stavrides, "Sonuç: Müşterekleşme Yoluyla Şehri Yeniden İcat Etmek," *Müşterek Mekân: Müşterekler Olarak Şehir*, trans. Cenk Saraçoğlu, (İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2019): 245-246.

<sup>55</sup> Pınar Karababa Demircan, "Giriş," *Yeniden Üretilen Mekanlar-Sivas'ta Anı Anıt ve Öteki Mekân*, (İstanbul: NoteBene, 2021): 14.

People can display daily, organizational, personal, or collective experiences in spaces. The variations in these relationships give the space new significance. Examining how people exhibit the experience in a part of the space provides a clue about the relationship established with the space and the mutual influence of the space on the experience. Karababa Demircan says,

Being a tool and target of the struggle between communities and authorities, the space, which is also a collection of places, both examines the places where the agency is seen and exhibits the daily existence and the accumulation of experience in daily life.<sup>56</sup>

People can utilize their spaces for various things, and the emergence of different spaces forms the whole area. Spaces provide insight into a historical and cultural experience. It is a sizable section inside METU with various facilities like classrooms or communal rooms. The struggle of METU students against the METU administration occurs in multiple ways in different areas within this space. Space has a memory that consists of experiences and shapes experiences. Due to interactions with student groups and political organizations, the area's culture has changed throughout time.

As I explained above, gender and sexuality interact with each other. There is a similar relationship between space and gender. The patriarchal and binary gender systems regulate the organization of areas. Spaces based on these systems reproduce gender roles and gender inequality. Rendell writes, "Descriptions of gendered space make use of words and images which have cultural associations with particular genders to invoke comparisons to the biological body—for example, soft, curvaceous interiors are connected with women and phallic towers with men."<sup>57</sup> We can discern the impact

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<sup>56</sup> Pınar Karababa Demircan, "Üretilen Mekânda Müzeleşme ve Karşı Hareketler," *Yeniden Üretilen Mekanlar- Sivas'ta Anıt ve Öteki Mekân*, 45, (Translation of mine).

<sup>57</sup> Jane Rendell, "Introduction: 'Gender, Space'," *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, Architext Series, edit. Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, and Jane Rendell, (London: Routledge, 2003): 103.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=77180&site=eds-live> Last access July 12, 2022.

of gender in this structure as the building of spaces takes place within the cultural framework. The effect of gender on body perception also exists in the perception of space. These environments, which are shaped by gender, reinforce that gender by reproducing it. This effect is also influenced by who uses the spaces and how. Since I am looking into a gender-related issue, like sexuality, by looking at space, I have to be aware of the link between space and gender.

Understanding what space means, both theoretically and practically, is crucial to this inquiry. I must comprehend the relationship between space and these experiences as I look at the sexual experiences of students in this subject using METU as a space. Understanding METU's historical, cultural, and political processes is essential because they all contributed to its formation. Karababa Demircan says, "... for researchers, the study of the social sphere makes it possible to investigate the relations between the periphery and the center, the functioning of social life, and the relations of production and reproduction in detail."<sup>58</sup> Sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health experiences intertwine social interactions. Structures in the cultural, social, and political spheres affect these experiences. It is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences in this subject by looking at what kind of place METU is.

## **2.5. THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE STUDY**

The pandemic is related to and impacts this study in both causal and consequential ways. Mechanisms of the state and society have a similar dominance over the female body and ecosystem. It is crucial to address the pandemic about human

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<sup>58</sup> Pınar Karababa Demircan, "Üretilen Mekânda Müzeleşme ve Karşı Hareketler," *Yeniden Üretilen Mekanlar- Sivas'ta Anı Anıt ve Öteki Mekân*, 41, (Translation of mine).

dominance over ecology. The epidemic has reduced our ability to interact physically with locations and people, impacting the study's methodology and findings. Kandiyoti says, "A secure sense of gendered self is achieved as a by-product of the most restrictive and oppressive controls over female sexuality."<sup>59</sup> Gender is an apparatus that controls sexuality through the body. The network system, state mechanisms, media, and social media tools cause this control. Abortion policies in Turkey are an example of this control system. The domination of bodies by the patriarchal system and the domination of ecology are similar, and both are feminist issues. The results of the dominations established on ecology have practical reflections on daily life and gender. Warren says, "Ecofeminists insist that the sort of logic of domination used to justify the domination of humans by gender, racial or ethnic, or class status is also used to justify the domination of nature."<sup>60</sup> Just as the state constructs a control mechanism over the body, it also uses the same mechanism to control nature. The pandemic is one of the most recent examples of this.

Due to the pandemic, we lost physical contact with our physical places and the people around us. How we relate to people, our work, places, workplaces, and academies has undergone a transformation process. Butler points out that when individuals are deprived of a place or a community, they tend to believe that the change they are enduring is temporary or that the old order will somehow be restored. Butler argues that perhaps in the process of standing, something may emerge that outlines our bonds with others and shows the bonds or relationships that make us up.<sup>61</sup> The pandemic process has progressed similarly. We have physically lost our spaces and social communities during the pandemic period. For a long time, we thought the pandemic was a short-term situation and that we would soon return to the order before

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<sup>59</sup> Deniz A. Kandiyoti and Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies*, 13(2) (1987): 333. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177804> Last access June 3, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> Karen J. Warren, "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism," *Environmental Ethics*, 12(2) (1990): 125.

<sup>61</sup> Judith Butler, "Şiddet, Yas, Siyaset," *Kırılgan Hayat*, trans. Başak Ertür, (İstanbul: Metis, 2018): 37-38.

the pandemic. Although more than two years have passed since the pandemic, we could not return to the pre-pandemic period. However, this has redefined the lines of spaces and relations. Our relations with spaces have been transformed; online spaces have been added to the spaces we use. We continued the lessons we held in places such as face-to-face physical classrooms on online platforms. If we examine this situation specifically for this research, I conducted online interviews with the pandemic not to pose a risk to public health.

The pandemic has significantly affected the studies that contain the field. I carried out this research under the influence of the pandemic. The pandemic affected the online interviews and shaped the interviewees' experiences in this field within the scope of their relations with the space. For instance, it is out of the question to talk about the physical impact of METU on people who cannot go to campus due to the pandemic. However, the METU is not only a physical space; there are online activities and social platforms. With the pandemic, the effect of the place has changed dimensions. It has turned from being in a physical place to being online. Throughout this study, the pandemic's impact should be considered methodically and analyzed. Karababa Demircan says, "... it is important to be able to voice the plurality of experiences in the research field, not to ignore the possibility that comprehensive research will encounter subjectivities established differently in different places, social layers, and histories or simultaneously."<sup>62</sup> The interviewees' experiences in online or physical environments and the effects of the pandemic on the experience are considered in the interview analysis to be inclusive and holistic.

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<sup>62</sup> Pınar Karababa Demircan, "New Methods in Great Lockdown: Applying Feminist Self-Reflexivity During Pandemic," 135.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE BACKGROUND OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

#### 3.1. GENDER, SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN TURKEY

Before investigating the experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, it is necessary to understand the practices, policies, and services related to sexuality in Turkey that affect the experiences. The government restricts many struggles regarding the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movement in Turkey. The state tries to prevent feminist night marches on March 8 and pride marches during Pride Week. Büyükgöze mentions that after the Gezi Resistance, police interventions against the Feminist Night March began in 2014.<sup>63</sup> Students encountered obstacles even in universities such as Boğaziçi University and METU, where students held these actions for years to organize these events. It indicates the political barriers to gender equality. Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention with the decision of the President is one of the most important examples of this. Büyükgöze also states that the banners about women's sexuality positivity carried during the march have targeted Islamist conservatives and some leftist men in recent years.<sup>64</sup> This argument shows that sexuality is a political issue within the feminist movement and is visible through banners. The reaction not only from conservatives but also from leftists indicates that sexuality is taboo for everyone.

Gender inequality, which also affects sexuality, is encountered in many areas such as education, health, and business in Turkey. People do not talk about this issue in

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<sup>63</sup> Selime Büyükgöze, "Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü," *FeministBellek*, January 5, 2021, <https://feministbellek.org/feminist-gece-yuruyusu/> Last access May 19, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

public and consider it shameful to talk about it. As a result, sexuality is not discussed in families or schools, becoming taboo. This situation also affects services in the field of sexual and reproductive health. Due to the fear of being judged, people may be unable to consult a doctor in this field or have difficulty purchasing products. The discourses produced about sexuality in Turkey, especially the state, press, and social media discourses, directly interfere with the number of children people will have, how to dress, behave, and establish romantic relationships with whom. According to the news from the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasized that the population increase should be continued and said, “No Muslim family might have such an understanding, whether it is population planning or birth control, and the first duty here is mothers.”<sup>65</sup> Another consequence of this is the reactions against abortion. Although abortion is legal until the end of the tenth week in Turkey, many public hospitals do not perform abortions. Abortion Services in Public Hospitals in Turkey Research Report says, “A total of 295 public hospitals were interviewed; In 10 of them, optional abortion service is provided without any conditions, in 185 of them it is not provided.”<sup>66</sup> Sirman and Akınerdem explain that if the woman is married and wants to have an abortion, even if she wants to have a spiral, she has to get permission from her husband.<sup>67</sup> This example indicates that health policies establish what kind of domination over the body with health policies. Young people, women, and LGBTIQAs cannot access inclusive and youth-friendly health care. In Turkey, accessing all products and services related to sexuality is pretty

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<sup>65</sup> “Erdoğan: Müslüman Aile Doğum Kontrolü Yapmaz,” *BBC News Türkçe*, May 30, 2016, [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160530\\_erdogan\\_dogum\\_kontrol](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160530_erdogan_dogum_kontrol) Last access June 2, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Lou ÖNeil, Deniz Altuntaş, and Alara Şevval Keskin, “Önemli Bulgular,” *Yasal Ancak Ulaşılabilir Değil: Türkiye’deki Kamu Hastanelerinde Kürtaj Hizmetleri 2020*, Kadir Has Üniversitesi Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalışmaları Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2020: 2 <https://gender.khas.edu.tr/sites/gender.khas.edu.tr/files/docs/2020-12/2020-kurtaj-arastirmasi-raporu.pdf> Last access May 17, 2022, (Translation of mine).

<sup>67</sup> Nükhet Sirman and Feyza Akınerdem, “Ön Söz,” *Kadınların Üreme Sağlığı Hizmetleri ve Kürtaj Deneyimleri Araştırma Raporu*, 6.

expensive, such as condoms or menstrual products. This situation leads to STIs or unwanted pregnancies.

It is very difficult for children and young people to access education in this field in Turkey. The education given in this field in public schools is limited to the menstrual and reproductive systems. This situation causes young people to be unable to access services in this field and makes them more vulnerable than adults in cases such as sexual harassment. For example, if a young woman is not informed about harassment, she may blame herself or not know what to do when she encounters harassment. According to the Sexuality and Youth Information File of the Sexual Education-Treatment and Research Association, research conducted in Turkey shows that although young people are willing to learn about sexual health, their knowledge of these issues is insufficient. In addition, in this file, it is mentioned that the main reason for this lack of information is that families consider sexuality a “forbidden and shameful” issue in Turkey and that traditional attitudes are maintained on this issue.<sup>68</sup> The lack of education and information on this subject, both in the education system and in the family structure, causes young people to access the correct information. As a result of their sexual experiences, they might feel ashamed and cannot recognize their bodies and desires. This situation is not only about sexuality. For instance, parents explain even menstruation to children as something to be ashamed of. Looking at the word dirty in the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution, the woman who had her period gave it as an example.<sup>69</sup> It reveals that even public institutions equate menstruation with uncleanness. This case causes society to consider menstruation as something terrible and dirty.

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<sup>68</sup> Selma Karabey and Nurcan Müftüođlu, ed., “Türkiye’de Genç Nüfusun Cinsel ve Üreme Sađlığı,” *Bilgilendirme Dosyası- 7 “Gençlik ve Cinsellik”*, (n.d), <https://www.cetad.org.tr/CetadData/Books/43/pdf-dosyasini-indirmek-icin-tiklayiniz.pdf> Last access May 15, 2022.

<sup>69</sup> “Türk Dil Kurumu: Sözlük.,” Türk Dil Kurumu Sözlükleri, <https://sozluk.gov.tr/> Last access June 2, 2022.

Despite all this, critical non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working on gender, sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health in Turkey. Youth Approaches to Health Association, Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation, Kaos GL, and Pozitif-iz are examples of these associations that study this topic. Such examples significantly contribute to people's access to information and services in this field, establishing a solidarity network and producing policies. The above background of Turkey in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health gives us information about the gender structure in this field. I should consider these structures and mechanisms while researching, because although universities differ from the general population in terms of their structures, this background may have reflections.

### **3.2. GENDER, SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN METU**

Although universities are not independent of society, their culture affects students. The people and places we interact with affect gender. Just as gender roles regulate spaces, spaces also regulate gender roles. Our perception of space regulates our perception of gender and our performance. Doan says

I recognize that my gender performance is simultaneously modulated by the observers of my gender as well as the spaces in which we interact. These modulations do not shift my own sense of gender, but they do shape the visibility and impact of my gender performance.<sup>70</sup>

Space and gender interact and influence each other, and both have political influence. Every space has cultural, social, political, and economic structures. These structures

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<sup>70</sup> Petra L Doan, "The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces - Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 648.

reflect people's awareness, relationships, attitudes, beliefs, actions, and experiences. Thus, it is crucial to include space as a sociological phenomenon in research while doing research in the field of social sciences.

I initially looked at the social and gender equality movements at METU to better understand how the space affects students' experiences with sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Just as METU impacts the students' experience, the students' experience at METU throughout history has displayed METU as a place. Thus, using sources about METU, I investigated how METU is physically, politically, and socially situated. I also talked to METU students and graduates involved in student societies and movements to find out how movements affect students' lives.

METU is a university with a large campus. It is essential to understand the physical structure of METU and how and for what purpose students use METU physically. I will first examine the METU maps to understand the physical structure of METU. The current student movements at METU and the past struggles affect the construction of METU as a place. I also investigated historical student movements at METU. To understand current and past studies on gender equality at METU, I interviewed 18 students and graduates from METU Women's Solidarity, METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, METU Gender Studies Society, and METU Gender and Women's Studies graduate programs are/were active in gender actions. I will analyze this based on the 18 interviews I conducted and the literature review. Since I was a gender activist at METU, METU's influence in this area includes my experiences.

### **3.2.1. The Relationship between METU Campus and Student Experiences**

There is an interaction between people and the place they live in. Space is socially related to history, politics, culture, and the economy. There is a dialectical relationship between society and space. While space constructs society, society shapes space. Soja argues that there is a dialectic reaction between social and spatial relations, which are interdependent. The social relations of production are both space-forming

and space-dependent.<sup>71</sup> The relations the society establishes with each other and the relations it establishes with the space exist together. The organization of the space emerges socially and how the space is organized affects social events. While the economic, social, political, and cultural relations that occur in the space construct the structure of the space, the space shapes this relationship accumulation. Investigating its history is an effective way to understand the social transformations in space. Soja writes, “Just as human history represents the social transformation of time, socially produced space can be compared with other social formations arising from the transformation of the given conditions of living.”<sup>72</sup> The organization of space came into existence in history. Political, cultural, social, and economic conditions, needs, and wishes of individuals can affect the structure of space over time. This place has been interacting with the places it is in since the first time it was established. This interaction constructs the place’s physical, political, social, and political structure as an accumulation of experience. METU’s interaction with students, academics, laborers, university administration, actions, activities, and student communities has built METU as a place. There have been historical changes and transformations in the campus parallel with Turkey. In the following sections, I will examine space’s historical and social transformation in detail.

METU is a large university campus with living space for students, including classrooms, student cafeteria, student dormitories, department buildings, community rooms, grassy areas, sports centers, canteen, the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium<sup>73</sup>, shopping centers, medical center, and forest. METU students’ departments, interest and daily routines affect their physical use of the campus. Similarly, the physical use of METU shapes the experience of METU students. Lefebvre writes, “Everyday life also

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<sup>71</sup> Edward W. Soja, “Sosyo-mekânsal Diyalektik,” *Postmodern Coğrafyalar: Eleştirel Toplumsal Teoride Mekânın Yeniden İleri Sürülmesi*, trans. Yunus Çetin, (İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık, 2019): 113

<sup>72</sup> Ibid:112, (Translation of mine).

<sup>73</sup> People call the stadium Devrim (Revolution) because the group of METU revolutionary students wrote “Devrim” on a large stadium area in 1968.

figures in representational spaces- or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it forms such spaces.”<sup>74</sup> Understanding the space they use represents necessary to interpret students’ daily lives. While people’s thoughts about sexuality in the space affect their sexual experiences, sexual experiences in the place can also affect people’s perceptions of sexuality. In this section, I will evaluate the physical structure of METU and the effect of the spaces with the METU maps.



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<sup>74</sup> Henri Lefebvre, “Social Space,” *The Production of Space*, 116





The English definitions of the parts I have numbered on the map are as follows:

1: Preparatory School Classes Block, 2: Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences B, 3: Faculty of Architecture, 4: Department of Biological Sciences, 5: Library, 6: Department of Mathematics, 7: Department of Physics, 8: Faculty of Arts and Sciences, 9: Culture and Convention Center, 10: Çatı Cafe, 11: Shopping Center, 12: Devrim Stadium, 13: Department of Civil Engineering, 14: Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, 15: Department of Mechanical Engineering B Block, 16: Department of Geological Engineering, 17: Department of Mining Engineering, 18: Department of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, 19: Western Dormitories Area, 20: Eastern Dormitories Area.

As we see on the maps above, METU is a large campus university with a campus area of 4500 hectares and a forest area of 3043 hectares.<sup>77</sup> Due to the campus size, students cannot actively use all areas of the campus at the same rate, and which area of the campus the students are active in impacts their student experience. Student experiences also affect which area of the campus they are active in. The eastern housing district, Stadium (Revolutionary/Devrim), dining hall, President's Office (Rectorate Building), library, Culture and Convention Center / Kültür ve Kongre Merkezi (KKM), some of the student societies rooms (close to the dining hall)<sup>78</sup> The departments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Faculty of Architecture, and Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences are the locations on the maps representing the central campus area. The road from the central engineering building to the faculty of economics and administrative sciences is one of the main roads on the campus. The grass areas across from the physics and mathematics departments are socialization areas for students. Students often use the areas on this road for stands, posters, actions, and events. The

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<sup>77</sup> "General Information," Middle East Technical University, <https://www.metu.edu.tr/general-information> Last access July 25, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> It is called a Baraka.

A1 Passage Gate and the A4 Passage Gate are the two significant gates that students use to enter the campus. Beyond the A4 Passage Gate, there is the 100. Yıl Neighborhood, where METU students generally reside. In front of the physics and mathematics departments, the western district, the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium, the dining hall, the President's Office, the library, and the Baraka, close to the dining hall, A1 and A4 gates are essential points for actions and events. The western housing district, most engineering faculties, and education faculty departments are far from the center of campus.

Where students live, their interests, and departments affect how they use the campus. A student living in a family home in Ankara might have more limited time on campus than a student living in 100. Yıl, which affects their relationship with the campus. Similarly, a student staying in the dormitories in the west region is farther from the center of the campus than a student living in the east region, which might affect their participation in activities. Since the engineering and education faculty departments are far from the campus, they may be less likely to be aware of the activities due to the roads they use on campus. Being aware of activities related to gender and sexuality might affect the use of students on campus. This situation affects students' experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. The students' interest in this field also shapes the use of the campus. For instance, if an engineering student is an activist in these fields, they use the center of the campus to participate in activities. The interviewee says

There was a situation like this, although it changed in recent years. You know the campus too. As the structure of the campus, it is divided into two. If we MM (Central Engineering Building) and the Çatı<sup>79</sup> as a center, the preparation side is livelier than other side. While the student profile, including architecture and social sciences, is more diverse. Behind the Çatı, it is more engineering-oriented. It is a place where there are male-dominated departments, especially

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<sup>79</sup> As seen on the map, it is a cafe in METU.

in some departments, but not all. Since I am an architect, I did not experience this much. As far as I have heard from women engineer friends and LGBTI+ engineer friends who worry about this, it becomes unbearable for those students from time to time. The sexist discourses, homophobia, transphobia, and the reality in that part of the campus created something completely different. I remember my friend saying I can breathe when I get to this side of campus. The conversations in the canteens there are utterly different. In the department, the attitudes of the academicians and behaviors are utterly different. It is a masculine and scary place. There is a spatial separation coming from the campus layout. There is a problem with the fact that the engineers are gathered in one place, and everyone else is somewhere else.<sup>80</sup>

Considering this interviewee's comment on the maps above, we understand that METU has two areas: engineering and other departments. The campus layout and the departments' location affect the students' profile and interests. The campus's spatial plan causes the campus's social, political, and cultural structure to differ in various areas of the METU. Gender equality or inequality is different according to different venues within the campus. The organization of the space is effective in this differentiation. The place has two separate social structures in line with the content of the courses in the departments and the interests of the departments.

I lived in the fifth dormitory in the eastern housing district for about two years. After that, I lived in the 100. Yıl neighborhood for about four years. I was an undergraduate student in sociology, one of the central areas of campus. Before I came to METU, I was active in areas such as gender equality, which enabled me to participate in similar events at METU. All these experiences have affected my campus usage and have made me active on campus. When I stayed at the dormitory and was a preparatory student, I usually took the road from the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium or the shopping center to the preparatory class. I used the central roads, so I became aware of the events

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<sup>80</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 10, February 20, 2022.

at METU. When I lived in the 100. Yıl neighborhood, I usually came to KKM from 100. Yıl by hitchhiking or buses. Thanks to my activism in political and student society activities, I was frequently at the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium, the eastern dormitories, the grassy areas in front of the physics and mathematics departments, and the front of the Rectorate building. At the same time, the library and the dining hall were the places I used most. Since we usually received forums in the physics department, made the banners in architecture, and opened the stands in front of the physics or library, these areas were also the areas I used frequently. I also used departments such as sociology, physics, economics, and business administration to enter my courses. I also went to engineering faculties, albeit limited, to participate in English courses. METU Women's Solidarity and METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity are unofficial communities, so we did not have a community room we used. The physics department canteen, lawn areas, physics department classes, and cafeteria are the areas we usually use for meetings. When I was active in METU Community Volunteers Foundation (TOG), an NGO, I often used the industry department canteen for meetings. When I was active in the Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE)-Ankara, a NGO, I went to the central engineering building because its community room was in it. I usually took the route from the central engineering building to the prep school to hang events and action posters. As a student at METU, I spent most of my time in the middle of campus. Also, thanks to all my volunteering, I was aware of sexual and reproductive health peer training and peer training of trainers (ToT) on sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian settings. Thanks to them, my interest in this issue is increased, and I understand the significance of this topic. I decided to study this topic in my thesis.

METU Campus is a living space with many social, cultural, and political activities. As in my experience mentioned above, how students physically use the campus interacts with how they use it politically and socially. Thus, it is significant to

examine the physical structure of METU to understand the effect of space on the sexual experiences of students.

### 3.2.2. Historical Process of Student Actions at Campus

When we examine the historical student movements at METU, we can understand that certain places stand out even if the aims and forms of action change. The historical transformation of why and how people use places can indicate social, political, and cultural changes. It is necessary to understand the historical transformation points of these movements in space to understand the impact of political movements such as gender on experiences at METU. Connell says, “The idea of historicity is about the change produced by human practice and the people involved in the process.”<sup>81</sup> Social, political, and cultural experiences accumulated in historical processes shape the space. Examining historical events in space supports understanding space’s relationship with experiences. METU was founded in 1956.<sup>82</sup> ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 1 (METU History Documentary Part 1) - Bozkırı Yeşertenler documentary describes the founding times of METU between 1956 and 1963. It was not a campus university when it was first established in a different location, in a small building. This documentary is a significant source about the establishment of METU and its transformation into a campus university.<sup>83</sup> METU is a university where student movements have been active since its establishment. These movements have an effect that shapes the space, and the area maintains the continuation of these movements. Since METU is a well-known and highly visible university, student actions within METU have visibility in Turkey.

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<sup>81</sup> R.W. Connell, “Tarihsellik ve ‘Kökenler’,” *Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve İktidar, Toplum, Kişi ve Cinsel Politika*, 213, (Translation of mine).

<sup>82</sup> “History,” Middle East Technical University, <https://www.metu.edu.tr/history> Last access July 25, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Önder M. Özdem and Berrin Balay Tuncer, “ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 1- Bozkırı Yeşertenler,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz6h3MpPx8A&t=2581s> Last access July 30, 2022, 00:00 – 52:21.

We need to examine the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium historically within the scope of the relationship between space and history. The Devrim (Revolution) Stadium is one of the central points of METU. Many students go through the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium from the eastern region's dormitories to the departments. It is an area where students hold the significant events of the spring festivities<sup>84</sup>, the Devrim (Revolution) march.<sup>85</sup>, and the graduation ceremony, where the students carry political banners and critical student actions. Thus, the stadium is a symbolic place of METU with political meaning. It is also a socializing area for both students and graduates. People sit here with their friends or do exercise. Student societies related to sports carry out their activities here. It is necessary to investigate its historical process to understand how the METU Devrim (Revolution) Stadium has become a political symbol. Yancı mentions that Devrim (Revolution) was written on the METU Stadium in letters 33 meters high in 1968.<sup>86</sup> Devrim (Revolution) has remained there since 1968 and is a part of METU history that has affected the formation of the place. Yalçiner tells that Taylan Özgür, Alpaslan Özdoğan, Yusuf Aslan, Hüseyin İnan, and himself, who were active in the revolutionary student movement, decided to write Devrim (Revolution) to reflect the spirit of the period spontaneously after Hüseyin İnan brought a quality paint. He mentions that although different ways have been tried to erase writing, thanks to this dye, it has not been successful.<sup>87</sup> Devrim (Revolution) remained until today. This action shaped the use of the stadium at METU. The stadium, where the students wrote Devrim (Revolution), has been one of the essential spaces for many political activities and events since then. The interviewee says

There is the Devrim Stadium, which is symbolic in terms of both gender and LGBTI+ and identity and class struggles. Thanks to its historical importance,

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<sup>84</sup>During the spring festivals at METU, students organize the Devrim (Revolution) parade every year.

<sup>85</sup> METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity organizes the METU pride parade every year.

<sup>86</sup> Baran Yancı, "ODTÜ Tarihi: Devrim Stadyumu [Bölüm 10]," *Yaz Hocam ODTÜ Medya Topluluğu*, December 19, 2019, <https://yazhocam.com/one-cikanlar/devrim/> Last access July 28, 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Mustafa Yalçiner, "Stadyuma 'Devrim' Yazmayı Ayaküstü Kararlaştırdık," *ODTÜ Tarih Direniyor*, comp. Yalçın Bürkev, (İstanbul: NoteBene, 2016): 131-132.

the spatial effect of doing an action, giving a photograph, coming together, and making a video work there is high.<sup>88</sup>

The Devrim (Revolution) Stadium has a spatial effect even today, making it essential for student protests. Historically, the students' writing of "Devrim" (Revolution) at this Stadium has turned it into a critical place for student actions for 54 years. For Turkey, the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium represents METU, and the actions and activities held there have become easily visible in Turkey. A photo of the Devrim (Revolution) stadium is in annex V.

The Devrim (Revolution) Stadium is also an important area for students for the graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony is organized in this space, and students carry political, cultural, and humorous banners. For instance, students who represent the LGBTIQ+ movement carry a rainbow flag. When I graduated in 2017, students and their relatives protested against the appointed rector Verşan K k. He became a rector by appointment, not by election. Because of his political stance, he is a rector that METU students protest with the slogans "Verşan K k cannot be rector of METU.". News at Gazete Duvar explains the METU administration decided to hold the Graduation Ceremony, which the students attend at the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium each year with banners that draw attention to social fact-events, in 2022 at the Culture Convention Center.<sup>89</sup> As the number 11 interviewee stated, people organizing an action in the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium can quickly become the agenda in Turkey. The banners and protests at the graduation ceremony at the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium are also on the agenda in Turkey every year. This decision taken by the Rectorate is an attempt to prevent protests. The news of Bianet explains that METU students and graduates protested this decision in front of the Rectorate building and announced that

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<sup>88</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 10, February 20, 2022.

<sup>89</sup> "ODT  Rekt rl g 'nden 'Devrim'de mezuniyet t reni yasađı," *Gazeteduvar*, July 7, 2022, <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/odtu-rektorlugunden-devrimde-mezuniyet-yasagi-haber-1572508> Last access August 1, 2022.

they would hold the graduation ceremony at Devrim (Revolution) Stadium.<sup>90</sup> This decision is critical for maintaining the graduation ceremony, which is a METU tradition.

One of the significant places in METU is in front of the Rectorate building. The Pride parade route, which I will explain in detail in the following sections, is also in front of the Rectorate building. Students use this place to protest against the Rectorate's decisions, protest against the banning of the spring festival, and organize actions on gender equality. Karadağ tells METU Women's solidarity held a sit-in in front of the Rectorate to establish a harassment prevention unit in 2016.<sup>91</sup> The actions taken in this place are critical, especially in announcing the students' demands and the protests against the Rectorate. When we examine the history of METU, this place is a critical point in terms of student actions. Karanfil says that METU students burned Robert Komer's, the American Ambassador in Turkey, car in 1969 and that Komer was responsible for a program to destroy the people with torture in Vietnam.<sup>92</sup> Çelen explains how METU students burned Komer's car in front of the Rectorate building to protest Komer, who was visiting the METU Rectorate.<sup>93</sup> Thanks to this protest, we can understand that the front of the Rectorate building was one of the critical places for student actions in the history of METU. The documentary ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 2 - Zor Yıllar (METU History Documentary Part 2 - Difficult Years) also tells this event, and most of the student protests between 1964 and 1980 at METU.<sup>94</sup> Since

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<sup>90</sup> ODTÜ: Mezuniyet törenleri yasaklanamaz, 6 Ağustos'ta Devrim'deyiz," *Bianet*, July 30, 2022, <https://bianet.org/bianet/yasam/265215-odtu-mezuniyet-torenleri-yasaklanamaz-6-agustos-ta-devrim-deyiz> Last access August 1, 2022.

<sup>91</sup> Sevcan Karadağ, "ODTÜ Kadın Dayanışma Platformu: 'Taciz önleme birimi kurulsun!'," *gaigaDERGİ*, April 21, 2016, <https://gaiadergi.com/odtu-kadin-dayanisma-platformu-taciz-onleme-birimi-kurulsun/> Last access 5 June, 2022.

<sup>92</sup> Ezgi Karanfil, "ODTÜ Tarihi: Komer Olayı [Bölüm 6]," *Yaz Hocam ODTÜ Medya Topluluğu*. July 11, 2019, <https://yazhocam.com/one-cikanlar/odtu-tarihi-komer-olayi-bolum-6/> Last access 30 July, 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Tuncay Çelen, "Komer'in Arabası Yakılıyor," *ODTÜ Tarih Direniyor*, 98-99.

<sup>94</sup> Önder M. Özdem, and Berrin Balay Tuncer, "ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 2- Zor Yıllar," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIxeYsghInk> Last access July 30, 2022, 13:05 – 21:15.

the leftist movement in Turkey was strong in these years, the students' protests at METU have accumulated to form METU's protest areas. Although the Rectorate building, like the Devrim (Revolution) Stadium, has been a space for student protests for many years, we can see that the actions taken differ. While the Rectorate building was where students burned Komer's car for the protest in the 1960s, it was also turned into a place for pride parades, women's rights actions, and protests against the banning of the festival in the 2010s. The strengthening of social movements and gender equality movements in Turkey has affected the actions taken at METU. Even though the protests have changed in what they are about, the important protest sites in METU have stayed the same.

Another important place for student communities at METU is the Baraka, where some community rooms are located, close to the cafeteria. Student societies, a critical part of METU culture, have an active role in student movements. The media society prepared a video about the Baraka that explains its meaning and significance of the Baraka. The Baraka, which has nine student society rooms, is a place where students socialize, organize community activities, and there is no hierarchy. This place is also essential for the transmission of community culture. It is a part of the events, protests, and solidarity at METU. Students who do not have a place to stay can stay here at night.<sup>95</sup> It is a living space for students to socialize, cooperate and transfer experiences. Therefore, it is historically significant as a place. This place has a meaning in terms of forming the METU culture that is a part of societies. Spaces like the Baraka are critical for the newly arrived community students' political, social, and cultural transformation. As mentioned in the video, the students here are a part of the actions and activities at METU.

Since unofficial communities do not have society rooms, departments and canteens are significant spaces for them. In my experience, METU Women's solidarity

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<sup>95</sup> ODTÜ Medya Topluluğu, "ODTÜ'de Baraka Kültürü | AnlatHocam!" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZ21AVHdRBE> Last access July 30, 2022. 00:00 – 10:00.

holds meetings in the cafeteria, physics, mathematics, architecture, and grassy areas. Özakın says that the solidarity, currently known as METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, was taking its meetings in the architecture department during the establishment period.<sup>96</sup> The Department of Architecture is among the crucial spaces for starting the struggle for LGBTIQAA+ solidarity at METU. If the administration locks the department after classes, students cannot use that space outside certain hours. The architecture of the spaces and the use of official units' areas affect the students' use. A participant, who graduated from METU Faculty of Architecture and was active in LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, says

As the architecture faculty structure is planned like this, it is programmed to come together; as you may remember, the faculty of architecture consists of large gaps. There are classrooms, rooms, studios in certain places, and huge spaces in the middle. Even during the planning process, people are wanted to come together and meet there.<sup>97</sup>

From the above description, we can understand how the planning of the architecture department allows students to gather. The construction of the spaces is efficient in how people use them. Thus, the architecture department might have become a significant place for students.

Individual experiences and places historically influence each other. As I am studying students' experiences in sexuality, sexual and reproductive health within the scope of this thesis, I need to deal with social and political movements in METU concerning gender and space. Therefore, it is essential to understand how students use spaces historically. It is necessary to consider the campus map and the history of METU to interpret the interviews in depth.

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<sup>96</sup> Özgür Özakın, "Kampüste Örgütlenme Girişimleri: ODTÜ- LeGaTo ve LeGaTo Projesi," *Kaos GL*, November 8, 2010. <https://kaosgl.org/haber/kampuste-orgutlenme-girisimleri-odtu-legato-ve-legato-projesi> Last access July 30, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 10, February 20, 2022.

### 3.2.3. Sexism and Harassment as a Tradition

Gender inequality exists in METU as well as the society of Turkey. Students face sexist, homophobic, discriminatory practices and harassment on campus. The interviewee says that

Events when the power is cut off. .... I said I wonder what was going on, the electricity went out, and the sounds started to come. They slammed past with something like a stick; real howls started coming from the front. I did not come across that they wanted panties. Previously, they used to say, ‘Girls, throw panties.’ There is a place called the eighth dormitory, which they call the horny dormitory. They say they came from there or something; I cannot say such a thing; I have no information. ...When it got dark, I was shocked that these men would go out and come to the dormitory and do it in a harassing way. I guess we expect a lot from METU. Things will be relieved if we realize that METU is also a part of the country. The meaning we attribute to METU is as if everyone here is treated incredibly ethically. The left cannot organize everything. The left does not have incredibly gender-conscious. I found such traditions very interesting. It is decreasing, of course. By the way, I was incredibly shocked when I first came and wrote at 100. Yıl Evleri<sup>98</sup>. I said well, now the electricity is gone, and men are howling in front of the first dormitory. I had no idea how this could happen. Some things surprised me in the comments below. Comments were saying it is a tradition. The people who defend it as a tradition are either the people who are part of it or the people who could not get out of the comfort zone of cis- heterosexual masculinity because of the comfort it provides.<sup>99</sup>

The interviewee mentions the dormitories that are in the eastern region. As we see on the maps above, these dormitories are near the center of the campus. I witnessed men coming to the women’s dormitories and harassing us when I resided in the fifth

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<sup>98</sup> Facebook group is named after the neighborhood next to METU.

<sup>99</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 1, January 30, 2022.

dormitory, much like the interviewee's experience. One of the men's dormitories in this area is called a "horny dormitory". When the electricity goes out, some men harass women by the march called "horny". This case reconstructs gender inequality under the name of culture in METU, as in Turkey. There is a political meaning for men to start harassing them with a power cut. Fear of the dark is a tool to oppress women. Performing masculinity in the dark restricts women's freedom of movement spatially and temporally. It has become a tradition and indicates that METU has a structure reproducing masculinity.

In METU, many similar traditions make harassment legitimate. While METU's traditions both open space for the struggle for gender equality, some of its practices maintain harassment and sexism. The other interviewee says that

Electrical and electronics students raided the sociology. There was such a culture. Twice or so, both coincided with the course I was in... When the academics intervened, and the Rector sent an e-mail, it was over.. ... The stereotype is that there are boys in the engineering department and girls in the social sciences department. The department is raided to we came to get a girl. Disgusting, sexist discoursing. Also, 'you are stupid; we are very smart students. It is how women go to sociology because their scores are not enough. We are very gifted; we gained engineering. We will take you too.' It is so disgusting; psychological violence is direct. There was such a tradition that it was discontinued.<sup>100</sup>

Men produce the discourse 'we came to buy girls' in a place where women are the majority, which objectifies women. The construction of the perception that men are superior to women in terms of intelligence according to their department is a result of their domination over them by establishing a hierarchical coexistence with women. This cultural difference between social sciences and engineering departments might be since engineering departments are far from the center of the campus, as I mentioned

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<sup>100</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 18, March 30, 2022.

above and we can see on the maps. This example shows that women and LGBTIQA+'s are not safe even in the classrooms. It is crucial for engineers to perform this harassment in the social sciences department while producing information about gender, especially in the social sciences departments at METU. Traditions are significant in the formation of a place and the creation of its culture. Known as a "tradition", these actions legitimize this harassment by making it valuable. At this point, it is clear that there are ways to legitimize masculinity and harassment at METU. Fighting against this harassment and preventing this action has ensured that students living at METU now do not experience it. Old students transfer this event to new students through experience transfer.

#### **3.2.4. Gendered Spaces of METU**

Gendered spaces in spaces reproduce gender equality. The genders of the spaces affect which gender we display, where, and how. Spaces have some rules about gender, and we are expected not to go beyond these rules. Gender inequality shapes what can expect from these rules. The toilets and dormitories in METU are examples of spaces that produce gender. The interviewee says,

When we compare the women's dormitories and men's dormitories, men's dormitories are much more comfortable. While the night is progressing in a way that they can enter and leave at any time they want, women's dormitories are shaped as an area where you enter by writing a defense after 00:00 or 00:30 AM, and where you encounter an attitude depending on the personal characteristics of the counseling person that day, that is, you see a guardian of morals in certain senses. Because at night, after 02:00-02:30, the doors of the women's dormitories are locked while the men's dormitories are not. While we may have to knock on the door for hours when we arrive at 02:30, or 03:00 at night, such a thing does not happen in men's dormitories.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 6, February 18, 2022.

For instance, METU dormitories are part of the binary gender system makes the lives of LGBTIQ+ students difficult. Practices in women's and men's dormitories make it difficult for non-men to go abroad at night. Since it is a state institution in Turkey, that is based on the binary system. Dormitories and toilets in METU are indicators that gender shapes places. There are dormitories for men and "girls" at METU. Even women are not officially called women in METU. The fact that toilets are based on binary gender causes difficulties, especially for LGBTQIA+ people. This use of space forces people to perform a particular gender. Doan writes that:

One of the scariest spaces for a person in the midst of a gender transition is a public restroom. The biological urge forces a regular choice between one of two doors with different labels (men/women, gents/ladies, guys/gals, buoys/gulls, etc.). Each excursion for me into the most private of gendered public spaces risked discovery and a potential confrontation with others outraged by my perceived transgression.<sup>102</sup>

The degree of the gendering of space may vary according to the location. Toilets and dormitories are the places where the effect of gender that we observe at the highest level. Society expects to behave in specific roles in these places. These areas limit the queerization of our queer behavior and identity. It is a challenging experience for LGBTIQAs to encounter their identity and what they are doing in these places.

In METU, students took action to transform gender-neutral toilets in the social sciences building, where the philosophy, sociology, history, and psychology departments are located. However, they were not very successful in practice. The narratives of the interviewees on this subject are as follows:

It did not happen; I practically did not succeed. It was not institutionally successful. Practically maybe we could do it. It was also on the agenda in the

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<sup>102</sup> Petra L Doan, "The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces - Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 643.

media. .... That is why there was no genderless toilet. However, the topic was on the agenda.<sup>103</sup>

The first thing that comes to my mind is the toilet discussions. Gender-neutral toilet. I do not know why, but there were extreme reactions as if there was a reaction outside the Rectorate. So, the Rector did not accept it. After a while, a de facto gender-neutral toilet was made. It was in sociology in our department.<sup>104</sup>

These narratives show that students cannot fully use the gender-neutral toilet in practice. An action taken at METU can be visible in Turkey. It is why these actions became the agenda in Turkey and negatively affected them. We understand the adverse effects of METU's media visibility in this example.

### **3.2.5. Gender and Women Studies Graduate Program and The Office for Promoting Gender Equality and Preventing Sexual Harassment in METU**

METU Gender and Women Studies master's program is an interdisciplinary program established in 1994 with the support of UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).<sup>105</sup> A graduate program about gender strengthens that place in terms of gender equality. It also indicates that social science produces knowledge about gender in the university, especially in social sciences. To understand the effects of the gender and women studies master's program at METU, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students and graduates of this program.

The interviewees' general tendency is that although the master's program is valuable, it is more focused on women's studies in terms of content and does not keep up with the latest. Some interviewees evaluated the program as:

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<sup>103</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 3, January 31, 2022.

<sup>104</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 12, February 21, 2022.

<sup>105</sup> "Gender and Women Studies," METU, last updated June 2, 2017, <https://gws.metu.edu.tr/tr/tarihce> Last access June 3, 2022.

Unfortunately, I think it is a program that does not keep up to date. The existence of the program is invaluable. What we talk about is very valuable. They are trying to update themselves, but the readings are a little backward.<sup>106</sup>

For example, I can tell that all academics are doing something about this. Let us say they do not study gender, but they add it to their research. ... There is a great awareness at METU. When I started my master's degree, there were things I was not very satisfied with and could not face what I expected. It proceeds more on women's studies, not gender. In my time, we were not very happy with it. We do not talk much about gender; it proceeds more binary; we talk about women. Sometimes it is not very inclusive.<sup>107</sup>

Although having a gender-related graduate program in METU is valuable for the space, this program is mostly limited to binary genders. Academically criticizing the binary system of gender studies, including body, queer, masculinity, and LGBTIQ+ studies, will also make the space inclusive. Gender is not just about women but all gender identities and sexual orientations. Therefore, the inclusiveness of gender-related studies, whether academic or practical, presents a holistic field of struggle.

Like the studies of the Gender and Women Studies master's program at METU, its spatial structure is also significant. This master's program is located in the economics and administrative sciences B faculty. According to the maps above, this place is not on the central road. This situation might weaken the relationship of the students of this department with the campus. It might be difficult for students of this department to be aware of the events, as the student societies announce their studies on the main road. The interviewee says,

I think we see gender as a bit abstract. We cannot see it concretely in space, in the field. For example, our department does not have a building. There is no point where we meet as a place. There is only one room. We go to classes in

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<sup>106</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 1, January 30, 2022.

<sup>107</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 2, January 31, 2022.

other departments. I think it provides a big minus. It should have a building as a place, it should be a concrete indicator, and there should be places where we can come together.<sup>108</sup>

This situation negatively affects the spatial existence of gender studies. Gender studies should be physically visible in parallel with academic studies and activism in the space. Having a physical space makes it easier for people to come together. This program's lack of a physical structure restricts people working in gender from a meeting, working, getting to know each other, and organizing.

Students stated that although there are readings about sexuality, queer and LGBTIQ+ in the courses, these are very limited. They stated that there are no direct courses on these and that there should be comprehensive content. The interviewees give examples of the courses as follows:

“There are things that we establish on gender in the courses. The topic of a week can be sexuality and queer theory. Sexual orientations etc. It is included in the course content.”<sup>109</sup>

For example, how can I say there were topics covered at the end of the semester, or something like that happened. ...it was a topic in the last few weeks, but other than that, I do not remember anything; I do not remember a lecture or a topic that we discussed directly on the queer.<sup>110</sup>

I observe the need to support academic gender studies with queer studies in METU. The graduate program is limited to only women's studies, affecting the diversity of the knowledge produced. Just as places affect individuals' experiences, people also affect space. The interests of the academicians and students in the graduate program might shape the content of the program.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 1, January 30, 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 4, January 31, 2022.

With the decision of the METU Senate in 2016, the Middle East Technical University Gender Equality Principles and Strategies Document are fundamental in terms of gaining an official momentum on gender equality and basing this document on international documents such as CEDAW (Convention of the Prevention of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women) and the Istanbul Convention.<sup>111</sup> The Office for Promoting Gender Equality and Preventing Sexual Harassment (CITOB) aims to raise awareness about gender equality, sexual harassment, and assault cases, evaluate applications related to these cases, and support applicants.<sup>112</sup> Such a unit at the university is a valuable step in preventing harassment and strengthening gender equality. Karadağ says CITOB was established thanks to the struggle of academics and students. METU Women's solidarity played a role in the struggle and held a sit-in in front of the Rectorate.<sup>113</sup> A person who graduated from METU's master's degree in gender and women's studies and played a role in women's solidarity describes the process as follows:

As Women's solidarity, we were protesting so that the abuser, which everyone knows, would be expelled from the university. To increase the pressure for this harassment unit to be established, the sit-in in front of the Rectorate was also a very successful action, and it was bigger than we expected. <sup>114</sup>

Activism within spaces affects the decision-making processes of decision-makers like this example. The process indicates the role of women's initiative in unofficial solidarity within METU in establishing CITOB. The role of student groups working on

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<sup>111</sup> "Gender Equality Principles and Strategies Document," Middle East Technical University, (2016), [https://citob.metu.edu.tr/system/files/odtu\\_toplumsalcinsiyetesitligi\\_ilke\\_ve\\_stratejiler\\_belgesi.pdf](https://citob.metu.edu.tr/system/files/odtu_toplumsalcinsiyetesitligi_ilke_ve_stratejiler_belgesi.pdf) Last access June 3, 2022.

<sup>112</sup> "Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğini Destekleme ve Cinsel Tacizi Önleme Birimi," METU, <https://citob.metu.edu.tr/#:~:text=C%C4%B0T%C3%96B%20toplumsal%20cinsiyet%20e%C5%9Fitli%C4%9Fi%20konusunda,ba%C5%9Fvurular%C4%B1%20de%C4%9Ferlendirmek%20ve%20ba%C5%9Fvuranlar%C4%B1%20desteklemeyi> Last access 5 June, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Sevcan Karadağ, "ODTÜ Kadın Dayanışma Platformu: 'Taciz önleme birimi kurulsun!'," *gaigaDERGİ*.

<sup>114</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 15, February 24, 2022.

gender, such as Women’s Solidarity, at the university is fundamental to enforcing gender equality.

### 3.2.6. Gender Studies as the Student Movement at METU

Both official and unofficial student societies are working in the field of gender, such as METU Women’s solidarity and METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity. These communities can open space for students to produce speech and action about gender. Students struggle that clubs could become an official community in this field. As a result of these struggles, METU Gender Studies Society became the official club. METU Women’s solidarity and METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity continue their work on campus without an official club. Even when I was a student, there was a struggle for Women’s solidarity to become the official community. According to the feminists who studied in the previous period, the METU Rectorate did not allow the establishment of a women’s club by saying, “There are no women in METU; there are girls.”<sup>115</sup> This discourse indicates that although there are changes in the METU administration, the sexist discourses of the METU administration have not changed. Students experienced a similar process in the struggle for the official community of the METU LGBTIQAA+ solidarity. This situation also indicates how the system has similarly dominated women and LGBTIQAA+s. According to the news of Kaos GL,

Since we want to establish the Gender and Women Studies Society, including homosexuals, the Office of Cultural Affairs and the Office of Sports throw our petition in our faces and say, ‘Does this have a culture? Do you want to encourage people?’<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The majority of society calls women who have not had sexual intercourse as "girls" and women who have had sexual intercourse as women in Turkey. This sexist distinction is associated with bleeding from the hymen.

<sup>116</sup> “ODTÜ’te Rektöre Homofobik Olduğu Gereğiyle Protesto,” *Kaos GL*, May 1, 2008, <https://kaosgl.org/haber/odtute-rektore-homofobik-oldugu-gerekesiyle-protesto> Last access 6 June, 2022, (Translation of mine).

The struggle over the years has resulted in gains in establishing a gender studies society. It shows the significance of the transfer of experience and the continuity of struggle in METU culture. According to the news in *Kaos GL*, METU LGBTI+ Solidarity's struggle to exist as a community at the university, based on LGBTI activists who met under the name of LEGATO (Lesbian Gay Society / Lezbiyen Gay Topluluğu) in 1996, resulted in gains after 21 years. *Kaos GL* writes, "METU LGBTI+ Solidarity expresses this achievement as the joint achievement of the women's and LGBTI struggle."<sup>117</sup> Feminists and LGBTIQAA+'s carrying out the struggle together effectively in this success. Although METU Gender Studies is an official community, METU Women's solidarity and METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity continue their work unofficially. The continuation of solidarity independent from the control of the Rectorate is crucial in terms of the independence of the movement.

Pride parade, honor week, March 8 World Women's Day Parade, November 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women parade, and ladder actions are significant activism events at METU. The interviewee, who graduated from METU and previously took part in LGBTI Solidarity, describes the beginning of the METU Pride Parades as follows:

It was the year 2010. It would be something like a commemoration march for the victims of trans murders, and a trans person was invited; it would be his game at KKM. Was it last-minute cultural affairs, or what did not allow it? It was a reaction march. It was the spontaneous march in 2010. I may be misremembering some details. There was a reaction march when the game in which transgender was to be canceled. It turned out so good that we liked it a lot. People got together and walked. There are LGBTIs, there are LGBTIs in METU. We are gay; we are lesbians, we are trans, we are here, etc. It was very good, he laughed. It was crowded. We were inspired by this protest march the

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<sup>117</sup> "ODTÜ'de 21 Yıl Süren Mücadele Kazanım ile Sonuçlandı," *Kaos GL*, March 1, 2018, <https://kaosgl.org/haber/odtude-21-yil-suren-mucadele-kazanimla-sonuclandi> Last access 6 June, 2022, (Translation of mine).

following year. It was very good; we said let it turn into a walk now. Whatever it is, let us call it a pride parade. ... After that, we did what we called the METU Pride Parade, the 1st METU Pride Parade.<sup>118</sup>

The start of pride parades at METU is a critical breaking point regarding gender because it also means that LGBTIQAs gain visibility in METU. The appointment of Verşan K k as the Rector at METU and the changing situation in Turkey’s politics also affected the activities at METU. While the police could not enter the METU campus before, they intervened harshly in the 2019 Pride Parade. It is the reflection of METU that the hate speech of decision-makers against LGBTIQAs and the police attack on Pride marches in Taksim<sup>119</sup>. We understand this increasing oppression at METU from the difference between the discourses of a graduate and a student who are interviewees. The interviewees say:

At that time, there was Verşan K k, who was a trustee. He had brought the police into the university, and the friends who were going to walk before they could even start the march were subjected to violent police intervention and gas.<sup>120</sup>

“Our pride parade was never stopped by a police thing.”<sup>121</sup>

The point that draws attention in the interviews with the graduates and students who have done activism in this field is similar action practices and obstacles from the Rectorate. This situation is related to an upper space to which the space belongs. Sometimes, the applications belonging to the place may not change as time changes. Since the views on gender equality and struggle in Turkey did not show a significant

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<sup>118</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 17, March 5, 2022.

<sup>119</sup> It is one of the central districts of Istanbul with socializing areas. It is an important place for political actions, and the state tries to prevent political actions in this area by force.

<sup>120</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 11, February 20, 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 17, March 5, 2022.

improvement, there was not a specific positive change in the perspective of the METU administration, but there were even worse developments.

### **3.2.7. The Transmission of Gender Movement**

During the period I was in, Women's solidarity had written "Women Want Peace" and made a colorful hand print on the wall of the mathematics department. As we see on the map, the building of the mathematics department is one of the centers and visible points of the campus. Many students pass in front of this building in their daily life. The Rector's office repainted this text and handprints, and then the Women's Solidarity rewrite. This cycle went on several times. Finally, "We women insist on peace! But we will fight bans." written and colored handprints with that graffiti have been on the visible point of the campus since 2015. Rainbow ladder actions in 2021 are a similar process. The photos of the wall and the rainbow ladder are in annex V. The interviewee who was involved in the process of painting the math said

"The women's wall, which we did. We continued to write persistently and stubbornly after the deletion of the writing on the wall after the October 10 massacre as a call to peace that started before October 10."<sup>122</sup>

The interviewee, who is currently studying at METU, says

I was not there during the math wall period. I just know the thing. Having women's hands painted many times. Women were rewriting and making traces, repainting and re-doing. In this regard, it is similar to the rainbow ladder. It is a symbol, after all. The symbol of women's solidarity at METU is in the busiest place of the school. A wonderful message in a very visible form. Our rainbow ladder was a similar process.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 15, February 24, 2022.

<sup>123</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 5, February 18, 2022.

Symbols and colors have political meaning. The use of spaces can turn into a kind of protest like the Devrim Stadium. Although it is one of the most fundamental rights for people living in the space to shape their own spaces, this is not allowed for political reasons. It has produced a symbolic meaning for gender equality through the mathematics wall at METU. Even though the administration wanted to prevent the transformation of the space, it was a spatial gain thanks to the METU Women's solidarity. The math wall has turned into a spatial symbol for gender. It is also significant that the position of this wall on the campus is visible. The same interviewee describes the rainbow ladder action processes as follows:

It was already painted at the time of Gezi, and no one had covered it. We were performing a musical act in front of the Rectorate, which turned out to be very spontaneous. Let us renew the paints there. It was a support action for Boğaziçi. It supports the resistance process there, like greetings from METU. We had painted, let us go and renew it, we said, the paints have run. There was paint already; it was just running. We went and renewed. We did not expect such a thing; we were very surprised when they covered it. However, then it already made much noise at school. We went and repainted. When we repainted, we made it an open call. Too many people came. Here they repainted; we repainted. More people came. We painted six or seven times, added the word "no trustee," and then started the tent watch. In that respect, it is like women's hands in math.<sup>124</sup>

These examples of actions at METU show that the actions taken in the past years are up-to-date and that the transfer of experience brings continuity to these actions. Past experiences in space shape current experiences. The transfer of experience between students is significant regarding how students organize their actions. The construction of the space is spread over time. Rainbow ladder actions are continuations of previous actions. The production and construction of space is an action with continuity.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

The location of the rainbow stairs is significant in that it is near the Devrim, and students use these stairs to go to their departments. The interviewee says,

“We decided to renew the staircase leading to the dormitories from Devrim, which was painted in 2013 but whose parts have been erased.”<sup>125</sup>

This stair is between the Devrim and the dormitories in the eastern region. Many students use this area for going from the dormitories to the Devrim, to the departments to the cafeteria. Being a visible point for students also supports the physical visibility of the LGBTIQ+ struggle on campus.

### **3.2.8. Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health at METU**

It is critical to investigate actions about sexuality, which is the main subject of the research in METU. Most people, including leftists, do not consider sexuality a political issue in Turkey. This situation is not very different in METU, but there are limited events in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health in METU. The interviewee says that

The 100. Yıl Evleri page for Facebook, which I observed. The most interactive place is METU; I think it is the platform where the most people are present quantitatively and numerically and where the most flow of questions and information is transferred daily. Open to everyone. Many questions and information are being shared about sexuality and sexual health, and reproductive health.<sup>126</sup>

Alternative spaces constructed by students online are fundamental for access to information. Talking about experiences plays a role in accessing information. In our society, sexuality is an issue that people cannot talk about. Facebook groups associated with the space allow us to access information about the space easily and quickly. As in

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<sup>125</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 8, February 19, 2022.

<sup>126</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 4, January 31, 2022.

this example, Facebook groups enable young people to talk about sexuality, exchange information, and share experiences. As we saw with the pandemic, both physical and online spaces can be used to get information.

Activities in this field are essential regarding the visibility of sexuality studies and students' access to information. Organizing activities in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health on campus supports the discussion of this issue. Since the campus is a student living space, the activities impact students' access to information and socialization. The interviewees say,

In the past, there was an event organized by Biyogen (Biology and Genetics Society) and LGBTI solidarity for AIDS awareness day, but now no one is doing it. We have not done it yet. I think this is a big shortcoming. Because if you are researching sexual health and the like, I have come across a lot at METU that HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) is wildly common.<sup>127</sup>

“We open a stand for condoms in the library every December 1, World AIDS awareness week.”<sup>128</sup>

The interviewees' narratives tell us that events were held, especially on December 1, World AIDS Day. This topic needs to be made visible to understand the significance of sexual and reproductive health. Distributing condoms on the campus on a day with a meaning like December 1 is a significant action. It also encourages young people's access to condoms. Students enable each other a physical space such as the booth provides a place where students can get information. The fact that this does not continue may be related to the loss of dominance of the campus communities with the pandemic's effect.

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<sup>127</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 9, February 19, 2022.

<sup>128</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 16, February 26, 2022.

Carrying out these activities is related to the structure of the university. The negative and positive reactions against these activities show the social and political structure. A graduate interviewed described reaction against this stands as follows:

“For example, while one friend from our stand was distributing condoms, they hand them to those who pass the way. A man walked over to us, asking how you could throw a condom in my face.”<sup>129</sup>

Seeing a condom in a public place is uncomfortable for people with a sexist view. The space’s rules are not to allow anything sexual to appear in public. An event about a subject with many myths, such as AIDS, causes a reaction based on gender inequality on campus. Sontag says that AIDS has been paradoxically metaphorized as punishment for deviant behavior and threatening the innocent.<sup>130</sup> There is a prejudice against anything related to AIDS because AIDS is associated with immoral behavior. AIDS, considered a result of sexuality, is used as a metaphor for both the disease and sexuality, creating prejudice against sexuality and AIDS. Fear makes it easier for people to control their behavior. The reaction to condoms is also a reaction to both sexuality and AIDS.

The interviewee explains another activity in this area as follows:

“In the BDSM (Bondage, Discipline/Dominance, Sadism/Submission, Masochism) consent workshop, I did not attend that event, but how to get consent, safe words, and red lines were discussed. People’s questions were answered.”<sup>131</sup>

While sexuality is taboo, holding a workshop on BDSM at METU and raising awareness on consent and safe sexuality is at a very progressive point. Society’s rules marginalize fantasies because people do not assume sexual pleasure as a right.

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<sup>129</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 10, February 20, 2022.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Sontag, “AIDS ve Meteforları,” *Metefor Olarak Hastalık, AIDS ve Meteforları*, trans. Osman Akınhay, (İstanbul: Can Sanat Yayınları, 2015): 159.

<sup>131</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 16, February 26, 2022.

Sexuality for procreation is considered superior to sexuality for pleasure. BDSM is a fantasy, and people do not consider as legitimate. Organizing an activity at METU allows people to get to know their bodies and pleasures.

Another activity in this field at METU is about menstruation. Menstruation is also a subject that is difficult to talk about. It produces many wrong ideas about menstruation, such as ‘dirty’ menstrual blood. The interviewee says that

There were pad actions and bloody pad actions. ... I do not remember what the post process was. Is it not from the menstrual blood, but the blood in your hand, the process comes from time to time, or the women with menstruation are disgusting, but the murders of the women are not? We painted red to the ped and put them like the library entrance or the dining hall. To a point where many people are disgusted, but that is not my bag! I always drop something; the purpose of an action is to draw attention and raise awareness. Did it attract attention, even if it was a little bit of awareness?<sup>132</sup>

The action about menstruation contributed to the normalization of menstrual blood, which is assumed as dirty by society and even the Turkish Language Institution. METU is a space within Turkey, and the political situation in Turkey also shapes the content of actions within METU. Since METU is a politically influential university in Turkey, a movement started at METU is easily visible.

### **3.2.9. The Impact of the Pandemic on METU**

A pandemic is a factor that affects this change and transformation. The pandemic negatively affects people’s coming together and policy-making. New students can participate in activities in student clubs and discuss gender to gain awareness in the fields. Old students transfer their experience to new students. The students who came after 2015 know that Women’s solidarity painted the women’s wall.

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<sup>132</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 15, February 24, 2022.

This experience transfer provides it. Since the pandemic interrupted this experience transfer, it has become difficult for new students to access the structures active in this field. The statements of the interviewees regarding this situation are as follows:

Since 2019, political activity has decreased a little due to the pandemic. As a result, I feel like these ideas that are not very active, such as conservatives, conservative ideas, or those that come directly from a patriarchal place, started to become a little more dominant and make their voices heard.<sup>133</sup>

“They harass people. I experience this in the neighborhood as well. Many friends say they were verbally abused when they were about to hitchhike or enter their house. Everyone thinks it has increased during the pandemic period.”<sup>134</sup>

Failure to ensure the continuity of the activities carried out in a place opens up space for other actions. Failure to quickly continue the continuity of the communities with a spontaneous decision during the pandemic and the interruption of a certain time may change the socialization period of the students who have just entered METU. METU has a transformative effect in terms of gender. The loss of this effect on the campus with the pandemic opens up a space for heteronormative and patriarchal order, causing an increase in harassment.

Getting together makes it easier for people to meet and organize. The activities of student societies are essential in terms of METU culture. Students who start at METU socialize and establish relationships with METU quickly by going to these communities. These communities are significant for students’ interaction and transfer of their experience. The pandemic has limited all this. The interviewee says that

The impact of the pandemic has been significant. It prevented socialization at METU. Even if a person did not come and organize somewhere or was not seriously politicized in the usual way, he was returning without even realizing

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<sup>133</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 13, February 21, 2022.

<sup>134</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 11, February 20, 2022.

it. They were becoming a liberal person. But most people did not set foot on campus until 2nd or 3rd grade or come back once or twice. They were not involved in socialization. Culture transfer failed to perform memory transfer. It resulted in the weakening of organizations.... Communities weakened. Communities were very important tools for the propagation and reproduction of a truly libertarian culture, including many of the students. They are not in very good shape either. Even if they do not have many members, they are not active. Carrying out some work in the community takes place through the transfer of experience. In the pandemic, the transfer of experience has been blocked, and continuity has been interrupted.<sup>135</sup>

METU is a large living space, and communities form an essential part of this living space. METU's communities also have transformative power over students. The situation of not being able to come together in physical places with the pandemic prevented campus life. This situation interrupted the transfer of experience. Former students graduated without the transference, which provided the continuity of the actions. It is also a significant point in the previous quotations. The interruption of this transfer of experience has reduced the effect of the place on the experiences of the 1st and 2nd-grade interviewees in the fields of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health.

Another point that the pandemic negatively affects is the use of space. Physically, people cannot meet in places for a while. This situation negatively affected the spatial gains before the pandemic. The interviewee says,

In 2019, people made posters by projecting them on the wall every day until morning. Now, for example, they lock the architecture department at 17.00. They leave a different door open every day, like a puzzle, anyone who can find it can get in and out. Those rights have been extorted. The physics department

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<sup>135</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 7, February 18, 2022.

closes, and the architecture department closes. The officer comes and asks what you are doing. This case is very contradictory for METU, but it was usurped silently during the pandemic. It is not challenging to oppose individually, but people have not experienced it as a method; they become nonusable areas.<sup>136</sup>

This case shows that the administration restricts the areas that students use freely. Due to social, political, and cultural conditions, space use has historically changed. These points of change and transformation affect people's experiences. Examining these points also provides information about the difference in experiences. Who decides how people use public spaces is a political issue. It is an accumulation of experience that students use the venues for events independently of the administration. The pandemic stopped this experience transfer from happening, which made it hard for students to use the spaces for their activities and groups.

I believe METU is a university with a high level of political activism. An organization can fight against it no matter how much the administration pressures it. Activities organized by METU Women's Solidarity, METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, and METU Gender Studies Community have an essential role in gender studies at METU. Although the pandemic has damaged the transfer of experience among students at METU, it is an essential factor that ensures the continuity of the struggle at METU. Although activities related to sexuality are limited, it is a factor in students' awareness in this field. Understanding how gender works at METU as a place will help you figure out the connection between society, gender, and experience when you look at the interviews.

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<sup>136</sup> Online interview for examination of the space, the interviewee number 8, February 19, 2022.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. GENDER AWARENESS

The gender awareness of the interviewees plays an active role in the answers they will give. The culture and social structures in which people live shape their perspective on gender. When considering a gender perspective, it is necessary to consider it is a constructed perception, not a natural process. Butler says,

Note as well that the category of sex and the naturalized institution of heterosexuality are constructs, socially instituted and socially regulated fantasies or “fetishes,” not natural categories, but political ones (categories that prove that recourse to the “natural” in such contexts is always political).<sup>137</sup>

The binary gender system and heterosexuality are the norms, and the state ignores those outsides of them. It makes it difficult for people outside of the politically constructed genders and sexual orientations to exist in public spaces. Gender identities and sexual orientations of individuals affect gender awareness. Likewise, individuals’ gender awareness also affects their sexual, sexual, and reproductive health practices. Thus, I asked questions to understand the opinions of interviewees on gender identities, sexual orientations, and their effects on sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health.

I asked their opinions about their gender identities and sexual orientations, their impact of gender identities and sexual orientations on sexual experiences, and access to information and services about sexual and reproductive health to analyze the gender

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<sup>137</sup> Judith Butler, “Monique Wittig: Bodily Disintegration and Fictive Sex,” *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 161.

awareness of the interviewees. The interviewees generally have ideas about their gender identity and sexual orientation. Women and LGBTIQ+ interviewees generally mentioned Turkey's political, cultural, and social situations in questions about gender identity and sexual orientation. The dominant opinion of the interviewees is that gender identity and sexual orientation affect access to sexual experiences, services, and information about sexual and reproductive health. I will discuss the interviewees' answers about gender awareness in detail below.

#### **4.1.1. Gender Identities and Sexual Orientations**

When I asked their opinions on gender identities and sexual orientations, I observed that they had gender awareness. Regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, the interviewees made inclusive and non-prejudiced statements in these interviews. It might be that people who want to participate in an interview about sexuality have a particular awareness of their gender identity and sexual orientation. I think that people who may make discriminatory statements in this field do not participate in the interview because they may have prejudices about talking about sexuality.

There are some examples of what heterosexual people said about their gender identity and sexual orientation when I interviewed them.

“Everyone can freely live and share what they want. Just as it is normal for me to be attracted to a male individual, I think a non-heterosexual relationship is normal, in quotation marks.”<sup>138</sup>

This interviewee stated that she thinks being heterosexual and LGBTIQ+ as equivalent. She established the reason for this based on normality. Since the perspective of socially different gender identities is based on inequality, it is not enough to attitude

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<sup>138</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 1, March 4, 2022.

them as normal. Gender awareness requires recognizing the unequal practices between different gender identities in society. Another interviewee from a similar point says,

Frankly, I do not think anything. Since we are in a heteronormative world, we can sometimes call it a very marginal group, and is a group that is foreign to us, others, or different to us. However, there are gays, lesbians, LGBTI+s; they exist as much as we do, in a heteronormative world they exist as much as heterosexuals. I do not think anything extra.<sup>139</sup>

While some interviewees expressed their opinions on gender identities and sexual orientations, as in this example, some interviewees also mentioned social and political issues. It is a fundamental point for the interviewees to criticize normality. The normal is considered superior to the abnormal. The 'normal' one has social status and is accepted. Everyone wants to be normal since normality is the prerequisite for being accepted politically and socially. People assume that defining something as normal indicates not being biased towards it. Butler writes, "Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes."<sup>140</sup> The so-called normal structure is socially constructed. This interviewee constructed heterosexuality as normal, and other sexual orientations are called abnormal over it. Gender comes into existence associated with the normalization process. Gender roles determine the normality of a behavior, person, or action.

As interviewee number 19 explained, sex is also constructed concerning gender. Demonstrating this situation is significant to understanding how sex and gender are related. There is a perception that only genders are socially constructed. Whether or not sex is constructed is debatable. The interviewee says that

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<sup>139</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

<sup>140</sup> Judith Butler, "Gender Regulations," *Undoing Gender*, 42.

Sex is a socially constructed concept. Sex is much more than two. In other words, even their existence is debatable now beyond being respected. As I said, as I said at the beginning, the existence of sex is already controversial. I think there are socially constructed norms and concepts. That is why we have to respect them; I am not at a point like that.<sup>141</sup>

The interviewee is a sociology student and may be effective in stating this subject. Gender is effective in the perception that there are two sexes. The sexes are constructed about the genitals. Genders are much more than biology. Sexes, like gender, have social, political, and cultural meanings. Butler argues that gender is a political and cultural apparatus that produce sex naturally.<sup>142</sup> The natural generation of sex reinforces the binary gender system. The process of how gender is politically and culturally constructed enables sexes to produce. Engendering depends on people's biological characteristics. Engendering causes not only the construction of expected gender roles as performativity but also the reproduction of sexes.

Society does not look in favor of talking about sexuality. The perception of family structure, religious rules, and moral rules are among the factors that cause it. Some interviewees mentioned this situation. Some of them say,

“Which, again, is a taboo in line with religion, in my opinion. I think we live in a country where you cannot even talk about it.”<sup>143</sup>

Trans women are being burned. Fathers are killing their gay son and daughter. There are many troubles. I witnessed it myself. A gay friend of ours in high

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<sup>141</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 19, March 30, 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Judith Butler, “Gender: The Circular Ruins of Contemporary Debate,” *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 15, March 24, 2022.

school was beaten up and teased. They cannot walk comfortably on the streets.<sup>144</sup>

These examples indicate that people's gender identity and sexual orientation affect not only their sexual experiences but also every point in their lives. The LGBTIQ+ issue, like sexuality, is a topic that cannot be talked about in Turkey. Talking about anything related to sexuality and sexual orientation becomes taboo. The sharing of the participants on this subject may show that they are also aware of gender-based discrimination.

Some interviewees did not want to comment on this issue because they did not have a subject among those interviewed as heterosexual. Significantly, they consider the experience of subjectivity. When I asked the interviewee her opinions about gender identities and sexual orientations, she said,

“Not something I can comment on as cis heterosexual anyway... Whatever sexual orientation is, we accept it.”<sup>145</sup>

It is significant to be the subject of the issues to express an opinion. Our comments might contain judgment and subordination if the issues are unrelated to us. The critical point about it is what factors will determine our subjectivity. Doan mentions the fluidity of subjectivities against the boundaries of constructed identities.<sup>146</sup> Being a subject is not only related to gender difference but also to experiencing commonality. The fluidity of experiences also makes subjectivity fluid. The interviewee did not comment on a field without shared experience, showing that the subjectivity debates also reflect on METU students.

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<sup>144</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 29, April 12, 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 20, April 14, 2022.

<sup>146</sup> Petra L Doan, “The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces- Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy,” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 639.

Heterosexual male interviewees generally focused on their thoughts when expressing their opinions on gender identities and sexual orientations without mentioning their social, social, and cultural dimensions. The interviewees say that

“People should be able to live the way they want to express themselves, the way they want to live. Everyone deserves to be free within themselves, so I fully support it.”<sup>147</sup>

There is no problem for me in this regard, I think that I am very tolerant of these matters. It has no positive or negative effect on me. It is a normal routine for me, and I have friends like that. Our communication is also good. I can say that this topic should not even be talked about.<sup>148</sup>

Individuals produce discriminatory discourse even when saying, “There is no problem for me.”. People assume that being LGBTIQ+ needs toleration. Tolerance establishes a hierarchical balance of power over others based on the norm. Çayır says that before modernity, the understanding of tolerance is based on hierarchy. The strong group tolerates the vulnerable group. He also explains that modern societies are founded on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, not tolerance.<sup>149</sup> Discrimination is caused not only by our actions but also by our words. Our words determine our political, social, and cultural positions. Saying that I am tolerant towards LGBTIQ+s means that one assumes oneself on top by creating a hierarchical distinction between them.

If there is a distinction between respecting and attitudes toward heterosexuality and respecting and attitudes toward LGBTIQ+s, there is also prejudice. The

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<sup>147</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 7, March 16, 2022.

<sup>148</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 5, March 7, 2022.

<sup>149</sup> Kenan Çayır, “Gruplararası İlişkiler Bağlamında Ayrımcılık,” *Ayrımcılık Çok Boyutlu Yaklaşımlar*, comp. Kenan Çayır, Müge Ayan Ceyhan, (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları,2012): 7. <https://secbir.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ayrimcilik-%C3%87ok-Boyutlu-Yakla%C5%9F%C4%B1mlar.pdf> Last access June 2, 2022.

discourses of the media and the state play a role in forming our perspective on this issue.

I respect all genders, like most of my friends from METU. My only criticism is that dirty hands exploit this beautiful policy. Of course, they may have such thoughts, but it is wrong for them to be with a terrorist organization.<sup>150</sup>

While there are no political prerequisites for respecting heterosexuality, respect for non-heterosexuals requires political sameness. It is striking that some heterosexual male interviewees reproduce discrimination under the discourse that we respect them. As mentioned in the section on Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health in Turkey, policies and discourses based on gender inequality in Turkey marginalize the LGBTIQAA+ movement and show it in connection with terrorism. We understand the influence of the policies in Turkey on the discourse of the interviewee.

While expressing opinions about gender identities and sexual orientations, there should be both knowledge and awareness in this field to address the effects of Turkey's social, political, and cultural structure. I noticed that when LGBTIQAA+ interviewees talked about this field, they focused on social, cultural, and political structures.

Let us put cis heterosexual men aside; companies should say, let us hire women, let us hire LGBTI. When such a criterion comes, I feel like there is a distinction. The firm that got funding for affirmative action then hired a man, and they said you are very good. ... It was so scary that at this point, I said no, it would not work.<sup>151</sup>

As emphasized by this interviewee, LGBTQIA+s and women are exposed to discrimination based on gender in business life. This interviewee, the subject, also criticizes the companies' attitudes in this field. While expressing their opinion on

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<sup>150</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 18, March 29, 2022.

<sup>151</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 4, March 6, 2022.

gender identity and sexual orientation, she is aware of the economic and career challenges expected in the future.

Although METU is in a better position regarding gender equality than most of Turkey, it has places where gender roles are very effective. METU has an impact on how we perform gender spatially.

Even since I came to METU, I have been living my identity openly. Of course, some things bother me. Even here, we can still be under pressure because I live in a dormitory. Sometimes I take on a role so that the dormitory staff does not take a stand against me. Let us say I wear queer-looking things; there may be a need to behave neatly when leaving the dormitory.<sup>152</sup>

This interviewee talks about his experiences and difficulties even at METU as a gay person. In the analysis of the background of METU, I explain METU, which is based on the binary gender system and heteronormative structure. One of the places where we observe these effects the most is the dormitories. Butler says, “The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”<sup>153</sup> Behaviors, clothes, and facial expressions on the body create the perception of gender and may contain illusions. As in this example, how and why we perform gender can vary depending on the space and person relations.

Another decisive point for gender awareness is to be aware of the struggles in this field and to understand their significance. One way to combat gender inequality is to oppose it. To oppose it, it is necessary to understand as a subject why we have to struggle in this field. The interviewee says that

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<sup>152</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 8, March 21, 2022.

<sup>153</sup> Judith Butler, “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversion,” *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 179.

“As a nonbinary gender identity, I think it is perfectly present, as natural as binary. I think that discourses and policies should be produced, and training should be given against the phobia produced in this regard.”<sup>154</sup>

This interviewee emphasizes the efficiency of the struggle. At METU, we understand the points where the struggle against the binary gender system and phobia is successful. The establishment of CIOB and the formalization process of the gender studies community are effective examples of this.

I argue that LGBTIQ+ and heterosexual women have similar shared experiences. They share a common experience, such as being in a disadvantaged group, even if they have different experiences due to gender inequality. They handled social, political, and cultural situations more than cis heterosexuals. Because cis heterosexual men have a privileged position in the binary gender and patriarchal systems, their sharing about these topics, which they have not experienced, is limited.

#### **4.1.2. The Effects of Gender Identities and Sexual Orientations on Sexuality**

The interviewees’ opinions are those gender identities, and sexual orientations mainly affect sexual experiences. The reason is that, as mentioned in the previous section, the interviewees generally have information about gender identity and sexual orientations.

Gender determines our sexuality. We continue to display gender during sexuality as well. Sexual stratification influences our experience of our sexuality. Heterosexual men in the upper strata may dominate their partners’ bodies during sexual intercourse. The interviewee says,

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<sup>154</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 24, April 3, 2022.

“It is about where women are socially positioned. Because the woman is socially positioned in a lower place than men, the relationship between the two partners may create more pressure on the woman, making her sexual experience less good.”<sup>155</sup>

We consider Rubin’s erotic pyramid over this opinion. Especially unmarried women are in a socially inferior position compared to men. It affects their sexual experiences. The pleasure of a person who cannot recognize their body due to social norms or who is afraid of being judged may be negatively affected. The part in which the same participant explains the effect of her gender identity on her sexuality is highly relevant to this issue.

Anxiety about how our body looks also affects our sexual practices. Gender shapes not only our experiences but also our body image. This situation determines our pleasures and desires regarding our sexuality and body.

When I have been with a man, I have only been with one man. It took me a long time to overcome that social pressure during sex. My belly, how I look etc. It puts much pressure on me, and because I always think about it at that moment, it can prevent me from taking sexual pleasure. Even though I am bisexual, I feel safer and more understanding with women on both sides.<sup>156</sup>

Focusing on the anxiety of our body being admired during sexuality prevents us from focusing on the action we are doing. Due to gender inequality, norms such as “women should be thin,” which are produced especially on women’s bodies, create an ideal body. Body image anxiety causes us to be ashamed of our bodies and unable to focus on our pleasures and desires. Cahill argues, “The body is constituted again, perhaps even more insidiously, as that which the woman needs to struggle against, to control, to whip into shape, despite its inherent tendencies to lapse into an unattractive

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<sup>155</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 2, March 5, 2022.

<sup>156</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 19, March 30, 2022.

appearance.”<sup>157</sup> With the control mechanism produced through the body, the perception of how people should look is constructed. Moreover, this perception is reproduced by creating the fear that the body is not attractive. The interviewee says that

“Tabooed non-hetero relations in Turkey. Tabooing non-heteronormative things also become difficult the sexual experience. Likewise for women. Sexuality outside marriage is complicated for women, as it is not considered normal.”<sup>158</sup>

Accepting a specific sexual relationship as normal complicates the experience of those outside the norm. A heteronormative and binary-based system may also push non-binary and non-heterosexual people to live their sexuality secretly. In this case, the places where people can transfer experience are limited. This case makes it challenging to access services in this field.

Virginity is another significant issue mentioned in the impact of gender identity on sexuality. People perceive virginity as associated with honor, which women should protect until marriage. This perception shapes the sexual practices of especially unmarried women. The interviewee says that

“My girlfriends are at least more problematic in these matters than me. Since virginity is a valuable thing in the country, since the man cannot be detected much, they are hesitant and stressed if it is their first relationship.”<sup>159</sup>

Since their families give importance to chastity, they feel guilty about their sexual relations before marriage. This situation causes women to be stressed during sexual intercourse. Inability to focus and stress during sexuality prevent the moment from being lived in a way focused on taking pleasure. Virginity is a control mechanism over

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<sup>157</sup> Ann J. Cahill, “Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body,” *Hypatia* 15 (1) (2001): 52.

<sup>158</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 19, March 30, 2022.

<sup>159</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 6, March 9, 2022.

the sexuality of people who have a vagina. Kandiyoti refers to the control of the patriarchal system on sexuality, its association with male dignity, the imposition of innocence on women, the reproduction of gender experience, and the cultural impact on all of them.<sup>160</sup> The patriarchal system controls women's bodies by giving meaning to control and virginity. As the interviewee mentioned, bleeding from the hymen is valuable in a society that shows the person has not had sexual activity before. This case points out that people perceive sexuality as just vagina and penis penetration.

Especially women and LGBTIQ+ interviewees state that their gender identity and sexual orientation impact their sexual experiences. Gender also builds expectations from sexuality unequally. The meaning of orgasm is different for each gender identity because people do not assume a right of each gender identity. The interviewee says that

I think that being a cis heterosexual woman shaped my perception of sexuality. As I mentioned, sex without an orgasm is also acceptable. Because, as a pre-acceptance, women do not have an orgasm every time they have sexual intercourse. A women's orgasm is not attainable. This, of course, affects my perception of my sexual practices. It is a very established thing about me.<sup>161</sup>

Unlike those with a penis, it is significant that those with a vagina do not equate sexuality with orgasm. There is no requirement that orgasm is present in every sexual experience. The significant point is that for men, the orgasm is supposed to be at the end of every sexual intercourse, while this is not the case for other gender identities. This situation itself makes sexuality an unequal act. Andrejek, Fetner, and Heath explain, "Among men who had sexual intercourse with a woman in their most recent sexual encounter, 86 percent report having an orgasm. Among women who had sexual

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<sup>160</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies*, 334-335.

<sup>161</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

intercourse with a man, 62 percent report having an orgasm.”<sup>162</sup> The social construction of sexuality also affects the perspective of orgasm. It affects women’s orgasms in heterosexual relationships. Asking how often you had sexual intercourse is calculated regarding the ejaculation of the individual with the penis in a sexual relationship with individuals with a penis. Even the question of how many times you have had sexual intercourse is calculated based on the ejaculation of the man in heterosexual relationships.

Since we live in a heterosexual order, families raise their children on the assumption of heterosexuality. The heteronormative order forces sexuality to be heteronormative as well. It affects the sexuality of non-heteronormative people. The interviewee says that

“I realized late that I am bisexual because of those norms. I thought I was heterosexual and had experienced something like this. I am glad I experience being bisexual; it was a very enjoyable time.”<sup>163</sup>

As the interviewee mentioned, heterosexuality has affected the awareness of sexual orientation as it was shown as normal, and therefore the sexual experiences of the person were affected. On the other hand, gender identities and sexual orientations are fluid. Thus, while we may want to experience our sexuality in a heterosexual relationship, we may also want to experience our sexuality in a homosexual relationship. On the other hand, an interviewee also stated that being queer positively affects sexual experiences. The interviewee says that

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<sup>162</sup> Nicole Andrejek, Tina Fetner and Melanie Heath, “Climax as Work: Heteronormativity, Gender Labor, and the Gender Gap in Orgasms,” *Gender & Society*, 36(2) (2022):198. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08912432211073062> Last access May 25, 2022.

<sup>163</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 9, March 21, 2022.

“I think it has a positive effect on my sexuality. Realizing that I can do things queer and do things my way at some point causes me to shape my sexuality the way I want, which is good for me”.<sup>164</sup>

Awareness of our own identity is at a point that empowers us and can have a power that makes us discover our sexuality. Developing another sexual practice based on our identity in a heteronormative and gender inequality order makes it easier for us to experience our desires and pleasures.

Heterosexual male interviewees also had difficulty observing the effects of their gender identity and sexual orientation on their sexuality. Heterosexual men are in the most privileged position in their sexual experience. This situation affects their perception of sexuality and may prevent them from being aware of the discrimination in society. The interviewees say that

“I honestly do not know.”<sup>165</sup>

“It does not affect the sexual experience because my identity does not come to the fore during sexual activity. We exist as two individuals, also due to my partner.”<sup>166</sup>

“I only have sex as heterosexual; it has no other effect.”<sup>167</sup>

Sexuality is a socialization process. Social norms, judgments, and politics have an impact on sexuality. Both sexuality and gender influence one another. The interviewees in these transmissions may have thought of their sexuality as a physical activity independent of society.

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<sup>164</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 4, March 6, 2022.

<sup>165</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 5, March 7, 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 7, March 16, 2022.

<sup>167</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 18, March 29, 2022.

On the other hand, some heterosexual male interviewees are aware of the privileges brought by their sexual orientation and gender identity. We need to know the social position of other positions to be aware of our social position. One of them says that

Because of society, being a heterosexual man is considered more normal than women or people of other genders, so I grew up a little more liberally than in other classes. Taking training and being curious about something on this subject is considered more normal than others.<sup>168</sup>

This interviewee stated that being male and heterosexual is acceptable by society, emphasizing that accessing information in this field is accessible. It is significant to understand how the sexual experiences of advantageous people in terms of gender and sexual orientation are shaped.

#### **4.1.3. The Effects of Gender Identities and Sexual Orientations on Sexual Health and Reproductive Health**

The general tendency of the interviewees is that women and LGBTIQ+ individuals may have difficulties accessing services in the sexual and reproductive health field. The health system is one of the most significant sexual and reproductive health problems. Since the government sets up the health care system based on gender roles, this is bad for gender identities and sexual orientations. When I asked about the effects of gender identities and sexual orientations on sexual health and reproductive health, the interviewee said,

As a woman, it may be challenging to go to a doctor and get information about this subject because there are people around me who still have sexual taboos in their minds. People are trying to overcome it, but it already exists in society. It might be challenging as a woman. They might be afraid of the reaction they

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<sup>168</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 25, April 6, 2022.

might get. Some doctors have a paternalistic attitude, and it seems like they approach the woman from the perspective of protecting her virginity. It may be, as I mentioned, for LGBT individuals as well. We do not know the attitude of the doctor we meet; sometimes, they may be aggressive. Sometimes I see it on social media; it is mentioned especially if there is an LGBTI-friendly doctor; if you have any suggestions, I would like to go to them. People choose and go because they do not want to face a bad attitude. I do not know for straight men, and I guess I never thought about that part. I do not think it will be very challenging.<sup>169</sup>

The health sector is a field where people encounter sexist and homophobic perspectives. Doctors' attitudes play an active role in accessing services in this field. In *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri*, "Irmak said, 'I had to explain how I had sexual intercourse when I said 'my partner is a woman' in both urology and gynecology examinations'."<sup>170</sup> It is also an indication that the problem in the health sector is independent of METU. Gender identities and sexual orientation perspectives of healthcare professionals affect their experiences towards their patients. Kaptan says, "Being afraid or concerned about going to the gynecologist is unfortunately a very common phenomenon due to exposure of discrimination or maltreatment."<sup>171</sup> This situation shows that the health system discriminates against women and LGBTIQ+ due to their gender identity and sexual orientation. Therefore, they cannot access sexual health, which is a right. Especially women who have sexual relations without being married and LGBTIQ+ individuals are looking for a doctor who is not phobic and non-sexist in this field. METU students also have a concern about the same situation. In the interviews for understanding the space, I observed that the METU Facebook groups shared about this subject. The book *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri* mentioned that the NGO prepared a non-phobic and non-discriminatory gynecologist list and that it is

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<sup>169</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 8, March 21, 2022.

<sup>170</sup> Aslı Alpar, ed., "'Jinekolog Muhabbetleri' ne Yansıyan İhlaller," *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri*, 15.

<sup>171</sup> Seven Kaptan, "Her kaygı ile başa çıkılabilir," *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri*, 34.

empowering to encourage access to doctors.<sup>172</sup> These good examples are crucial for constructing solidarity networks. Among the interviewees, some have information about this list. The interviewee says

“At this point, I think NGOs are very helpful. It is about accessing the right information, reaching LGBT-friendly doctors, etc.”<sup>173</sup>

The awareness of the lists can enable many people to reach reliable doctors. The same interviewee says that

Doctors at Medico<sup>174</sup> are still good, but in these laboratories, for example, while the test is being done, I want to ask the woman who gave the kit for the vagina culture test how much I should put inside it. Will it be enough if I put it inside? Do we need to take it a little further or something? Here she asks me, are you married or single? Are you living a married life? I think she is even familiar with students. I said you could answer me as if you were a married woman, but that is what I asked 3-4 times. Because although she heard the question, she did not want to understand it. ... Finally, I realized that because there was another man in the room, I guess she did not want to answer. After that man left, she said putting inside 2-3 inside cm is enough. I would probably have experienced a similar thing with another doctor in another hospital. Even the doctor is embarrassed, what should the patient do?<sup>175</sup>

This interviewee also relates to a similar discriminatory experience she faced. There are discriminatory statements in the health center at METU. Although the health system in METU is not independent of Turkey, it provides more convenience than Turkey’s health system for students. People assume having sexual intercourse as living married

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<sup>172</sup> Özge, “Fobik Doktorlara Bir Nanik: Türkiye’de Güvenilir Jinekologlara Ulaşmak Mümkün mü?” *Jinekolog Muhabbetleri*, 8.

<sup>173</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 14, March 24, 2022.

<sup>174</sup> Medical Center in METU.

<sup>175</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 14, March 24, 2022.

life is useful data showing that sexuality is legitimate only for married couples. Health personnel attitudes have a direct impact on people's access to information and health services. People cannot access an inclusive service if the health personnel do not give a reliable and correct answer to the question arising from their value judgments.

Our gender identity and sexual orientation influence our interpretation of access to information and services on this subject. If we are in a disadvantaged group, our experience in accessing services and information gives us awareness of this issue. If we are in a privileged position compared to other groups, we may not be aware of the difficulties in this field. Some of the interviewees are heterosexual men with little knowledge of this field. They say,

“I did not know much about this subject. It does not affect me, but it is worth asking.”<sup>176</sup>

“I do not think I can answer this question very well. I have never needed a health request on this matter. I did not know how a homosexual life because their experiences may differ.”<sup>177</sup>

It is because they do not have information about the experiences of people other than their gender identity and sexual orientation, and they cannot experience receiving services in this field. Masculinity is a form of performativity that is also constructed through sexual performance. It is embarrassing for men to go to a doctor in this field because of the meaning that gender attributes to masculinity. Since going to the doctor in this field is matched with a sexual disorder, it causes the perception of degraded masculinity.

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<sup>176</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 5, March 7, 2022.

<sup>177</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 7, March 16, 2022.

Our gender identity and gender role affect accessing services. How we experience our identities is also influential. Some interviewees claimed that being LGBTIQ+ contributes positively or negatively to access to information about sexual and reproductive health. The interviewees say,

“Since LBTIQ+ people form a community with other LGBTIQ+ people, I think the support has increased.”<sup>178</sup>

However, I observe an indirect effect for LGBT+ individuals, as these people usually join organized groups, keep in touch and reflect on these issues, and their awareness is higher to me. So, I guess what they do is conferences etc. I think I face a higher consciousness there because they talk about it when they get together.<sup>179</sup>

The interviewees emphasized the advantages of the organized identity struggle. The METU campus is a living space, and the presence of communities working on gender issues on campus ensures this. In the analysis part of the interviews for understanding the space, interviewees emphasized that the student communities working on gender at METU, although limited, carry out activities about sexual and reproductive health. People’s access to associations and communities in this field and their organization in the struggle significantly impacts access to information. On the other hand, some say that being LGBTIQ+ has adverse effects on access to information in this field. The interviewee says

“An equal sexual health education cannot be reached in the social order. Nonbinary individual or LGBTI+ individual. On the other hand, there is a gap between boys’ and girls’ access to sexual health education.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 2, March 5, 2022.

<sup>179</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 22, April 2, 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 13, March 23, 2022.

Since the knowledge produced in medicine is based on the binary gender system, it is not inclusive. The patriarchal system also has effects in the field of health. The health system is about the body; therefore, the information produced is also about the body. It is significant who produced the information produced in this field. We can also understand the effect of being a subject in this field. If a man produces information about vaginal orgasm in the health sector, it enforces the patriarchal system and ignores the subject's experience. Bozok mentions that because of patriarchy, medical information about new patterns that work and biology that play a founding role in the production process is produced.<sup>181</sup> The sex reductionist production of biology also strengthens the binary gender system. The lack of information about people other than binary gender and heterosexual is a critical obstacle to accessing information. It is vital if the information produced in the health sector is based on gender equality. The lack of reliability of the information in the health field causes difficulties in the health system, especially for women and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Another point is that some say those gender identities and sexual orientations are ineffective because there is no information in the sexual and reproductive health field. The interviewees say that

“I do not think they differ in knowledge because, as I mentioned, since there is not much education, I do not think anyone has access to a very high-quality education.”<sup>182</sup>

“I think everything is done online now. That is why I think everyone's access is the same, but I think that a woman might be embarrassed more.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Nihan Bozok, “The Cyborg with Everybody and All Alone, Between Species and Without an Origin: The Possibilities of a Feminist Body Politics in Donna Haraway's Thought,” *ViraVerita E-Dergi*, 136.

<sup>182</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 26, April 7, 2022.

<sup>183</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 9, March 21, 2022.

The lack of inclusive and accessible education about sexual and reproductive health makes it difficult to access information. On the other hand, the fact that information on the internet and training are sexist and heteronormative affects not only LGBTIQAs but everyone's access to accurate and reliable information. For instance, in an education where the vagina as a female reproductive organ is explained in biology lessons, it is impossible to talk about the existence of queer knowledge.

The interviewees generally had ideas about gender identities and sexual orientations. Women and LGBTIQAs interviewees talk in detail about the impact of their gender identity and sexual orientation on their sexuality. They mention that factors such as norms and cultural values in society negatively affect their sexual experiences. On the other hand, effects are observed at the point that gaining queer awareness provides positive sexuality. Pressures on sexuality harm being able to orgasm. A sexist and homophobic approach to accessing services in the healthcare sector in METU negatively affects the sexual and reproductive health of women and LGBTIQAs. Despite this, the solidarity networks created strengthen it in this regard. I observe the impact of the gender equality movement at METU on access to information in the sexual and reproductive health field. Government institutions do not provide comprehensive, accurate, and reliable information about these topics, strengthening access to information. The heterosexual male interviewees are less aware of discrimination based on gender inequality.

#### **4.2. PERCEPTION OF SEXUALITY, BODY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

I investigate students' perspectives on sexual practices in this section. People's perception of sexuality proceeds with gender. Norm, values, cultural rituals, and social life practices shape people's perspectives on sexuality. Butler argues that "intelligible"

genders establish and maintain a link between gender, sex, desire, and sexual practices.<sup>184</sup> Considering gender is critical to understanding how sexual practices are performed and sustained. Our sexuality, which occurs in parallel to gender, leads to our desires and sexual paths.

I asked questions about their sexual experiences, relationship experiences, orgasm, masturbation, virginity, and body relations to investigate the interviewees' perceptions about sexuality, body, sexual health, and reproductive health. There are differences in the opinions of the interviewees about sexuality. Interviewees defined sexuality through concepts such as emotion, need, performance, desire, and communication. While the interviewees define sexuality, the number of people they specify is related to whether they see sexuality as legitimate. While the interviewees talked about whose sexuality is legitimate, age and consent issues became prominent. The interviewees mentioned that virginity is not significant and is a social imposition. Interviewees generally associated orgasm with pleasure and satisfaction. While the interviewees mentioned general physical well-being regarding sexual and reproductive health, they also mentioned emotional, psychological, and social well-being regarding safe sexuality. The following sections will analyze the answers to these issues in detail.

#### **4.2.1. Sexuality**

The sexuality definitions of the interviewees show the meanings they attach to sexuality. Interviewees associated sexuality with desire, bodily performance, and need. Considering sexuality as performativity makes it easy to associate with gender. Sexuality is an act performed with the body. When the interviewee explains sexuality, she says,

It can be a performance; it can be a bodily performance. You can also consider it as a way of expressing yourself. You can think of it as a bodily need, and it

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<sup>184</sup> Judith Butler, "Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance," *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 23.

can be just that. I do not think we have to attach any meaning. I do not think it is something that should be exaggerated. It is something that has existed since the beginning of evolution and something that has lasted for millions of years. A need and action. I think I qualify this as a need.<sup>185</sup>

People perform sexuality with the body, and body acts determine how people perform it. Social, cultural, and political meanings attributed to sexuality construct the body, and those attributed to the body construct sexuality. The body, desire, and sexuality are interrelated and affect each other. Salamon argues that in sexuality, there is something disassembled with the body as the object of desire and the vehicle of desire. They say that the intensity of sexuality might be felt more intensely in some parts of the body through desire than in others.<sup>186</sup> Which part of our body we use in our sexual experience affects our performativity for the sexual experience. Gender roles determine which part of our body is good for sexual pleasure. Heterosexual men may not want to take pleasure from their anus as they associate anal intercourse with homosexuality. Even if they get sexual pleasure from there, they may not show it. When I asked what sexuality is, the interviewee said,

“It might be the desired thing, the object. The feeling for the object of desire, not necessarily with a partner, the opposite sex, or same-sex partner.”<sup>187</sup>

This interviewee emphasized that sexuality is a feeling for the object of desire. Some individuals consider that sexuality is a concept related to desire. As Butler’s quote above, gender establishes a link between desire and sexuality. There is a desire for a person, an object, an action, or our own body. Simon and Gagnon write, “Desire is not

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<sup>185</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

<sup>186</sup> Gayle Salamon, “The Sexual Schema: Transposition and Transgenderism in Phenomenology of Perception,” *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott’s Critical Feminism*. ed. Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, 21st Century Studies: V. 4. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011): 242, 2022, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=381990&site=eds-live> Last access June 3, 2022.

<sup>187</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 1, March 4, 2022.

reducible to an appetite, a drive, an instinct; it does not create the self, rather it is part of the process of the creation of the self.”<sup>188</sup> Desire is one factor that creates the self rather than being a part of the self. Sexual desire is a part of sexuality, but it does not always have to cause sexuality to act out. Desire is not only related to instinct but also the perspective of sexuality and gender. There are meanings related to sexuality and gender in the desires of individuals. People can perform their desires not only physically but imaginatively as well. Desires are related to sexual pleasures and the whole of sexuality.

Sexuality can be emotional as well as physical. The motivation in sexual experiences can be physical, emotional, rheumatic, or needy. The motivation of sexuality affects the significance and value of sexuality. The interviewee says that

“It feels like two people sharing emotionally.”<sup>189</sup>

As with the interviewee, people might assume sexuality has an emotional meaning. Sexuality can be a physical act that needs the motivation to perform emotionally. People often assume that they can perform between two people. People can also perform sexuality alone or with more than two people. The construction of the perception that sexuality should be between two people is also a force that enhances marriage. It also stands in a place that ignores masturbation. However, experiencing sexuality with only one person can also be a desire, wish, and decision about one’s sexuality.

Another factor in the perception of sexuality is that we assume sexuality with whom and how. Some interviewees emphasized that sexuality can be alone or with more than two people. People can experience sexuality alone, with a partner, or with

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<sup>188</sup> William Simon and John H. Gagnon, “Sexual Scripts,” *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Peter Aggleton, and Richard Parker. (London: Routledge, 2014): 30. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=70791&site=eds-live> Last access June 5, 2022.

<sup>189</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 19, March 30, 2022.

multiple partners. Consent is the key to determining this. The interviewees say about sexuality:

“It can be a person’s self-satisfaction, and one is satisfied with someone else.”<sup>190</sup>

“Sexuality does not need to be two people, in my opinion. First of all, it could be more.”<sup>191</sup>

Such sexual experiences are issues that are not talked about in society. Masturbation and group sex are even more invisible issues than other sexual experiences, such as sexuality between unmarried people in sexuality. Acar Savran argues that the reduction of sexuality to penetration and its naturalization. Also, it causes the naturalization of sexuality as heterosexual sexuality.<sup>192</sup> The perception that sexuality is between two people also reinforces heterosexuality. Since people assume that sexuality is vagina and penis penetration, there is a misconception that it should be between two people. As mentioned by the interviewees, people can perform sexuality alone or with more than two people. Whether or not sexuality is acceptable should not be about how many people experience it together, but how it feels to individuals and whether it is discriminatory.

Whose sexuality is legitimate is a fundamental indicator of the perception of sexuality. The interviewees answered that sexuality is legitimate regarding consent, age, and feeling ready. None of the interviewees considered the legitimacy of sexuality to be based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and status of being married. The interviewees say about the legitimation of sexuality,

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<sup>190</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 8, March 21, 2022.

<sup>191</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 12, March 22, 2022.

<sup>192</sup> Gülnur Acar Savran, “Cinsiyet/ Toplumsal Cinsiyet/ Cinsellik: Biyolojizm ve Toplumsal Kuruluşçuluğun Ötesinde,” *Beden Emek Tarih: Diyalektik Bir Feminizm İçin*, (Ankara, Dipnot Yayınları, 2019): 296.

“I can say anyone old enough to perceive the concept of consent.”<sup>193</sup>

“It is legitimate for consenting and adult individuals.”<sup>194</sup>

As the interviewees pointed out, consent is vital to sexuality. An act without consent cannot be called sexual. It is important to understand the difference between desire and consent. As the Association for Struggle against Sexual Violence says, “When we desire, it does not mean that we also have consent. Our reasons for not giving consent do not have to be social processes. We can also have emotional or physical reasons.”<sup>195</sup> Having sexual desire does not always mean consent.

Another point that the interviewees discussed regarding the legitimacy of sexuality are age. While some interviewees said it was legitimate for people over 18, others said it was legitimate for people over a certain age, even though they did not specify an age. When I asked whose sexuality is legitimate in your opinion, the interviewees said that:

Anyone over a certain age and sane, willing, and consenting can have sex. What I mean by a certain age may change, but if I had a child, the age at which I would suggest sex for them would be 17-18. Before, there may be remorse and ego-bruising.<sup>196</sup>

“I think it is proper for everyone after they reach that age which is okay psychologically.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 24, April 3, 2022.

<sup>194</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, interviewee number 13, March 23, 2022.

<sup>195</sup> “Cinsel Şiddet Kavram Tartışmaları-2: Arzu / Rıza / Rıza İnşası,” Association for Struggle against Sexual Violence, May 29, 2016, <https://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/2016/06/26/kavram-tartismalari-2-arzu-riza-ve-riza-insasi/> Last access 12 June, 2022. (Translation of mine)

<sup>196</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 9, March 21, 2022.

<sup>197</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 12, March 22, 2022.

Sexuality brings some health, psychological, social, and physical responsibilities, both for oneself and partners. There is debate about being over a certain age for consent. One of the most significant issues in consent discussions is the construction of consent. Power inequalities in society may have reflections on sexuality, and these power inequalities may lead to the construction of consent. It may be the main reason for the controversy over age. Sexuality with partners should be legitimate for everyone as long as it is within the legal age limit and consensual.

Commitment to partners was another topic of discussion that the interviewees pointed out. The interviewee says about the legitimization of sexuality:

“As long as they are not married to someone else, there is not a state of cheating; it is legitimate when both sides want it.”<sup>198</sup>

At this point, it is controversial that cheating is based on marriage. People assume married relationships as legitimate, and married people’s cheating is not legitimate. In this answer, while deception was defined, the definition was made over marriage. Opinions of the experiences of monogamy and polygamy can be considered on whether cheating is legitimate.

The interviewees thought differently from society while they were explaining that sexuality was legitimate for them and society. The interviewees stated that sexuality in Turkey is legitimate for married people, heterosexuals, and men. When I asked whose sexuality is legitimate according to society in Turkey, the interviewees said:

“Mostly for married heterosexual people.”<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 6, March 9, 2022.

<sup>199</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 14, March 24, 2022.

“According to society, sexuality justifies it only for people who are heterosexual, married people, and are together with everyone’s knowledge.”<sup>200</sup>

As I mentioned in Rubin’s article in the section on sexual stratification, sexuality contains inequality within itself. It is not assumed legitimate for everyone, even if it is not within an official law. Sexuality is assumed legitimate and feasible for men, married people, and heterosexuals in a heteronormative and patriarchal system, as in Turkey, and state discourses support this. This case may have negative effects on women and LGBTIQ+ sexuality. The interviewees are aware of the perception of sexuality in society. The interviewee says that

It is legitimate for everyone who will ensure the continuation of the patriarchal order and heteronormative values and will not break those stones in society. Heteronormative sexual orientation. I am not saying male, but masculine. People with the qualities that will ensure the continuity of the perception of masculinity.<sup>201</sup>

This interviewee mentioned that sexuality is a means of maintaining heteronormativity and patriarchy. For sexuality to be legitimate, it is expected to maintain the social order. Patriarchy and heteronormative regulate sexuality. A sexuality based on gender roles reproduces masculinity. Butler argues, “In a sense, the implicit regulation of gender takes place through the explicit regulation of sexuality.”<sup>202</sup> The rules that regulate gender also construct our sexuality. Focusing on male pleasure in sexuality is based on gender inequality, which causes women to be unable to discover their pleasure. Marriage status also determines whose sexuality is legitimate and associated with gender roles. People consider marriage the norm in society. The government policies support people in marrying and having children. The state does not consider sexual

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<sup>200</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 21, April 1, 2022.

<sup>201</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 13, March 23, 2022.

<sup>202</sup> Judith Butler, “Gender Regulations,” *Undoing Gender*, 53.

intercourse outside the family institution, which will not ensure the continuation of the family institution, as legitimate. The interviewee says,

Sure, it is legitimate if you are married and have a husband or wife. It is legitimate if you are a woman and have a husband, but if you are a man, there is no value judgment whether you are married or not or are a family. “Bravo” ...to them, and “How could you do this to your husband; how can you have sexual intercourse if you do not have a husband?” God, the inequality between men and women, bothers me.<sup>203</sup>

As emphasized by the interviewee, there is a distinct difference between the perspectives on the sexuality of men and women based on gender inequality. If you are male, it is supported to have any sexual intercourse provided you have a heterosexual sexual relationship. If you are a woman, you are expected to be married to have sexual intercourse. This perception both results from gender inequality and reproduces gender inequality. İlkaracan says, “In most Muslim societies, including Turkey, there is a male-dominated understanding and attitude that assumes women’s bodies and sexuality as belonging to the family, tribe or society, not the women themselves.”<sup>204</sup> Since the state does not assume sexuality as a woman’s act, everyone has the right to speak about women’s sexuality, except for women. It is possible to talk about the influence of religion in patriarchal societies. In societies where masculinity is dominant, it is not desirable for women to have a relationship with their bodies. It is not only about sexuality but also about the physical well-being of women. According to the interviewees, society’s perception and their perceptions of sexuality are different from each other.

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<sup>203</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 30, April 15, 2022.

<sup>204</sup> Pınar İlkaracan, “Giriş: Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik,” *Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik*, comp. Pınar İlkaracan, trans. Ebru Salman (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2018): 11, (Translation of mine).

#### 4.2.2. Virginit

Being a virgin is considered a condition for women to marry. Virginit about marriage is an important issue that restricts sexuality.

“It is hard to generalize, but it legitimates primarily for married people in our society. Also, heterosexual men. Because they have no virginit to lose.”<sup>205</sup>

Virginit is an efficient apparatus for controlling the sexuality of people with a vagina. As the interviewee stated, since men do not have the condition to “lose their virginit,” they can perform sexuality without marriage away from discrimination. This case indicates how sexuality, body, and gender are intertwined. It was mentioned in Kandiyoti’s article how women’s sexuality is controlled through the body. The meaning attributed to virginit also controls the sexuality of especially women through the body. The opinions of the interviewees about virginit are closely related to their perception of sexuality. When I asked the opinion of the interviewee about virginit, she said that:

I think I can say that it is an artificial perception created by society to put pressure on women. So, it is not here, but there are places in the east where bloody sheets<sup>206</sup> are still expected. It is expected you should not have had sexual intercourse until you are married. However, this case is not for men; it is for women.<sup>207</sup>

This interviewee states that although virginit is nothing to her, it has a social meaning. González-López says, “As a social construction, virginit is expressed through public symbols. A woman’s emblematic virtue is not private; it becomes a family and a

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<sup>205</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 11, March 22, 2022.

<sup>206</sup> Since there is a perception in society that blood should come from the vagina in the first sexual intercourse, some families want to see the bloody sheet after marriage to prove that the bride has not had sexual intercourse before.

<sup>207</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 29, April 12, 2022.

community asset.”<sup>208</sup> The social meaning of virginity has a symbolic meaning that deprives women’s sexuality of being private and is constructed as a social belonging. Women’s orgasm, sexual experiences, and sexual pleasures should be examined together with the social meanings of virginity. The perception of chastity in society shapes the sexual practices of women by controlling their bodies. The interviewee says about virginity:

“As I said, something that comes with defining this thing is defining sexuality anyway. When you get this idea that it is not just about penetration, the virginity that society gives you goes away.”<sup>209</sup>

Since virginity is associated with the hymen and its bleeding, when people define the first sexual experience as vagina and penis penetration, the meaning attributed to virginity by society might become meaningless. Whether the woman has had sexual intercourse involving only penetration or not is controlled through virginity. It is the definition of sexuality that influences this point. Since sexuality is perceived as an action between men and women in society and is defined as the penetration of the penis and vagina, sexual acts that occur outside of this are ignored. Especially some heterosexual male interviewees defined virginity in line with social perception. The male interviewee says about virginity:

“It does not mean much, but it is like an unimpaired space since there is no sexual intercourse.”<sup>210</sup>

The interviewee assumes having sexual intercourse is unimpaired. At this point, it affects the perception established over the hymen. Since the hymen is accepted as a

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<sup>208</sup> Gloria González-López, “Introduction,” *Erotic Journeys : Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives*, (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2005): 5, <https://0-search-ebscobhost.com.opac.bilgi.edu.tr/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspmu&AN=edspmu.MUSE9780520936133.7&site=eds-live> Last access June 13, 2022.

<sup>209</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 20, April 1,4, 2022.

<sup>210</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 6, March 9, 2022.

physical part of the body that might be deflowered in society, there is a perception that it will damage people similarly in their sexuality. We can also understand the relationship between the body and ecology. In the patriarchal system, people assume that nature is associated with being a woman. Natural areas are called virgin land. The same participant answered whether it is significant for your partner to have sexual intercourse before. Some interviewee says,

It does not matter to me, but it is still a question mark in people's minds as men or girls, as I face and hear both sides. Is it me or him, does he love him or me, is it me, or is he better? Makes a question mark as a man or a girl. However, it does not make much of a difference to me.<sup>211</sup>

People's previous sexual intercourse may cause performance anxiety in their partners. The reason for this is parallel to the meaning attributed to masculinity socially. Society expects that the man is strong and direct in terms of sexual performance. It may cause men to feel no desire to be the best at sexuality.

Most interviewees stated that in parallel with the significance of virginity, whether their partner had sexual intercourse before them is not significant. Among the interviewees, some preferred to have had sexual intercourse before. Some interviewees stated that if it were their first experience, they would also want their partner to have their first experience. Some of them say about this issue:

“No, it does not matter because we have been living our lives until today. They may have had experience with another person. It may happen after me; it is natural.”<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 2, March 5, 2022.

It does not matter to me because I do not care much about her past. She has a good relationship with me now. I do not care too much about what she did or did not do in the past. What matters is what she does with me.<sup>213</sup>

These interviewees do not consider it significant whether their partner has sexual intercourse when the interviewees are not in their life. People may attach significance to whether their partner has a sexual experience with someone else during their relationship. This case is related to the meaning given to monogamy. Despite this, not attributing importance to their partners' previous sexual experiences is equivalent to not attaching any meaning to virginity. When I asked the interviewee why it was important whether her partner had previous sexual experience, she said:

“It is important to me because it would be my first relationship. So, there is a relationship; if I am experiencing something for the first time, I expect the same excitement on the other side. I approach it emotionally.”<sup>214</sup>

At this point, there is a desire to share an experience. The interviewee expects that the excitement of the first sexual experience will be shared in line with the meaning that the attribute of sexuality should be emotional. Performance anxiety and the desire to be liked also play a role in these situations. If the partner will also have their first sexual experience, it is not possible to judge the other partner by being inexperienced. Men are the socially stronger group in the relationship between women and men. Thus, women have anxiety about being judged for their sexual performance and appearance. The other interviewee says about the same question:

I wish it were not significant, but it does. I would like my partners to have a sexual experience. It does not matter if my partner is men or a woman. It is good for me that they have experience. Besides, they will be someone who

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<sup>213</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 16, March 28, 2022.

<sup>214</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 19, March 30, 2022.

knows their act; they will not have any excitement. They will be good at it. I love sexuality. I want to be the person who teaches them. Not a judgment as if you have never done it; I want to be doing the action at that moment.<sup>215</sup>

There is also an experienced status within the act of sexuality. While virginity is important for some people, it is essential to be sexually experienced. The power status within sexuality also includes the hierarchy of experience. There may be an experienced transfer and social stratification created by the relationship between the teacher and the learner in sexuality.

Even if there is a difference between their perception of sexuality and society's perception of sexuality, the perception in the society affects their experience. The interviewee says,

When I went out after my first sexual intercourse and was not alone in this, my other female friends felt the same; it felt very strange. When I went out, I felt like everyone was looking at me. It is like everyone understands that I am having sex.<sup>216</sup>

At this point, we can understand the experiential result of the socially constructed pressure on women to be virgins. Women are afraid that nonmarital sexual intercourse that people will notice. The reason for this is the pressure from their families, circles, and official institutions when this is understood. The other interviewee says,

Yes, when we have sexual activity, does the neighbor hear our voice? If they hear it, what will the neighbor think? What does the cashier think when buying a condom? Even if the person is not thinking anything, even if the neighbor does not hear, I realize that I am always thinking. It has an effect of increasing anxiety; it affects negatively.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 9, March 21, 2022.

<sup>216</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

<sup>217</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 7, March 16, 2022.

The perception of sexuality in society has an impact on our sexual experiences. When we take pleasure from sexuality, not making a sound out of fear of being judged by our neighbors is a fear that directly affects our sexual practice. The fear of being judged when accessing a condom, which is critical for sexual health, affects our sexual experiences and feelings. Performing sexual acts with anxieties and fears also affects sexual pleasure negatively.

#### **4.2.3. Masturbation and Orgasm**

The point of view towards masturbation and orgasm is also among the attitudes caused by the perception of sexuality. Therefore, investigating the opinions of the interviewees on these issues plays an efficient role in understanding their experiences with sexuality. Some interviewees legitimize masturbation as a natural process. The interviewee says below about masturbation,

“Something natural.”<sup>218</sup>

The naturalization process enables people to legitimize people’s actions. Masturbation appears not only for pleasure but also as a natural act and is associated with health due to the need to gain legitimacy. Epstein and Mamo argue that sexuality needs to be specifically justified, especially since some types of sexuality are assumed taboo, and the pairing of sexuality with health provides the ground for legitimation.<sup>219</sup> People do not assume that sexuality is for only pleasure and desire as legitimate. It is why people feel the need to justify their sexual acts. People can experience masturbation to get sexual pleasure.

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<sup>218</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 15, March 24, 2022.

<sup>219</sup> Epstein Steven and Laura Mamo. “The Proliferation of Sexual Health: Diverse Social Problems and the Legitimation of Sexuality,” *Social Science & Medicine* 188 (2017): 178. [doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.06.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.06.033) Last access June 3, 2022.

Whether masturbation is legitimate or not depends on gender identities. Masturbation is establishing a relationship with the body. Women are not supported to interact with their bodies. How individuals should relate in parallel with their gender identities is transferred from family to children in a sexist and heteronormative manner. The interviewee says that

We start getting to know our bodies later. For example, there is something for men, when he is 12-13 years old, his father comes into his room and says let us talk man to man. When I was 12-13 years old, my mother did not come and say let us talk to the woman to woman. He just told me what menstruation was; I knew what it was to be menstruation. However, a man also learns something about his sexuality. If talking about it starts in the family. It is not a secret or taboo for men, but we discover our bodies and masturbation later. Also, every time we have sexual intercourse, at least since I do not have an orgasm, masturbation is necessary at some point, and I consider it a self-reward mechanism.<sup>220</sup>

As this interviewee mentioned, men and women have different perspectives on masturbation in the binary gender system. In the book *I Love Female Orgasm*, a woman says about her experience, “My father talked about masturbation as if it is something normal for boys but ‘only some kinds of girl’ do.”<sup>221</sup> The perception of sexuality, in which gender inequality is shaped, affects the way families give information about sexuality to their children. The environment in which individuals experience their first socialization process is the family. Changing the information given by the parents about sexuality according to gender identity also enforces gender inequality in sexuality. While families consider teaching masturbation to boys as natural, they consider it inappropriate for girls. Due to sperm production in people with a penis, ejaculation is

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<sup>220</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

<sup>221</sup> Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, “Tavşancığın Okşamak: Mastürbasyon ve Kadın Orgazmı,” *Yaşasın Orgazm: Kadınlar için Sıradışı Bir Orgazm Rehberi*, trans. Deniz Aycan, (İstanbul, Aganta Kitap, 2020): 51.

assumed as necessary for health that this process naturalizes men’s masturbation. The interviewee says that

“Sometimes women are okay to have sex without orgasm. They have taken for granted, and so have I.”<sup>222</sup>

Women and LGBTIQAs have difficulty discovering their pleasures, bodies, and desires, as taking pleasure from sexuality other than the sexuality of heterosexual men is ignored. Solot and Miller mention that they encounter many women who experience their first orgasm at a later age.<sup>223</sup> The inability of women to recognize their bodies due to social and political values and norms affects their knowledge of what they receive sexual pleasure. Some of the women are not sure whether they have an orgasm or not. For men, having an orgasm is assumed to be the end of sexuality. Orgasm turns into an action that is difficult to achieve. The interviewee says,

“It is necessary that partners care for each other in this regard. Orgasm in sexuality should be assumed as an important thing and should be tried to be reached.”<sup>224</sup>

Orgasm is part of sexuality. The aim of sexuality is not just to have an orgasm, but sexuality itself should be experienced as a pleasurable experience. Assuming orgasm as a right for only a gender identity and sexual orientation causes inequality in sexuality. According to a study held by Kadının İnsan Hakları–Yeni Çözümler Association, orgasm is part of the human right to take pleasure. However, sexuality is not just about orgasm.<sup>225</sup> Taking sexual pleasure is a human right of all genders and sexual orientations. The struggle for gender equality is also related to this right. As

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<sup>222</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 3, March 6, 2022.

<sup>223</sup> Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, “Tavşancığı Okşamak: Mastürbasyon ve Kadın Orgazmı,” *Yaşasın Orgazm: Kadınlar İçin Sıradışı Bir Orgazm Rehberi*, 71.

<sup>224</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 20, April 1,4 2022.

<sup>225</sup> Nuran Akıncı, İpek İlkaracan Ajas, and Nigar Etizer Karacık et al., *Cinselliğimiz Var!* (İstanbul, Kadının İnsan Hakları- Yeni Çözümler Derneği, 2018): 10,16. [https://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/18475\\_KIHYC\\_CinselligimizVar\\_web.pdf](https://www.kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/18475_KIHYC_CinselligimizVar_web.pdf) Last access June 12, 2022.

mentioned by the women interviewees, considering orgasm as a part of sexual experience and their partners taking responsibility for each other's pleasures are related to recognizing this as a right for their partner.

#### **4.2.4. Perception of Sexual Health and Reproductive Health**

Inequalities in sexuality have an impact on access to sexual and reproductive health care. Sexual and reproductive health is a human right like sexuality. The interviewees' perception of sexual and reproductive health affects their experiences, their sexuality, and their opinions toward sexual and reproductive health. Thus, examining the interviewees' perceptions on this topic is fundamental. I noticed that the people I talked to had two different ideas about what sexual health, reproductive health, and safe sexuality were. Some interviewees defined these definitions as protection from STIs and unwanted pregnancies, while others also mentioned psychological well-being. The interviewee says,

“Reproductive health is about reproduction; they have to mean different things. Sexual health is the psychological and physical state of the individual in sexual matters.”<sup>226</sup>

“When we say safe sex, we mean sexual intercourse in a safe environment, voluntarily, and trusting the other person.”<sup>227</sup>

Although the interviewee states a difference between sexual health and reproductive health, they are two interrelated issues. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) argues sexual and reproductive health is related to the freedom to decide whether to reproduce or not and when and how often to do it.<sup>228</sup> Despite this, as we can see in the

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<sup>226</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 11, March 22, 2022.

<sup>227</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 28, April 9, 2022.

<sup>228</sup> “Sexual and Reproductive Health,” United Nations Population Fund, <https://www.unfpa.org/sexual-reproductive-health#readmore-expand> Last access June 3, 2022.

expression of the interviewee, reproductive health is mainly thought about being pregnant and having children. Sexuality is socially assumed to be an act of reproduction, especially for women. This situation causes the relationship between contraceptive methods and reproductive health to be missed. Understanding sexual and reproductive health with an inclusive approach also empowers us to access our rights on this topic. As emphasized by the interviewee in the definition of sexual health, sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical well-being and social and psychological well-being. UNFPA also says, “Good sexual and reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system.”<sup>229</sup> Suppose people know that sexual and reproductive health is a state of social and psychological well-being. In that case, people recognize that consent and being away from discrimination are also a part of this. Thus, constructing sexuality through heterosexual relationships is a condition that harms sexual and reproductive health. While the interviewees refer to social and psychological well-being in terms of safe sexuality, which is a part of sexual and reproductive health, they generally refer to physical well-being in terms of sexual and reproductive health.

Being healthy is also a status indicator in society. When a subject such as sexuality, considered shameful to talk about, is combined with sexually transmitted infections, discrimination against individuals living with STIs is produced. Sontag argues that people have dual citizenship in the “healthy” and the “patient” countries.<sup>230</sup> Whether or not we are healthy creates a social status among people, such as the country’s passport we have. When talking about sexually transmitted infections, the interviewees used the word catching rather than infected. The interviewee says,

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Susan Sontag, “Metafor olarak Hastalık,” *Metafor Olarak Hastalık, AIDS ve Meteforları*, 13.

“In situations where protection is not very possible, I may have concerns about picking up or communicating disease.”<sup>231</sup>

Coding STIs as a disease and calling as the dose of clap cause discrimination. While being sick itself harms social status, this may increase anxiety when the subject is a sexually transmitted infection.

#### **4.3. ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

The perception of sexuality in society and government policies make it difficult to access sexual and reproductive health. This topic’s information access supports secure service, and service access supports information access. Therefore, knowledge and service are inseparable. I should address education, health, civil society, social services, and social policy issues in accessing information and services.

Interviewees generally stated they did not receive training on sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Most interviewees said that they share this with their friends in this field and that these shares are good for them. While heterosexual male participants stated that they did not go to the doctor about sexual health and reproductive health because it was unnecessary, women and LGBTIQ+ participants noted the reason for not going to the doctor was fear of being judged. The interviewees said that the fear of being judged and the high price of the products negatively affect access to sexual health and reproductive health products, such as a condom.

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<sup>231</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 14, March 24, 2022.

### **4.3.1. Access to Information about Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

Most interviewees stated they did not receive any sexual and reproductive health training. Most of those who stated that they received education said that the education about menstruation is given only to girls in secondary or high school or the section in which reproduction is in science lessons. The interviewee says that

When we first entered puberty, they separated the girls from the boys and gave the girls pads. It was at the beginning of middle school, in the 6th grade. All I remember is that it was weird for them to separate us. Later they gave us packages, and it looked like we had to hide them from the men.<sup>232</sup>

The government institutions explain sexual health and reproductive health only concerning menstruation. As in the example mentioned by the interviewee, the training content also supports discrimination against menstruation. Inclusive, empowering, and non-discriminatory training in this field can provide safety information about sexual and reproductive health.

All of the participants emphasized that there should be training in this field. It shows that young people need accurate and reliable information in this field. The participants explained who and what content they needed training in the following ways. The interviewees say,

I think it definitely should. I noticed this when I first had sexuality. So, there is a huge deficiency. There is a huge lack of information. Everyone is shy when talking, even among our friends, which I do not think should happen. I think it is normal at school, and they need to tell us it is normal.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 11, March 22, 2022.

<sup>233</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 21, April 1, 2022.

“I think it should be because many people in Turkish society are unaware of this issue, and as such, they cannot have a healthy sexuality.”<sup>234</sup>

As stated by the interviewees, the lack of education in this field affects sexual experiences negatively. The general situation in Turkey is not different from what the interviewees stated. Sexual health, reproductive health, and education policies throughout Turkey also affect the situation of METU students, especially until they come to university. The interviewees are aware of this need and the consequences of the lack of training. Regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health Situation Analysis in Turkey Report, Lack of education in schools, insufficient educational resources, and studies about sexual and reproductive health cause young people and adolescents to engage in risky behaviors and negatively affect their sexual and reproductive health.<sup>235</sup> Individuals who have not received sexual and reproductive health education have sexual experiences without knowing the methods of protection from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. In this case, they do not know how to physically and socially protect themselves. It may negatively affect their physical and mental health.

The interviewees emphasized that this is an environment where they can share their thoughts about this topic in general and that it is good for them. The lack of official information about this topic may cause us to create alternative areas. The spaces we create for ourselves strengthen us in our discussions of the issues. Disadvantaged groups such as women, youth, and LGBTIQA+s create these spaces that support them to speak about their bodies as subjects. The interviewee says about this issue,

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<sup>234</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 28, April 9, 2022.

<sup>235</sup> Ayşegül Esin and Sare Mihçioğur, et al., “Türkiye’de Kapsamlı Cinsellik Eğitimi,” *Türkiye’de Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Durum Analizi Raporu*, (İstanbul: Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Hakları Platformu,2021): 97. <https://www.stgm.org.tr/e-kutuphane/turkiyede-cinsel-saglik-ureme-sagligi-durum-analizi-raporu> Last access June 3, 2022.

“Since we are coeval and going through similar processes, we feed off each other. It is comforting to share with someone; it is nice to hear similar things from them. It feels good when I am feeling alone.”<sup>236</sup>

Based on what the interviewee said, we can say that the transfer of experience among peers prevents the feeling of loneliness. Experience partnerships convince us that we have done nothing wrong and are not guilty by showing that we are not alone. Bozok says knowing that we are not alone and others are going through similar experiences helps us become empowered, especially in situations deemed too private, such as illness.<sup>237</sup> Illness and sexuality have similar characteristics, assuming they are limited to the private sphere. Moreover, people do not consider it right to talk about them too much. It is challenging to talk about sexual and reproductive health-related infections. The reason is that society has a discriminatory and judgmental attitude towards this issue. Since there is no education about sexual and reproductive health, there is a need to transfer experience on this subject. Talking about this issue with people with common characteristics supports them in understanding that they are not alone while empowering them on this topic.

#### **4.3.2. Access to Health Care**

In this section, I investigate the interviewees’ access to health care. The state’s discourses and society’s point of view make it difficult to access services in this field. In addition, gender identities outside the binary gender system have difficulties, especially in accessing health services. Gender inequality affects accessing services in

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<sup>236</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 26, April 7, 2022.

<sup>237</sup> Nihan Bozok, “On Explaining Illness, Revealing One’s Ailment to the World, Forming Solidarity and Empowerment: Women’s Self-Narratives that Raise and Vibrate Dialogues of Healing,” *Culture & Communication/ Kültür ve İletişim*, 23(45) (2020): 19.  
<https://doi.org/10.18691/kulturveiletisim.710175> Last access June 10, 2022.

this field. The limited accessibility of the vaginal condom in Turkey results from this. Therefore, investigating access to services in this field plays a vital role in this study.

The status of going to a doctor for sexual and reproductive health among the interviewees varies, and gender identity plays a role in this. They stated that there is no need or fear of being judged in cases of not going to the doctor. The interviewee, who is a heterosexual man, says

“I have never felt a need for this, but if it does, I will not hesitate to go.”<sup>238</sup>

It is a need for someone who is sexually active to go to a doctor about sexual and reproductive health. The person does not know why they should go to the doctor because they have not been trained in this field before. For STIs, it is necessary to be tested at regular times. Another reason may be related to the production of sexist biological information. Therefore, the assumption is that women as more biological than men. It is a misconception that due to being more biological creatures than men, so it is a need for only women to go to the doctor. Sexual and reproductive health is assumed reproduction for women, affecting this perception about going doctor. Grosz explains that thought based on essentialism and misogyny reduces women’s biological needs for reproduction by assuming that women are more biological, more natural, and more bodily than men due to certain biological and physical transformations.<sup>239</sup> Concerning biology, the health sector is affected by gender inequality. Assumed that women are more body-related than men, medicalize the woman and her body. The perception that a woman’s biological needs are only related to reproduction is constructed. Menstruation is necessary to ensure reproduction, and going to the doctor about menstruation is considered legitimate and encouraged. Thus, it is assumed that men go to the doctor more unnecessary than women.

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<sup>238</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 23, April 2, 2022.

<sup>239</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “Introduction,” *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): 14.

The reason why sexually active and unmarried women do not go to the doctor is the fear of being judged. The attitude and behavior of gynecologists are significant. An interviewee explained why she did not go to the doctor as,

I get news like this when you go to the doctors for anything, doctors ask if are you married instead of the status of sexually active. ... So, I do not want to do too much. So, I do not want to confront.<sup>240</sup>

The discriminatory approaches of health personnel hinder access to sexual and reproductive health services. Policies, culture, and social values shape the attitude of health personnel. They ask this question to determine the type of examination, as there is a perception in society that an unmarried person will not have a sexual experience. When someone who is sexually active but not married answers that she is not married, the doctor will think that the person is not sexually active. Doctors might determine the kind of health test according to this answer. This case might complicate people's health checks and detect possible problems.

There are also good examples in the field of sexual and reproductive health. Some local governments have anonymous HIV centers. In the Public Health Center in Çankaya<sup>241</sup> Municipality, within the scope of combating HIV/AIDS, Counseling and anonymous testing services are provided to people at risk without seeking social security.<sup>242</sup> Consulting on this issue enables people to gain knowledge in this field. Moreover, testing anonymously prevents avoiding tested for fear of stigma. The interviewee says who is gay,

I said that I wanted to get tested, there was a risk. His reaction was not very good. The man was not in a warm attitude like okay, let us help. Instead, he

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<sup>240</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 20, April 1,4 2022.

<sup>241</sup> Çankaya is the most populous district of Ankara, which also includes METU.

<sup>242</sup> "Gönüllü Danışmanlık ve Test Hizmetleri," Çankaya Belediyesi, <https://www.cankaya.bel.tr/pages/6314/Gonullu-Test-ve-Danismanlik-Hizmetleri/> Last access June 14, 2022.

displayed a somewhat disturbing attitude by saying you know what you do is not a precaution. Then I went to Çankaya. They said they could not test everything there but would give an information beforehand. The information was very good; I did not feel uncomfortable. I found it healthy. I even said why I did not know this before; these are the things I should know.<sup>243</sup>

This situation shows us the significance of consultancy centers in this field in local governments. Especially young people, LGBTIQAs, and women need to get information in this field without facing discriminatory reactions. It is not enough to carry out only sexual health tests in health institutions; information should also be given, as in this example. The increase in such examples will positively affect people's experiences in this field.

#### **4.3.3. Access to Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Products**

Access to contraception is critical to avoid STIs and unwanted pregnancies. Questioning kinds of methods and their purpose gives clues about their access. Penis condoms and birth control pills are more accessible than other methods in Turkey. The interviewees stated that they generally use these methods to protect themselves from STIs and unwanted pregnancies. The interviewee says,

“Because it is the most accessible condom. There are many methods. However, most methods are also about women's bodies.”<sup>244</sup>

As this participant stated, all methods of protection from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, except condoms and vasectomy, are for women. The control mechanism over women's bodies is politically constructed. Reproduction is

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<sup>243</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 8, March 21, 2022.

<sup>244</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 7, March 16, 2022.

assumed to be a woman's responsibility. These situations shape medical methods. The interviewee says that

“I use condoms and nothing else.”<sup>245</sup>

Most interviewees stated that they use condoms. People can buy condoms for their penis from many places such as pharmacies, the internet, and markets. Therefore, it is physically easy to access. The situation in Turkey is also in line with the interviewees' experiences. According to the research on the sexual and research health of young people, 59.1 percent of the young people who heard about STIs stated that there is a way of contraception stated condoms as a way of protection.<sup>246</sup> Information and access impact deciding which method to use to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancies. Condom is the most well-known method among young people in Turkey, as we can understand from the case of METU. I argue that individuals with a penis use condoms facilitate access because male sexuality is an act supported by society.

Among the interviewees, those who stated that they had difficulty accessing condoms stated that the fear of judgment and the high price of condoms cause difficulties in accessing them. The interviewee says that

“So, it may be financially expensive. The exorbitant prices of the more reliable brands than others might be a challenge.”<sup>247</sup>

The lack of income of university students makes it difficult to access high-priced condoms. The state should provide condoms for free for condoms to be accessible. Ensuring this will primarily support young people in sexual and reproductive health. It

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<sup>245</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 18, March 29, 2022.

<sup>246</sup> Hilal Özcebe and Turgay Ünalın et al., “Knowledge on Sexually Transmitted Infections,” *2007 Turkey, Youth Sexual And Reproductive Health Survey*, (Ankara: United Nations Population Fund, 2007): 16. <https://turkiye.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/genclerdeciinselsaglik.pdf> Last access August 21, 2022.

<sup>247</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 24, April 3, 2022.

will significantly reduce the risk of transmission of STIs and unwanted pregnancy. According to the Sexual and Reproductive Health Situation Analysis in Turkey Report, participants had difficulties meeting their needs due to the high prices of condoms.<sup>248</sup> The difficulties encountered by the youth regarding the price of access to condoms are not only a problem specific to METU but also a problem throughout Turkey. This situation shows the need to work on this subject throughout Turkey. Interviewee 4 stated that there are NGOs where we can obtain condoms for free, but not many young people know about this issue. Increasing the access of NGOs to young people and producing social policies on free access to these materials are the main steps to be taken toward protecting sexual and reproductive health.

Accessing products such as condoms in public means that people understand that you are sexually active. There is a privacy concern when accessing these products, especially for those who do not want their families to learn that people are sexually active. There may be fear of being judged, especially since the sexuality of women is not considered normal in society. Interviewees also had different gender identities among those who feared being judged. The interviewee says that

“It may happen something like no one sees it. When I buy, I want people not to see it.”<sup>249</sup>

A condom is not the same as buying any product from the market. Since buying a condom indicates that a person has a sexual life, people may be afraid of the reactions they may encounter. In this case, it is a barrier to my access to these products. For these reasons, some participants said they prefer places such as pharmacies or cosmetics stores because they are professional. Judgment in society shapes where we get these products.

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<sup>248</sup> Ayşegül Esin and Sare Mihçioğur, “Genç Kadınlar ile Odak Grup Görüşmesi,” *Türkiye’de Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Durum Analizi Raporu*, 234.

<sup>249</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 16, March 28, 2022.

#### **4.4. POLICIES AND CHALLENGES ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

Most interviewees think government policies harm sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. In the section about Turkey's situation on sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, I discussed the effects of state policies on sexuality associated with gender inequality. The interviewees are aware of Turkey's political situation in this field and its effects on their lives. In the section on access to services and health services in this field, the difficulties in access that interviewees emphasized government policies. As mentioned in the other section, they stated that government policies ignore sexuality and sexual orientation. The policies also cause difficulties accessing the HPV vaccine and abortion.

One of the most vital difficulties in Turkey in this regard is the difficulty in accessing the HPV vaccine. Accessing the vaccine is vital, as condoms do not provide superior protection against HPV, and this virus may cause cervical cancer in individuals with a vagina.

I got the HPV vaccine with the HPV scholarship this year.<sup>250</sup> Access to sexual health and hygiene products such as pads indicates prosperity. It even challenges me. So, I think there are terrible policies. Politically, my access to my basic health rights on my body has been hindered rather than supported by state policies.<sup>251</sup>

Sanitary pads are the monthly need of people who have menstruation every month. High taxes on these products make it difficult to access them, especially for young people. High taxes indicate that the state assumed it as a luxury. The same issue affects

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<sup>250</sup> A pharmacy provides HPV vaccine to women who do not have the opportunity, which is called a scholarship campaign for HPV vaccine.

<sup>251</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 13, March 23, 2022.

the price of HPV vaccines. The price of the HPV vaccine, vital in preventing cervical cancer, prevents young people from accessing the vaccine. As this interviewee stated, there are good examples, such as the HPV vaccine scholarship. A pharmacist initiates the HPV vaccine scholarship campaign for underprivileged people. This case supports the access of young people.<sup>252</sup> Although this is a good example, it is not sustainable and not accessible to everyone. Thus, the vital thing is that the state should include the HPV vaccine in its vaccination program and provide free access to everyone regardless of gender.

Access to abortion is difficult, especially in public hospitals. Since there is access to abortion in private hospitals, this situation makes it difficult for young people to access abortion due to economic reasons as well as social pressure. Most interviewees, considering abortion as a right, also mentioned the difficulties in accessing it. The interviewee says,

Abortion should be legal; I think even the state should afford it. As far as I know, it is still legal at the moment, there is no problem, but there is a certain time. I do not remember exactly how much. There is a state hospital in Ankara that does this. I am not so sure if I am not mistaken. There is usually it in private, but when such a situation is encountered, not every woman or couple can afford it. That is why I think the state should help.<sup>253</sup>

As this interviewee mentioned, access to abortion depends on the ability to afford it. Abortion is a human right, and the state should not prevent it. Policies prevent abortion cause problems in terms of sexual and reproductive health. With the policies it produces over the body, the state equates reproductive rights with only having children and tries to control women's childbearing by ignoring their wishes. State policies may also cause

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<sup>252</sup> Ayşegül Kasap, "HPV Aşısı için Burs Kampanyası: Devlete yapması gerekeni gösteriyoruz," *Diken*, June 19, 2021, <https://www.diken.com.tr/hpv-asisi-icin-burs-kampanyasi-devlete-yapmasi-gerekeni-gosteriyoruz/> Last access June 14, 2022.

<sup>253</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 29, April 12, 2022.

psychological violence by addressing the right of the fetus to live by creating a sense of guilt in those who have abortions. Arcana mentioned that abortion is related to motherhood. Arcana emphasizes that abortion is assumed to be an issue related to motherhood. Arcana associates the feeling of guilt created by the anti-abortion movement with terror.<sup>254</sup> Ignoring women as subjects causes women cannot make decisions about their own lives. The construction of the perception that the fetus is human imposes an emotional responsibility on women. It is emotional and psychological violence. The issue of abortion is a human right and freedom issue beyond motherhood. Abortion should not depend on the system's limitations but on the willingness of the person who will or will not have an abortion.

Another difficulty stated by the interviewees is the inability to find spaces where young people perform sexuality and cannot access privacy. The interviewee who lives dormitory says,

It is already banned in the dorms. Especially at the age when I started to be sexually active, people did not have their own houses yet. Let us say you are with someone who lives with their family. So not in the family home anyway. Daily rentals, ridiculous hotels, my friend's houses. It should be easier. So, for example, a family should be ok with this so that their child does not suffer.<sup>255</sup>

The general tendency in families is that their children should not have sexual intercourse before marriage. Young people living with their families do not have a place to perform their sexuality. Students often stay in dorm rooms for more than one person. This situation prevents not only sexual intercourse with partners but also masturbation. There are political influences in the construction of spaces. Doan argues, "Gender strongly influences the ways spaces are perceived and the kinds of activities

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<sup>254</sup> Judith Arcana, "Abortion is a Motherhood Issue," *Women's Health*, (1991, updated 1994 and 2005): 225, 227.

<sup>255</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 17, March 29, 2022.

that are possible, acceptable, or even safe within them.”<sup>256</sup> The effect of gender is evident in the organization of dormitories as a place. Since the state does not consider sexuality as a right to staking pleasure or a need, there is no area where students can have sexual intercourse and they can access privacy. Anticipated and unexpected behaviors of people from one another are associated with space construction. Since it is socially, culturally, and politically expected of us not to perform any sexual activity, including masturbation, there is no room for privacy in the dormitories.

#### **4.5. THE IMPACT OF METU AS A PLACE ON EXPERIENCES ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

Since the interviewees are METU students, there is an effect of METU on experiences in the field of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Therefore, I examined the impact of space on sexual experiences, access to services, and information. The interviewees also stated that METU positively impacted information and access in this field, and those who said it had no effect.

Students who came to METU during the pandemic did not want to comment on these questions as they did not have much time to spend on campus. The student who enters METU in 2020 says,

“I have not been to METU much since it is an online system, I cannot comment much, but it did not have a bad effect. It did not make much of a difference either.”<sup>257</sup>

The socialization process is necessary for knowledge transfer. METU has a large campus, and students used to spend most of their time on campus. The pandemic

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<sup>256</sup> Petra L Doan, “The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces- Reflections from beyond the Gender Dichotomy,” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 649.

<sup>257</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 10, March 22, 2022.

prevented this case. Therefore, those who entered METU in 2020 and 2021 did not experience many things spatially. Whether METU has an impact on access to information, services in this field, or their sexual experience, it has not had a significant impact on the experiences of these students yet.

The perspective of sexuality affects sexual practices and access to information in an environment. The interviewees who stated the positive effects of METU on sexuality, sexual and reproduction health explained that METU is a more liberal environment than most of University in Turkey. The interviewee says,

I grew up in a slightly rural place. Since I am in a place<sup>258</sup> where there are more people with more open communication in an environment with fewer filters and where they can express what they want, I know more about it than they who are placed where I grew up. ... You can also provide a comfortable flow of information about sexual intercourse and orientation in a comfortable environment.<sup>259</sup>

It is significant for this participant to compare the place where she grew up with METU to understand the spatial difference. If there is no judgment about sexuality, it will be easier to talk about it. It will be easier for us to access information and services about the subject we can discuss. İlkaracan and Seral mention that women and sexuality are still taboo in Turkey. They say that access to accurate and reliable information is difficult since formal education systems and informal systems such as family and community do not give any information about this topic.<sup>260</sup> Sexuality is taboo in Turkey preventing information on this subject. Thanks to the gender equality movements in METU, students can experience this issue as more libertarian than in Turkey. The environment at METU supports the flow of information and sexual experiences among

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<sup>258</sup> The interviewee was talking about METU.

<sup>259</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 27, April 7, 2022.

<sup>260</sup> İpek İlkaracan and Gülşah Seral, "Kadının İnsan Hakkı Olarak Cinsel Haz: Türkiye'deki Bir Taban Eğitimi Programından Deneyimler," *Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik*, 195-196.

students. In ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 1 (METU History Documentary Part 1), Bozkırı Yeşertenler, Kemal Kurdaş, the former rector of METU, states that administrate manager came to his office and said, “I will report a disaster to you, you will be very sad.” He explained that the commander of the guard battalion in the parliament came and wanted the buildings called Baraka to be removed because the students were kissing in front of it. Upon this, Kemal Kurdaş replied that he should not ask us to do such a thing again and that we would never do it. Kurdaş said laughingly, “I told him just go and tell the students that we are making the forest nearby; they will do it in that forest in the future.”<sup>261</sup> This memory shows that METU has provided space for students’ sexual experiences since its foundation. It is significant that the former rector humorously portrays forests as a spatial space for students’ sexual experiences.

The activities carried out by students about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health at METU was mentioned. It is necessary to be aware of the activities of student societies to access this information. Student societies set up stands or hang banners at the main points of the campus to announce their events. However, some students cannot access these activities because they do not know about them. The interviewee says,

Whether it is a conference or a speech about informing, I have not encountered such a thing. It may be because I have only had half a semester. Still, apart from that, for example, when I go to a doctor in medico here, I feel that even he is approaching without prejudice when I go to a gynecologist. So, it is a nice thing.<sup>262</sup>

This interviewee has been at METU for a short time and has limited contact with the communities may have limited his access to activities in this field. The physical existence of the place does not affect the experiences. Our daily relationship with the

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<sup>261</sup> Önder M. Özdem, Berrin Balay Tuncer, “ODTÜ Tarihi Belgeseli Bölüm 1- Bozkırı Yeşertenler,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz6h3MpPx8A&t=2581s> Last access July 30, 2022, 42:36- 44:07

<sup>262</sup> Online interview for examination of experiences of young people about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health, the interviewee number 15, March 24, 2022.

space and the practices we perform in it affect knowledge and access. Even whether or not to look at the posters while going to class plays a role in this regard. Another crucial point this interviewee mentioned is the gynecologist's attitude at the health center in METU. The inclusiveness of university health centers contributes to sexual and reproductive health and health as a whole. Significantly, it is spatially close and easily accessible. As mentioned by other interviewees, having the option of being a gynecologist at METU having the option of having sexual and reproductive health tests such as smear test is a spatial effect. The attitudes and behaviors of the gynecologist are decisive in accessing services.

## CONCLUSION

Within this thesis's scope, I investigated young people's experiences about sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health through the case of METU. The relationship between gender and sexuality shapes sexual experiences and sexual and reproductive health access. Therefore, I consider the relationship between gender and sexuality in this study. People perform sexuality with cultural, social, and political meanings. İlkaracan and Seral mention that gender roles shape sexuality.<sup>263</sup> Gender roles interact with how people perform sexuality, as they do for every experience. Gender should be taken into account when researching sexuality. Therefore, I emphasized the relationship between sexuality and gender in this study.

I conducted in-depth interviews with 30 interviewees aged 18 - 25, who are METU undergraduate students, with semi-structured open-ended questions. Since I conducted the interviews during the pandemic, I conducted them online. I asked about how people see gender, how they see sexuality, how they see sexual and reproductive health, how it is to get information and services about this field, how government policies affect this field, what problems have come up, and how METU affects them.

Space has a significant impact on people's lives. METU inevitably impacts students' experiences in this field. To investigate this effect within the scope of feminist self-reflexivity, I interviewed interviewees who are struggling for gender equality and doing a master's about gender at METU. Gender inequality in Turkey has an impact on practice and life at METU. Although people consider METU a more liberal place than most other places, there are sexist and heteronormative practices. The activities carried out by METU Women's Solidarity, METU LGBTIQAA+ Solidarity, and METU Gender Studies about gender positively affect the space regarding gender

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<sup>263</sup> İpek İlkaracan and Gülşah Seral, "Kadının İnsan Hakkı Olarak Cinsel Haz: Türkiye'deki Bir Taban Eğitimi Programından Deneyimler," *Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik*, 196.

equality. A gender-related graduate program at METU is valuable but mainly focuses on women's studies.

The awareness of women and LGBTIQ+ interviewees in this field is broader than heterosexual men. The reason is that they are directly negatively affected by gender inequality and have experience of partnerships. Gender identity and sexual orientation affect access to information and services about sexual and reproductive health. The organized struggle of LGBTIQ+ individuals support access to information. In particular, women and LGBTIQ+s face difficulties accessing health services as the health system is based on binary and patriarchal systems.

The interviewees consider sexuality a need, desire, or natural thing. Qualifying something as natural and necessary might be the reason for its legitimation socially. Some students think that sexuality can be performed with two people as well as being performed alone or with more than two people. While the interviewees considered sexuality legitimate for people over a certain age and with consent, they stated that sexuality in society is legitimate for men, married people, and heterosexuals. Sexuality is affected by gender inequality and has a hierarchy. Therefore, sexuality is not considered legitimate for people who are disadvantaged in society, such as young people, LGBTIQ+, and women. Masturbation is also a sexual act. People can do it for sexual pleasure with partners or alone. Access to orgasm is challenging for women, as women's sexuality is ignored politically. Taking sexual pleasure is a right, and the struggle for sexual rights is political.

The interviewees stated that even though virginity is not significant to them, it has significance in society. People perform sexuality with their bodies. Society constructed virginity to control women's bodies by giving it social significance. Mernissi says, "In a matter of virginity between men, women only take

on the role of a silent intermediary in this matter.”<sup>264</sup> Virginity controls women’s sexuality. Everyone except women has the right to speak about women’s bodies, but the state policies assume that women are not required to speak about their bodies. This perception makes it difficult for women to discover their pleasures, desires, and bodies. To support positive sexuality, individuals need areas where they can share in sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Although there are obstacles to talking about this issue in a public area, the transfer of experience indicates that alternative areas are empowering. Since sexual and reproductive health is considered related to the health field, it is assumed to have a physical meaning. Safe sexuality is considered chiefly together with social and psychological relationships. Sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical, psychological, and social well-being. Reproductive health is not just about having a child. It is also about being able to decide freely.

Access to information and services on sexuality, sexual health, and reproduction is limited. There is a need for inclusive and non-discriminatory education in this field to experience safe sexuality. The lack of knowledge on this subject affects people’s sexual experiences. As in general society, METU students also have anxiety about going to a doctor about sexual and reproductive health due to the fear of being judged by doctors. This situation is a vital obstacle to accessing sexual and reproductive health services. Youth, women, and LGBT-friendly health centers and awareness-raising activities for health personnel can prevent this situation. The condom for the penis is the most preferred method to protect against STIs and unwanted pregnancy. It is that it is more accessible than other methods. There are barriers such as fear of judgment and high prices to accessing these products, especially for young people. Unwanted pregnancy and STIs negatively affect people’s physical and mental health. Facilitating access to these methods will strengthen sexual and reproductive health.

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<sup>264</sup> Fatima Mernissi, “Bekaret ve Ataerki,” *Müslüman Toplumlarda Kadın ve Cinsellik*, 99, (Translation of mine).

Government policies harm sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health. Difficult access to abortion and the fact that the HPV vaccine is not free are among the most vital consequences. Access to abortion is a human right. The state should provide access to abortion safely and free of charge. HPV is a virus that may cause cervical cancer. Although it is an easy solution to prevent this, the HPV vaccine is not in the vaccine program in Turkey. Therefore, these vaccines are expensive. The state should produce social policies to ensure access to this vaccine for all. Gender inequality also plays a role in the physical construction of spaces. Young people have limited access to safe and private areas where they can have sexual intercourse, as sexuality is assumed to be an act that should not be done. Young people often face such a problem because they live in their family homes or student dormitories. Sexuality is also a part of life, and the state should accept that it is a right for everyone, including consent.

METU is a living space with student societies, dormitories, a dining hall, lawn areas, sports fields, classrooms, a health center, and political, social, and cultural events. METU's university administration provides a service to students as well as a network of student solidarity. Social media pages where students can consult about sexual and reproductive health indicate this solidarity. Students' activities on this subject support access to knowledge and service in this field. METU has an impact on students' sexuality and sexual and reproductive health. A gynecologist's presence in the university's health center facilitates access to services in this field. It shows us the significance of health centers in universities. Health care workers' attitudes and behaviors are important. If sexist and homophobic health personnel were in the university health center, it would do more harm than good. Student societies at METU are empowering in terms of access to information. Since there is no fear of being judged on campus, talking about this issue provides information flow and experience transfer. Since students consider METU a liberal space, they might have more sexual experiences away from discrimination than in most parts of Turkey. It does not mean that students never encounter discrimination during sexual experiences, either.

It is significant to study in terms of social sciences since sexuality has social, cultural, and political meanings. The struggle against gender inequality is also the struggle for sexuality. Sexuality is affected by social gender inequality, and sexual acts are not equal for all. It indicates that sexuality is political in every aspect. The patriarchal system and the binary gender system limit sexual experiences. There are economic, social, and political barriers to accessing all sexual services and products. It is efficient to struggle with these barriers and produce policies to make sexual and reproductive health accessible to all. NGO studies about access to information and services that look at the whole picture are a good example.

All interviewees had a certain degree of gender awareness, although their awareness is variable. This situation led to the inability to analyze the experiences of the general student profile at METU in this area. It does not mean there are no sexist, heteronormative, or conservative individuals at METU. It is difficult to reach these people within the scope of this research topic. Since it is a master's thesis, the research was limited to one region. It would be more inclusive to conduct a study by comparing different regions to address different experiences on this issue and to show the differences in perspective on this issue in Turkey.

This study is significant for dealing with sexuality with sociological dimensions in the social sciences. Analyzing sexuality by establishing a relationship with gender was beneficial in holistically investigating sexuality-related controls. Since this study was limited to one space, I considered the space's effect. The study of the effect of space on an individual's experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health made the study holistic. Interviewing students and graduates who were/are active in the field of gender at METU to investigate the impact of the place is fundamental to the study. Since I graduated from METU, it has played a significant role in my relationship with the space for my studies. Incorporating my experiences as an interviewer and the influence of the place reinforced feminist self-reflexivity as a method. Addressing the effects of the relationship between sexuality and sexual and

reproductive health enabled a holistic focus on sexuality. In the study, I thought it was important to use the interviewees' own words to show how they felt and what they had been through as a subject.

I focused on gender and discussed the uniqueness of students' experiences of sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health through their relationship with space. This study is critical because it deals with sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health. Since researchers generally conduct sexuality studies in the health sciences field, this thesis is significant because it includes these studies within the scope of social sciences. Sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health are not only physical but also social, political, and cultural performances. Therefore, it is necessary to examine this issue from a sociological perspective. There is an interaction between individuals' experiences and places, and they affect each other. The relationship between sexual experiences and space is critical. I conducted this study at METU and considered the interaction of METU as a space with students' experiences in this field. This study is critical because it considers the social, political, cultural, and historical characteristics of METU. I dealt with sexual experiences in terms of spatial dynamics. I argue this study contributes to the literature in this field, as I am progressing in line with the interviewees' experiences by putting gender at the center and conducting a holistic study in the fields of sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, which includes the space.

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX I – QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH OF INTERVIEW FOR EXAMINATION OF THE SPACE

#### **Questions for Students / Graduates at METU Gender and Women Studies Graduate Program**

- Would you tell us about yourself?
- How would you evaluate gender studies academically at METU?
- What kind of gender studies are/were there outside of academia at METU?
- How do you think studies in the field of gender at METU have changed over time?
- How is/was the METU administration's perspective on studies in this field?
- What kind of studies are/were there in METU in the field of sexuality, sexual health and reproductive health?
- How would you evaluate METU in terms of gender equality? How has it changed over time?
- How does/did METU contribute to or complicate the studies carried out in the field of gender?
- What are/were the difficulties of carrying out gender studies at METU?
- How does the pandemic affect the study in this field? (Only for students)
- How would you evaluate METU as a place in terms of gender?

#### **Questions for Students/Graduates who Advocate Gender at METU**

- Would you tell us about yourself?
- What kind of studies, activities, and events is/were happening in the field of gender at METU? Where does/did your community or you stand in them?

- What are/were the difficulties experienced by women and LGBTIQ+ students at METU?
- What difficulties do/did students face at METU depending on their gender identity and sexual orientation?
- What are/ were the facilitation and/or difficulties caused by METU for studies in this field?
- How does/did the METU administration view the actions of your community?
- What were/are the activities carried out in the sexual and reproductive health field at METU?
- What kind of changes have the studies carried out in the field of gender at METU changed over time?
- How would you evaluate METU in terms of gender equality? How has it changed over time?
- How does the pandemic affect the work in this field? (Only for students)
- How would you evaluate METU as a place in terms of gender?

**ANNEX II – QUESTIONS IN TURKISH OF INTERVIEW FOR  
EXAMINATION OF THE SPACE**

**ODTÜ Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Kadın Çalışmaları Yüksek Lisans Programı  
Öğrencilerine/ Mezunlarına Yönelik Sorular**

- Kendinizden bahseder misiniz?
- ODTÜ’de akademik olarak toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmalarını nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
- ODTÜ’de akademi dışında ne gibi toplumsal cinsiyet alanında yapılan çalışmalar var/dı?
- ODTÜ’de sizce toplumsal cinsiyet alanındaki çalışmalar zaman içerisinde nasıl farklılık gösterdi?
- ODTÜ yönetiminin bu alandaki çalışmalara bakış açısı nasıl/dı?
- ODTÜ’de cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanında nasıl çalışmalar var/dı?
- ODTÜ’yü toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? Zaman içinde nasıl değişim gösterdi?
- ODTÜ toplumsal cinsiyet alanında yapılan çalışmalara nasıl katkı sağlıyor/du veya nasıl zorlaştırıyor/du?
- ODTÜ’de toplumsal cinsiyet çalışması yapmanın zorlukları neler/di?
- Pendeminin bu alandaki çalışmalara nasıl etkisi var? (Sadece öğrencilere yönelik)
- ODTÜ’yü mekân olarak toplumsal cinsiyet açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

## **ODTÜ’de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Alanında Aktivizm Yapan Öğrencilere/Mezunlara Yönelik Sorular**

- Kendinizden bahseder misiniz?
- ODTÜ’de toplumsal cinsiyet alanında ne gibi çalışmalar/etkinlikler/eylemlilikler oluyor/du? Topluluğunuz/siz bu faaliyetlerin neresinde duruyor/du?
- Kadın ve LGBTIQ+ öğrencilerin ODTÜ’de yaşadıkları zorluklar sizce neler/di?
- ODTÜ’de sizce öğrenciler cinsiyet kimliğine ve cinsel yönelime bağlı olarak ne gibi zorluklarla karşılaşılıyorlar/dı?
- ODTÜ’nün bu alanda yapılan çalışmalara sağladığı kolaylıklar ve/ veya neden olduğu zorluklar neler/di?
- ODTÜ yönetimi topluluğunuzdaki çalışmalara/ eylemlere nasıl bakıyor/du?
- ODTÜ’de cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanında yapılan etkinlikler neler/di?
- ODTÜ’de toplumsal cinsiyet alanında yapılan çalışmalar zaman içinde ne gibi değişiklikler gösterdi?
- ODTÜ’yü toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz? Zaman içinde nasıl değişti?
- Pandemi bu alandaki çalışmalara nasıl etkisi var? (Sadece öğrencilere yönelik)
- ODTÜ’yü mekân olarak toplumsal cinsiyet açısından nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?

**ANNEX III – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH BY CATEGORY FOR  
ANALYSIS (EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG  
PEOPLE ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH)**

**Demographic Questions**

- What is your date of birth?
- What is your gender?
- What is your sexual orientation?
- What are your department and class?
- What is the education level and occupation of your parents?
- How many siblings do you have?
- Where and with whom do you live?
- Do you have a partner?
  - How would you describe your relationship with your partner, if any?
- How many years have you been at METU? What are the communities you participate in at METU? What do you do in your spare time at METU?
- Are you sexually active? If yes, at what age did you have your first sexual experience?

**Category 1: Gender Awareness**

- What are your ideas about sexual orientations and gender identities?
- How do gender identities and sexual orientations affect access to information and services about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health?
- How do gender identities and sexual orientations affect sexual experiences?
- How does your gender and/or sexual orientation affect your sexual experience?

## **Category 2: Perception of Sexuality, Body, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

- What do you think about sexuality?
- What does virginity mean to you, and why?
- Whose sexuality is legitimate in your opinion?
- Whose sexuality is legitimate in society's opinion?
- What do you think orgasm is?
  - What are the factors affecting orgasm?
  - How do these factors differ in terms of gender identities?
- What do you think the first sexual experience should be?
- What are your thoughts on a one-night stand?
- What are your thoughts on monogamy and polygamy?
- What do you think about the perception of sexuality in society?
  - How do thoughts about sexuality in society affect your sexuality?
- Do you share with your partner (or when you have a partner) about sexuality?  
What do you share?
- Does it matter to you whether your partner has had sexual intercourse before or not, and why?
- What are your views on masturbation?
- What do you think about sexual and reproductive health?
- What comes to mind when you think of safe sexuality?
- How do you think the person establishes relationships with their body in their daily life?
  - How do you think you have a relationship with your body?
- What are your views on menstruation?

### **Category 3: Access to Information and Services About Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

- Did you receive government institutions, NGOs or schools training about sexuality, sexual and reproductive health? What was the content of it?
- Do you think there should be education about sexuality, sexual and reproductive health in schools? Why? If so, what content should it have?
- Where did you get the information on this topic?
  - Was any information you later recognized wrong or correct from your obtained information? What were they?
- Is there an environment where you can share sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health? Whom are you sharing with? What can you share?
  - How does this sharing make you feel?
- As a young person, what are your expectations regarding access to services and information about this field?
- Do you regularly go to the doctor for sexual and reproductive health?
  - If you are not going, what is the reason?
  - What is the attitude of the health personnel when you go?
- Which methods do you use as a method of protection against sexually transmitted infections and as a contraceptive method?
  - If you do not use them, why?
  - If you use it, which one do you prefer, and why?
  - Where can you access these methods?
  - Do you encounter difficulties when accessing these methods? What are they? How do you tackle these challenges?
- Which product do you use during your menstruation period? Why do you prefer it? What difficulties do you encounter while reaching it? (Only for participants who menstruate)

#### **Category 4: Policies and Challenges About Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

- How do government policies affect sexuality and sexual and reproductive health?
- What are the challenges young people face in their sexual experiences?
- What are the challenges faced by young people regarding sexual and reproductive health?
- What are your thoughts on abortion?
- Do you/did you have any fears or concerns about sexuality, and what are/ were they?

#### **Category 5: The Impact of METU as A Place on Experiences about Sexuality, Sexual Health, and Reproductive Health**

- How does your study at METU affect access to information and services about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health?
- What effect does studying/living at METU have on METU students' sexual experiences?
- Whose sexuality is legitimate at METU?
- What do you think is the perception of sexuality among METU students? How does this perception change among departments at METU?

**ANNEX IV – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN TURKISH BY CATEGORY FOR  
ANALYSIS (EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG  
PEOPLE ABOUT SEXUALITY, SEXUAL HEALTH, AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH)**

**Demografik Sorular:**

- Doğum tarihiniz nedir?
- Cinsiyetiniz nedir?
- Cinsel yöneliminiz nedir?
- Bölümünüz ve sınıfınız nedir?
- Anne ve babanızın eğitim durumu ve mesleği nedir?
- Kaç kardeşsiniz?
- Nerede, kimlerle yaşıyorsunuz?
- Partneriniz var mı?
  - Varsa, partnerinizle ilişkinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- Kaç senedir ODTÜ’desiniz? ODTÜ’de gittiğiniz topluluklar neler? ODTÜ’de ders dışında kalan zamanlarınızda neler yapıyorsunuz?
- Cinsel olarak aktif misiniz? Evet ise, ilk cinsel deneyiminizi kaç yaşında yaşadınız?

**Kategori 1: Toplumsal Cinsiyet Farkındalığı**

- Cinsel yönelimler ve cinsiyet kimlikleri hakkındaki fikirleriniz nelerdir?
- Cinsiyet kimlikleri ve cinsel yönelimler cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanındaki bilgiye ve hizmetlere erişmeyi nasıl etkiliyor?
- Cinsiyet kimlikleri ve cinsel yönelimlerin cinsel deneyimlere nasıl etkisi var?

- Kendi cinsiyetiniz ve/veya cinsel yöneliminizin cinsel deneyiminize nasıl etkisi var?

## **Kategori 2: Cinsellik, Beden, Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Algısı**

- Cinsellik sizce nedir?
- Bekaret sizin için neyi ifade ediyor, neden?
- Sizce cinsellik kimler için meşrudur?
- Toplumda cinsellik kimler için meşrudur?
- Orgazm sizce nedir?
  - Orgazm olmayı sizce neler etkiler?
  - Cinsiyet kimlikleri açısından bu etkiler nasıl farklılık gösterir?
- İlk cinsel deneyim sizce nasıl olmalıdır?
- Tek gecelik ilişki hakkında düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
- Tek eşlilik ve çok eşlilik hakkında düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
- Toplumdaki cinsellik algısı sizce nasıl?
  - Toplumdaki cinsellik hakkındaki düşünceler cinselliğinizi nasıl etkiliyor?
- Partnerinizle (veya partneriniz olduğunda) cinsellik hakkında paylaşımda bulunuyor musunuz, neler paylaşıyorsunuz?
- Partnerinizin daha önce cinsel birlikteliği olmaması ya da olması sizin için önemli mi, neden?
- Mastürbasyon hakkındaki görüşleriniz nelerdir?
- Cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı sizce nedir?
- Güvenli cinsellik deyince aklınıza ne geliyor?
- Kişi günlük hayatında bedeni ile sizce nasıl ilişkiler kuruyor?
  - Siz bedeninizle ilişki kurduğunuzu düşünüyor musunuz, nasıl?
- Regli hakkındaki görüşleriniz nelerdir?

### **Kategori 3: Cinsellik, Cinsel Sağlık ve Üreme Sağlığı Alanında Bilgi ve Hizmetlere Erişim**

- Cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı alanında devlet kurumlarından, sivil toplum kuruluşlarından ya da okuldan herhangi bir eğitim aldınız mı, içeriği nasıldı?
- Cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı hakkında okullarda sizce eğitim olmalı mı, neden? Olmalı ise, nasıl bir içeriği olmalı?
- Bu alandaki bilgileri nerelerden edindiniz?
  - Edindiğiniz bilgilerden daha sonra yanlış ya da doğru olduğunu fark ettiğiniz bilgiler oldu mu, nelerdi?
- Cinsellik, cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı hakkında paylaşım yapabileceğiniz bir ortam var mı? Kimlerle paylaşım yapıyorsunuz? Neler paylaşabiliyorsunuz?
  - Bu paylaşım size nasıl hissettiriyor?
- Bir genç olarak bu alandaki hizmetlere ve bilgiye erişim konusundaki beklentileriniz nelerdir?
- Düzenli olarak cinsel sağlık ve üreme sağlığı için doktora gidiyor musunuz?
  - Gitmiyorsanız nedeni nedir?
  - Gittiğinizde sağlık personelinin tutumu nasıl oluyor?
- Cinsel yolla bulaşan enfeksiyonlara karşı korunma yöntemi ve gebeliği önleyici yöntem olarak hangi yöntemleri kullanıyorsunuz?
  - Kullanmıyorsanız neden?
  - Kullanıyorsanız, hangisini neden tercih ediyorsunuz?
  - Bu yöntemlere nerelerden ulaşabiliyorsunuz?
  - Yöntemlere erişirken zorluklarla karşılaşılıyor musunuz, neler? Bu zorluklarla nasıl mücadele ediyorsunuz?
- Regli olduğunuzda hangi materyali kullanıyorsunuz, neden? Ona erişirken hangi zorluklarla karşılaşılıyorsunuz? (Sadece regli olan katılımcılar için)

#### **Kategori 4: Cinsellik, Cinsel Saęlık ve Üreme Saęlığı Hakkında Politikalar ve Zorluklar**

- Devlet politikalarının cinsellięi, cinsel saęlık ve üreme saęlığını nasıl etkiliyor?
- Gençlerin cinsellik deneyimleri hakkında karşılaştıkları zorluklar sizce nelerdir?
- Gençlerin cinsel saęlık ve üreme saęlığı alanında karşılaştıkları zorluklar nelerdir?
- Kürtaj hakkında düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
- Cinsellik ile ilgili korkularınız veya endişeleriniz var mı/var mıydı, neler/di?

#### **Kategori 5: ODTÜ'nün Mekân Olarak Cinsellik, Cinsel Saęlık ve Üreme Saęlığı Hakkında Deneyimlere Etkisi**

- ODTÜ'de okumanızın cinsellik, cinsel saęlık ve üreme saęlığı alanında bilgi ve hizmetlere erişimi nasıl etkiliyor?
- ODTÜ'de okumanın/ yaşamanın ODTÜ öğrencilerinin cinsellik deneyimleri üzerinde nasıl bir etkisi var?
- ODTÜ'de cinsellik sizce kimler için meşru?
- ODTÜ öğrencileri arasında cinsellik algısı sizce nasıl? ODTÜ'de bölümleri arasında bu algı nasıl deęişiyor?

## ANNEX V – LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

**Photograph 1: METU The Devrim (Revolution) Stadium**

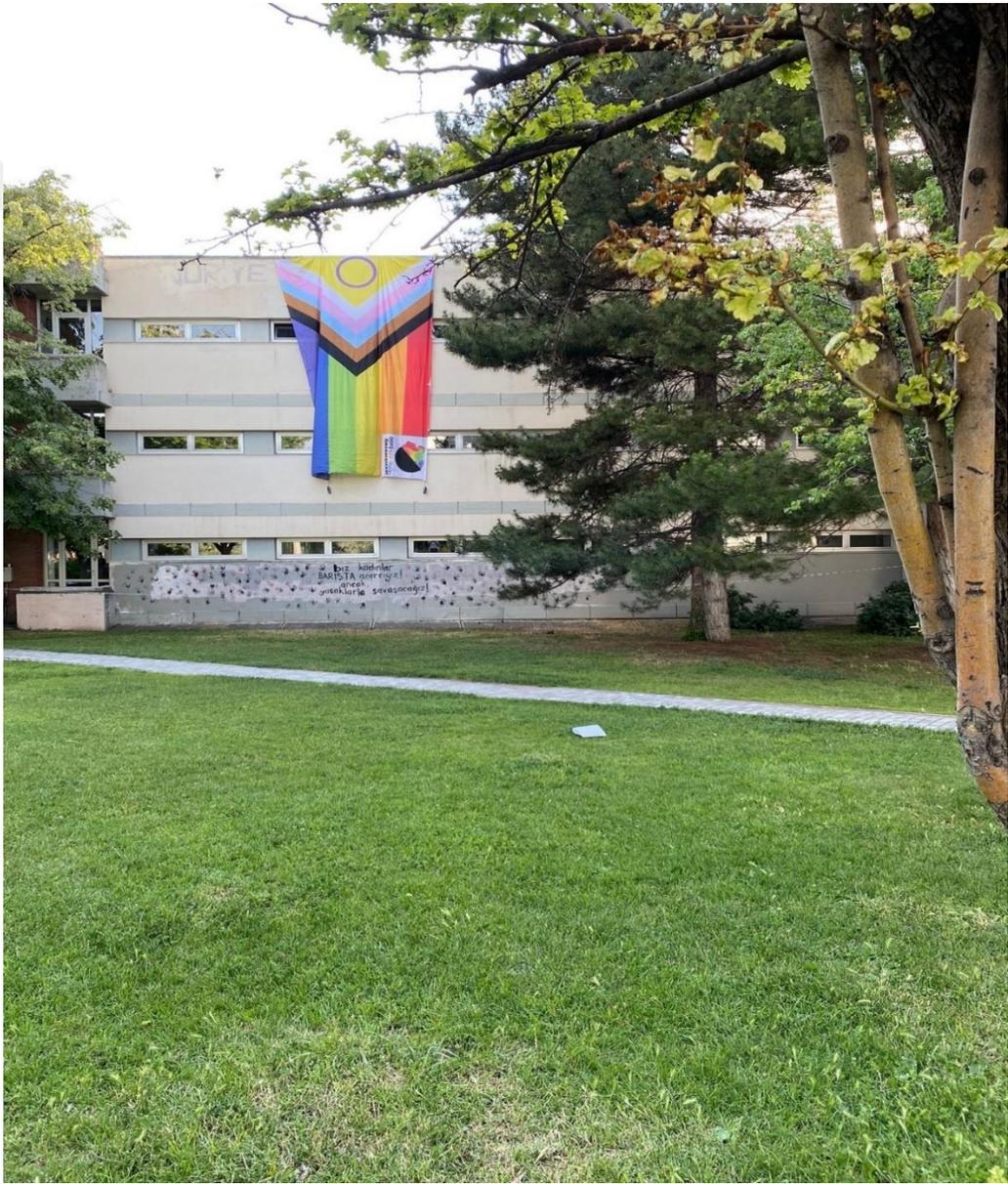


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<sup>265</sup> My friend, a postgraduate student at METU, took this photo on August 22, 2022.

**Photograph 2: METU Mathematics Department Wall Painted by METU Women's Solidarity**



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<sup>266</sup> My friend, a postgraduate student at METU, took this photo at the 2022 METU Pride Parade.

**Photograph 3: METU Rainbow Ladder**



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<sup>267</sup> My friend, a postgraduate student at METU, took this photo on August 22, 2022. (“METU without trustee” is written at the ladder.).

## **ANNEX VI – ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.

