

THE “MODERN AND INDEPENDENT” WOMEN OF GENERATION 1980:
SELF AND SUBJECTIVITY AMONG SECULAR, MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN
IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY

by

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Abstract

The “Modern and Independent” Women of Generation 1980:
Self and Subjectivity among Secular, Middle-Class Women in Istanbul, Turkey

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Esin Egit

Adviser: Michael Blim

The focus of this dissertation is Turkish women of “Generation 1980” (born in the late 1960s and early 1970s), a cohort of urban, middle-class, and secular women who came of age in the 1980s in Istanbul, and their struggles with and against “traditional” and “modern” gender ideologies. Based on sixteen months of fieldwork conducted in Istanbul between 2004 and 2007, this study analyzes the formation and transformation of a distinct female subjectivity, made visible through close attention to these women’s narratives of self, other, and society.

Increasingly, women in urban Turkey have begun to question traditional gender roles at an early age, and challenge socially expected life trajectories. Women’s narratives and memories of their early youth indicate that a shared sense of pride and accomplishment has emerged among women of this cohort, which I call “self-assured” subjectivity, as women are convinced that they are unquestionably “modern and independent.” Women’s accounts also, conversely, reveal that in situations that challenge their identity as “modern and independent” women, they find themselves surprised, confused, frustrated, and unprepared to respond. In such cases, women blame themselves rather than perceive their problems in the larger context of the gender inequality in and patriarchy of Turkish society. As they experience this discontinuity in their

identity, they turn to friends and intimates, to the private and personal realms, for help, reassurance, and confirmation of their “modern and independent” identity.

Women’s response to these “unexpected” situations, I argue, must be seen in light of the depoliticized public context in which they grew up. Generation 1980 came of age during a time when the junta government was actively and brutally depoliticizing the public sphere; Republican (Kemalist) ideology was being revitalized by the army; and the economy was undergoing rapid economic liberalization and privatization. Generation 1980 learned to distance themselves from politics and to seek gratification and satisfaction in the private, representing what I call the “apolitical” political self. Drawing on recent theories of self and subjectivity in psychological anthropology, this dissertation argues that women’s self-assured subjectivity, while empowering them in many ways, ultimately limits them as social agents because of their concomitant lack of political engagement.

*Dedicated to my father, B. Altan Eđit (1945-2005),
who raised me like a son.*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

After dating a series of short-term boyfriends, my high-school friend Banu announced, at the age of 26, her engagement to a young man she had met not long ago. Soon after their wedding party in the garden of a five-star hotel in one of Istanbul's upper-middle-class neighborhoods, Banu invited a few of us for an evening of tea and cake at their new apartment. Excited to see her in her married life, I arrived at their place carrying a wedding gift.

The gathering turned out to be a very small group: the host couple, another married couple, and me. Banu and I were not particularly close friends. Neither the other couple nor I knew Banu's husband well, and I remember feeling a little uncomfortable but hoping that tea and dessert would solve this. I was wrong.

After a few forced attempts at conversation, Banu served tea and pastries with their new porcelain tea set. While we, the women, were catching up with each other's latest news, the men were mostly quiet. I was trying to get comfortable in the new living room furniture, which encircled a large coffee table and faced an extra-large television, when the other guests suddenly announced that they had to leave, with the excuse that the next day was a workday. It was only ten o'clock and typically these gatherings last until midnight or even later. I sensed that they were offended by Banu's husband's lack of engagement. Confused by this abrupt change of situation, I began wondering if I should leave as well, but before I could decide what to do, Banu's husband excused himself too, claiming he was tired. So I felt obliged to say that it was time for me to leave as well. To my surprise Banu insisted that I stay. Right after her husband left the room, she began

telling me how she was disappointed with him; he would not engage in social activities with her, and he only wanted to watch motorcycle racing on television the entire weekend. Not only was he asocial, she said, he was inconsiderate, too—he had ordered all the living room furniture without even consulting her.

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. I always knew Banu as a smart and confident woman; recently she had earned a law degree. How could someone like her settle down with someone with whom she appeared to have nothing in common? Why did she marry a man who seemed not to respect her (or her friends) when she had been living so comfortably with her mother? That night I drove home disappointed and disturbed by what I had witnessed.

I admit I was relieved when I heard that Banu and her husband divorced less than six months after they married. Banu went back to live with her mother. A few months later when a group of our friends from high school met for dinner, as we used to do frequently in those days, Banu looked better than ever; she was lively and chatty. After a few drinks, she was joking, telling stories about her now ex-husband. She said, “When he didn’t want to have sex with me before marriage, I thought ‘Oh, how romantic, he respects the wedding night.’ It turned out that his penis was only this big! [She lifted up an index finger to indicate its size.] No wonder he didn’t want to have sex with me before getting married.” Everybody burst into laughter.

But once again I was puzzled and disturbed by what I was hearing. I was surprised she had not had sex with him while they were dating. I also could not understand why she thought his refusal to have sex before marriage showed “respect for the wedding night,” or why she found it “romantic.” How could she have such

contradictory thoughts and behaviors about dating and premarital sex while still romanticizing the “wedding night”? That was the last gathering we all attended before I left Istanbul to begin my doctoral studies in New York in the summer of 1999. My memories of the gathering at Banu’s apartment, and the ways she later talked about her marriage and her ex-husband, mixing and shifting between conservative and liberal views of sexuality, remained with me during the early years of my doctoral studies. I wondered what kinds of lives my friends and peers would build and which paths they would choose in becoming adults.

In some ways that the experience with Banu has led to my dissertation topic, which focuses on secular, middle-class women who came of age in 1980s Istanbul. In this dissertation, I argue that this cohort of women has experienced and continues to experience a cultural discontinuity, on which challenges their sense of self in their transition from youth to adulthood, and causes them to perpetually strive to maintain their assumed/desired identity as “modern, independent women.” To examine the particularities and the effects of this discontinuity in Turkish women’s sense of self, as well as their efforts to create continuity within their self experiences, first, I explore the construction of their identities as “modern and independent” women in coming-of-age narratives within the context of generational change and continuity. I particularly focus on change and continuity in women’s attitudes towards and definitions of gender roles and sexual morality, and the meanings attached to contextually defined cultural goals, such as financial independence and egalitarian marriage.

Through examining women’s coming-of-age narratives, with a particular focus on parent-daughter relationships and women’s early romantic and sexual relationships, I

argue that these women constitute the first generational cohort in Turkey to experience a sense of empowerment as young women, and that they display emotional (psychological) readiness to break away from normative gender roles and conservative sexual morality. I call the subjectivity of this cohort “self-assured” because the conviction that they are unquestionably modern (Western) has provided these women with the social confidence to be assertive in how they conduct themselves in mixed-gender public spaces as well as in their professional and intimate relationships. A sense of pride, and confidence in their personal and social accomplishments—assessed by contrasting them to that of women from older generations, particularly their mothers—emerge as a shared emotional experience in these women’s narratives and personal conduct.

On the other hand, women’s narratives also illuminate experiential moments or encounters that have resulted in feelings of not living up to their assumed identity, the “modern and independent woman,” they once inhabited with self-assurance. Watching and listening to my informants, time and again I found that situations and encounters that required them to perform traditional domestic roles (e.g., housekeeping), or a delay in getting promoted at work, took them by surprise. I collected their individual responses to such situations, which they experienced as unexpected and frustrating, leaving them with a sense of being betrayed and in a state of disappointment and doubt about their self-identity. Secondly, in this dissertation, I examine how my informants respond to the experiences of “betrayal” and “disappointment” when their sense of self-assurance is ignored, threatened, or denied, and how they maintain a sense of continuity among conflicting self experiences. Their efforts to make sense of these new experiences of self, and to build continuity between their past and contemporary sense of selves, I argue,

force them to develop new ways of representing themselves and self-understandings without entirely reformulating their identities, which are manifested as self-doubt and often self-deception in making sense of their contemporary realities.

Subject and Subjectivity

While the dominant formulations in cultural anthropology related to questions of self, subject, and subjectivity have posited that selves and subjectivities are culturally shaped and historically situated (e.g., Geertz, 1973, 1984; Good & Good, 2004; Mageo, 1995; Ortner, 2005; Read, 1967; Shweder and Bourne, 1984), questions such as, “How are we to understand the social shaping of the inner world when individual agents are so different from each other?” (Luhrmann, 2006, p. 348), and several concepts, such as “self,” “identity,” “agency,” “motivation,” and “internalization,” frequently used in anthropological analysis, call for more explicit attention to psychological bases and processes (Frank, 2006; Quinn & Strauss, 2006; Seymour, 2004). The editors of a 2006 special volume on the “Missing Psychology on Cultural Anthropology’s Key Words” published by *Anthropological Theory* state that their larger agenda is to illuminate the underlying psychological meanings already invested in terms that are being heavily used in recent cultural anthropological theory, such as “agency,” “resistance,” “subjectivity,” and “self,” those “that rely on implicit understandings of the relation of culture to psyche”; the editors further intend to identify instances in which “the psychology that is smuggled in with these terms is inadequate and [to propose] a better psychology in its place” (Quinn & Strauss, 2006, p. 268).

Such discussion and debate enters into my analysis the relationship between the individual woman's agency and cohort subjectivity in various ways. I employ the concept of subjectivity as summarized here: "actors' thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their sense of self and self-world relations" (Holland & Leander, 2004, p. 127) and "the shared inner life of the subject . . . the way subjects feel, respond, experience" (Luhmann, 2006, p. 345). For example, most women represented themselves and the women of "their generation" as women who "do not want to live the home-bound, dependent life that their mothers live." However, even as anthropologists talk about subjectivity as a shared "emotional tone" or "mood common to a group" (Luhmann, 2006, p. 348), this does not mean that subjectivities are homogeneously and identically shared. As Luhmann (2006) writes, "each of us knows that individual members of [a] group have different feelings, different personalities, different dispositions, both over the course of time and at any one moment" (p. 348). My informants share many similarities with regard to class position, social networks, education, family background, and exposure to the ideal of "modern, independent women," however, they still display different patterns of life cycles and idiosyncratic combinations of these patterns. For example, some women choose to get married, and some not; some compromise to "save" their marriage, some decide to file for divorce; some put their careers first, some prioritize their family; and still others strive to find a third solution to any of these challenges.

Furthermore, not only are individual experiences of shared subjectivities heterogeneous, but subjectivities, defined as the "shared emotional tone" or "mood common to a group," also alter through time, as the conditions within which they had

been previously shaped change. For example, although women's coming-of-age narratives indicate that they felt empowered, as teenagers in the 1980s and even as college students in the early 1990s—an empowerment that has significantly shaped their sense of self and subjectivity to this day—I also observed during my fieldwork a shared mood of frustration, dissatisfaction, and disempowerment emerging in the interviews and informal conversations among friends when they talked about current social and personal issues. The women I interviewed (in their early 30s during my fieldwork conducted in 2004–2007)—even as they all claimed to be “modern, independent women”—constantly negotiated their identities in the face of their lived realities at home, at work, and on the streets of Istanbul; presented different levels of distress and offer various explanations for that distress; and sought any number of solutions. In these narratives, the shared sense of self-assurance was countered by a shared sense of betrayal.

Identity and Experience of the Self

During the interviews, women talked about their disappointments and explained the situations that led to them. They frequently expressed disappointment in their intimate relationships, and in themselves. Some complained that their husbands or boyfriends did not respect their careers, some were disappointed in themselves for not being the “modern women” they thought they were supposed to be, and some complained of working too much and not having a proper family life. In my analysis of these narratives, I focus on women's constructions of themselves as “modern and independent women” as well as their efforts to recover from moments in which they failed to inhabit this identity. I show that my informants perceive a gap between the desired/assumed identity that they

have constructed since their early youth as modern women and their contemporary experiences as women who do not fully inhabit this identity. In order to explain the difference between women's assumptions of *who they were supposed to be* and their current perceptions of *who they are*, I borrow Ewing's (2002) differentiation between "identity" and "self experience":

Though a sharp distinction cannot be made between "identity" and "self experience," . . . I use the term identity to refer to the assumption of categories that are articulable by the individual and others, in part because they are articulated in public discourse and ideologies, such as the law. Identities would, then, include such categories as "woman," "educated person," "Turk," "immigrant," etc. Self experience must, of course, include one's identities but also one's affective, historical, and bodily relationships to such identities. For example, "I'm smart," or "I don't feel authentically Dutch," "my parents embarrass me," "I'm in danger here," etc. (pp. 94-95).

Following these definitions, I argue that my informants perceive a gap between their "identity" (who they think they are supposed to be) and "self experience" (how they experience this identity in their daily reality). The lack of correspondence between women's self experiences and their desired/assumed identity is particularly problematic for women of Generation 1980 because of the existing "modern woman" and "traditional woman" dichotomy. Women of Generation 1980 have been told (and they have assumed) that they *are*, and are going to be *recognized* as, modern and independent women. This identity has been part of their socialization both at home and at school since childhood.

Furthermore, gender equality and the raising of educated modern women has been one of the official discourses of the Turkish Republic, channeled through mass education and various government-owned or -controlled media. Later on the Turkish feminist movement in the 1980s reinforced the message of women's rights and expanded it to include control over their own bodies and sexuality. Each of these sources (family, mass secular education, the Republican discourse of gender equality, and the Turkish feminist movement) articulates a distinct but overlapping version of this "modern Turkish woman" identity, and together allowed women of Generation 1980 to have ample opportunity to incorporate this identity since their youth, as an uncontested reality. Women's narratives reveal that the disappointments they experience later in life are, for them, unexpected, and they respond with various defenses, ranging from resistance to embarrassment, and from self-doubt to self-deception.

"Apolitical" Political Self

At times during the interviews when women noticed and acknowledged the discrepancy between their assumed identity and self experience, they either blamed themselves or the specific men in their lives, or blamed the unique situation they were in for their "failure" to inhabit the identity of the "modern and independent woman." In these moments, they also actively avoided questioning the larger social and political framework that reproduces gender hierarchy and sexism in Turkish society, and associating their experiences with the context of women's lower status in society. In most cases, in such moments, they seemed puzzled, at a loss for words, and frustrated.

I explain women's lack of emotional and practical tools in explaining and dealing with such unexpected experiences, and their lack of a framework within which to contextualize them, through the depoliticized public context in which they grew up, and the lasting effect of this context in the formation of their political selves. One of the characteristics of Turkey in the 1980s was the systematic depoliticization of the public sphere by the junta government in an effort to brutally silence the growing leftist movement that was rising up against the ongoing corruption in government and nationwide political conduct. Growing up hearing the stories of violence and death, Generation 1980 learned to distance themselves from politics, and equate political engagement with street violence and "futile idealism." In this dissertation I argue that even though the members of Generation 1980 did not physically experience violence, their fear of any form of political engagement, transmitted through parental protection and an array of institutional disciplinary practices to keep youth away from political engagement, has contributed to the shaping their "apolitical" political selves.

One of the significant indications of this "apolitical" political self that emerged during the interviews is my informants' absolute refusal to associate themselves with feminism, even though they often make feminist statements. For example, during their adolescence, my informants reported that they engaged in premarital sex, expressing no remorse or guilt about it during the interviews, even though they acknowledged that "we live in a very sexually conservative society." In fact, they were proud of themselves for breaking social sexual norms, and presented these early sexual experiences as an important part of their modern and independent identity. By taking control over their sexualities and bodies, from a feminist perspective, these women engaged in a highly

political act. However, instead of explaining their conscious efforts at taking charge of their sexuality in political terms, during the interviews women chose to talk about it in terms of sexuality being a “natural” and “normal” part of human life, and found social support in their claim that “everybody” they knew was going through similar experiences. Secondly, one of the contemporary consequences of the formation of this “apolitical” political self, I argue, is the impossibility for the women of Generation 1980 to identify their struggles as women both in domestic and public sphere in terms of the gender inequality and sexism that exist in Turkish society at large. Instead women turn to “the private” and “the personal” for help and reassurance in solving their problems, which, in the long run, seems to provide only temporary and self-deceiving solutions (Chapters 5 and 6). In this context, long-term close-knit friendships and family relations emerge as relational spaces that provide women with contextual and relational continuity, which translates into a sense of continuity in collectively constructed self-assured subjectivity.

Cultural Schemas

As women of Generation 1980 entered the young adult phase of their lives, their self experience of how they inhabit the identity of “modern and independent women” has not been as smooth or as complete as they expected. Their frustration as a result of this is observable in their narratives. While talking about themselves and describing others, my informants invoked numerous cultural models for women’s identity, such as the “modern Turkish woman” as described by the Kemalist ideology and the “independent woman” as defined by the feminist movement, among others, such as “feminist,” “good wife,”

“typical housewife,” “working woman,” “traditional Turkish men,” “good student,” “apolitical youth,” “devoted mother,” and “veiled woman.” Women used such models either to represent themselves inhabiting certain identities they yearned for, or to differentiate themselves from culturally undervalued models of womanhood.

Cognitive anthropologists (e.g., D’Andrade and Strauss, 1992) call such models “cultural schemas.” In their book, cognitive psychological anthropologists Strauss and Quinn (1997) state that culture is both extrapersonal and intrapersonal (p. 9), and argue that individuals learn cultural models (also called “schemas”) that “are intrapersonal mental structures, understandings or assumptions” (p. 49). Holland (1992) provides an eloquent definition of cultural schemas. A “schema,” she explains:

is a complicated knowledge structure—a schematized interpretative framework. It is a living mental precipitate of past experiences. Schemas are significant because they channel experience of the present, inform anticipation of the future, and play an important role in the (re)construction of memories of the past. To the extent that these schemas arise from experiences interpreted according to a collective history and tradition, they are powerful cultural phenomena as well as psychological ones (p. 68).

However, in their representations, my informants do not simply employ one of the existing models; rather, they often interpret them in the context of their life stories. Strauss (1997) argues that “schemas are not mere replicas of dominant discourses but are individuals’ reworked versions of these,” with their unique styles, or their “own way of appropriating and interpreting those widely shared discourses” (p. 379). According to

Strauss (1997), this personal reworking of shared discourses enables the partial integration of fragmented selves, as, she argues, “past emotionally salient experiences” are important in creating this partial integration, as demonstrated in her informants’ coherent narratives about their pasts and their contemporary outlooks on events (p. 383). She writes that individuals “have disparate schemas that can be traced to heterogeneous social discourses and practices. In my analysis of these women’s narratives, I often found that women, as Strauss argues, “reworked” existing cultural models of womanhood in explaining their choices and actions regarding careers, marriage, and motherhood, yet employed them in unique ways by evoking significant past memories that functioned to tie together these models in a personal context. For example, one informant, Elif (single, 32), first dismissively described her mother as being a “typical housewife,” emphasizing that her mother did not work outside of the home, was obsessed with keeping a meticulously clean house, and was very involved with her daughters’ lives, but also described her as an “open-minded” woman, who often argued with her husband (Elif’s father) about raising their daughters with social freedom equal to that they give to their son. Elif finished her story saying that she wants to be a mother just like her mother. In this narrative the schema of “typical housewife” is reworked with another cultural schema, “raising sons and daughter’s equally” (formulated in the Kemalist discourse of gender equality), through Elif’s memories of her parents arguing about raising their daughters and son equally, and reworked, again, this time with the schema of “a devoted mother” who always sacrifices for her children, and is finally presented as a modern, open-minded mother that Elif wants to be.

Multiple Selves, “Shifting Selves”

On the other hand, women’s narratives also indicate that women do not just “rework” available cultural models to identify themselves or explain behavior. They often struggle with impossible situations where cultural models do not simply match to explain their experiences. In such moments during the interviews, I observed my informants shifting from one model of self to another in their self-representation, such as from being a “good wife” to a “dedicated career woman,” depending on context. Anthropological theories of “multiple selves” typically explain such shifts in subject position as strategic maneuvers employed by the “culturally shaped” individual in an attempt to cope with the competing, and often mutually exclusive, modern and traditional models of self (e.g., Kondo, 1990; Rosenberger, 2001). Ewing (1997) warns us that interpreting individuals’ shifts in subject positions as their “strategizing for power and advantage” implicitly relies on economic theory of rational choice, “and hence “oversimplifie[s] theories of motivation and human nature” (p. 277-278, n. 26).

During the writing of my dissertation, I have become increasingly dissatisfied by such cultural explanations, as current theory has not accounted for why, for example, women shift between various, often contradictory self-representations, and how it is that they seemed to not be aware of these shifts. Ewing (1990) argues that inconsistencies in self-representations “may often be associated with inconsistencies within the cultural system itself, inconsistencies that may be most clearly observed during negotiation and argument among situationally located actors” (p. 252; see also Ewing 1997). This is especially useful in understanding the case of these Turkish women, as most of the previously mentioned cultural models are constructed as binaries, where only one side of

the binary is socially valued and deemed appropriate for the women of my focus. Yet, as Durakbasa (1998) argues, the eclectic formulation of Turkish women by the Republican elite requires women to be more than one thing: a good wife, devoted mother, a professional woman, as well as, a modest and sexually reserved woman, but also a woman comfortable in mixed-gender social settings. One of the results of this eclectic context, and the binary framework is that the women of Generation 1980 find themselves in impossible situations in their daily lives, and strive to explain and justify the choices they made in order to assure themselves (and others, including me) that they still maintained a “modern, independent woman” identity, —a narrative process that often leaves them with inconsistent self-representations.

How, then, do Turkish women maintain a sense of an integrated self while experiencing constant challenges to the identity they feel they have inhabited since youth? And how do they manage the sense of discontinuity they experience, as they become adults? Drawing on psychoanalytic theories of self, Ewing (1990) argues that while the self is experienced as a whole, in actuality individuals shift between “multiple, inconsistent” and “context-dependent” self-representations. She argues that by virtue of a semiotic process of inconsistency management, individuals experience themselves as coherent (p. 251). Ewing (1990) writes:

People construct a series of self-representations that are based on selected cultural concepts of person and selected “chains” of personal memories. Each self-concept is experienced as whole and continuous, with its own history and memories that emerge in a specific context, to be replaced by another self-representation when the context changes (p. 253).

During the interviews, while talking about themselves, women often referred to their past experiences and observations to explain their current decisions and behaviors. For example, while an informant was having a difficult time in justifying her decision to stay with her husband who does not “respect” her, she shifted to representing herself as a “rebel,” recounting memories of how she stood up against her father’s authority at home. Drawing on the approaches provided by both cognitive and psychoanalytical anthropology, in this dissertation I argue that these “prideful” coming-of-age stories act as tools, recalling and reassuring that self-assured subjectivity, particularly in moments when women express self-doubt and frustration.

Abjection of the Mother as Other

In such moments during the interviews, as exemplified above, if women observed themselves struggling in presenting themselves consistently and coherently as “modern and independent” women, in addition to recalling earlier prideful memories, they also actively differentiated themselves from “other” women who they perceive as not-modern. Frank (2006), drawing on Chodorow (1999) and relational psychoanalyst Mitchell (1988), explains that “object relations and relational psychoanalysis emphasize the role that real and imagined others play in motivation and experience, and pay particular attention to the complex relationships between Self and Other that unfold contextually” (p. 297). In a similar vein, Crapanzano (1981) has argued that “self-constitution . . . is a dialectical process in which individuals experience themselves as self not directly, but only indirectly from the standpoint of the other” (p. 140). Following this line of thinking, through women’s narratives of self, I show that women position themselves against other

women—both real (their mothers, friends, or peers, including me) and imagined (“Islamic women,” “rural women,” “Western women,” or “typical housewives”)—in order to be able construct themselves as “modern women.”

In this process of self-making, I argue, women’s efforts to differentiate themselves from other women, particularly from their mothers, by disparaging so-called female qualities and women’s traditional domestic work is a form of abjection.¹ This process is theorized by Judith Butler (1990), drawing on Julia Kristeva, who writes, “[t]he ‘abject’ designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered ‘Other.’ This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion” (p. 133). Ewing (2008), drawing in Butler, uses the concept of “abjection” in the context of the identity of the national subject to explore the process of stigmatization of Muslim masculinity in Germany, and defines abjection as “the process of maintaining a sense of wholeness and identity by casting out that which is felt to be improper or dangerous to the integrity of the self” (p. 3). In the case of Turkish women of Generation 1980, I argue, these women constantly assess their level of “modernity” by comparing themselves to other women, particularly to their mothers, and cast out identities (behaviors, ways of thinking, attitudes and so on) that are perceived as “not-modern,” therefore “not-me.” It is then by forcefully rejecting and excluding other less valued women’s identities that the women of Generation 1980 claim the culturally defined and contextually valued identity of the “modern Turkish woman” and strive to maintain continuity in their sense of self.

¹ I thank Katherine P. Ewing for helping me to formulate this argument.

Generation 1980: A “Generation Unit”

The cohort of women I focus on came of age in Istanbul in the 1980s, a time when Turkey underwent major socioeconomic and political transformations (Ahmad, 1981; Karpat, 1981; Keyder, 1999). This period was marked by the 1980 military coup² that arrested increasingly violent political fighting between “leftists” and “rightists” (ultra-nationalists), ongoing since the late 1960s. On the other hand, the brutal military intervention and subsequent three years of junta government erased all forms of political activism and organizations (particularly the left-wing organizations), and aimed to depoliticize the public sphere (Neyzi, 2001; Tekeli, 1991). In 1983, the nationwide elections brought the Motherland Party (ANAP, a new center-right party) to power. The party leader, Turgut Özal, who had previously served as an undersecretary to Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel until the 1980 coup, became the Prime Minister. While ANAP was in power, Turkish society navigated a series of social and economic transformations as a result of the transition to an open-market economy and consumer society, which involved the government abandoning its import substitution policies and opening the borders to global markets. As Keyder (1999, p. 13)³ has written, “[s]tructural adjustment, liberalization, and privatization signaled that internationalization of capital was now an inescapable reality” (see also Keyder, 1993).

The socioeconomic and political transformations of the 1980s dominated the public agenda—resulting in incessant debates among and commentaries by innumerable

² For analyses of the 1980 coup, see Feroz Ahmad, “Military Intervention and the Crisis in Turkey,” *MERIP Reports* no. 93 (January 1981); and Kemal H. Karpat, “Turkish Democracy at Impasse: Ideology, Party and the Third Military Intervention,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 2 (Spring/Summer 1981), pp. 1-43.

³ See Keyder (1993, 1999) for a detailed analysis of economic liberalization and structural adjustment in Turkey.

politicians, military generals, journalists, intellectuals, artists, and other public figures—and a large portion of commentaries concerned the negative social effects of such changes on Turkish youth. Together, they focused on the fact that “[e]ven though civilian rule was quickly established, a new constitution was put into effect that restricted civil liberties, and young people born in the 1970s were raised in a relatively depoliticized environment” (Neyzi, 2001, p. 422). In public discourse, the youth of the post-1980 era were heavily criticized for a lack of interest in social issues, and thus labeled the “apolitical generation” (Neyzi, 2001). Assuming an alarming tone and moralistic stance, these commentaries criticized Turkish youth for being “degenerate” and “acculturated” as a result of “rising new values” such as individualism, materialism, and consumerism (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2).

Turkish society was going through other major changes, especially in urban areas, as a result of becoming an increasingly complex and diversified society (Tekeli, 1991). These changes were marked by the coexistence of many elements, including migration, economic polarization, emergence of “yuppie” culture, rapid urbanization, depoliticization, and Islamic revivalism. In fact, Tekeli (1991) remarked that social change in the 1980s was so rapid that one might call it a “social mutation” (p. 3). Analyzing a survey carried out between 1985–1989,⁴ Tekeli wrote that “the policy of systematic depoliticization pursued by the junta was still quite effective, but when interviewed large segments of society expressed their hope for greater democracy and freedom” (p. 7). Tekeli also observed that, “it is quite certain that many traditional elements are now in the progress of disintegration” (p. 3). Defining the important

⁴ PIAR Marketing Research Co. Ltd, *Profile Turkey 1989: Values, Attitudes, Behaviors*, PIAR, Istanbul 1989.

dimensions of social change as the “relative openness to change,” especially among urban youth and women, Tekeli asserted that “women and young people have become the most prominent agents of social change” (p. 10).

In his now classic essay on generations, Mannheim (1952 [1923]) argues that contemporaneous individuals develop a distinctive consciousness as a result of sharing a common location within the sociohistorical context. He writes:

The fact of belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic type of historically relevant action (p. 291).

According to Mannheim, this distinctive consciousness is determined by the tempo of social change, and is moderated by what he identifies as “intermediary generations” (p. 301). He writes:

Generations are in a state of constant interaction . . . [t]he fact that the transition from one generation to another takes place continuously tends to render this interaction smoother; in the process of this interaction, it is not the oldest who meet the youngest at once; the first contacts are made by other intermediary generations, less removed from each other (301).

In their early to mid-thirties by the time of my fieldwork, my informants came of age in the 1980s, between the more politically active generations of the 1960s and 1970s,

and the generation growing up in the late 1990s (what I tentatively call the “Internet generation,” when youth were increasingly connected to global culture through social media technology).⁵ To emphasize this temporal boundary, I use the term “Generation 1980” instead of “post-1980 generation,” which suggests a more open-ended time period. Extending Mannheim’s framework to my research, I consider Generation 1980 an “intermediary” generation, and argue that its members are most directly and uniquely affected by the sudden social changes of the 1980s in their exposure to almost simultaneous political repression and economic liberalization during their teenage years.

During the 1980s, youth were designated in several terms, including “Generation 1980,” “post-1980 generation,” “Özal generation” and “children of the coup.” The term “Özal generation” (like the Thatcher or Reagan generations in Britain and the US) emphasizes the influences of economic and cultural liberalization, and the subsequent changes in society; yet it hides prior and, I argue, more substantial effects of the coup on the formation of that generation.⁶ It also overemphasizes youth consumerism. The discourse that accompanied the use of the “Özal generation” rarely acknowledged efforts of the military regime to restrict individual rights to organize and participate in social protest, and it failed to systematically tie such efforts to the social atmosphere within which Generation 1980 came of age. This “Özal generation” discourse ultimately chose to blame the youth.

⁵ By this I do not mean that my informants are not currently Internet-savvy, instead emphasize that while growing up, use of the Internet and other social media formed little or no part of their daily activities.

⁶ This discourse was mainly created by new neoliberal institutions and people with the power to circulate this narrow representation of youth. Tugal (2002) notes that the members of the older generations who accuse the youth of 1980 for being too concerned with building their resumes are the same ones who ask for those resumes in their roles as Turkey’s CEOs.

But calling this generation “*darbe çocukları*” (children of the coup) dismisses the sudden influence of the open economy and emergent consumer society on the formation of the youth, by disregarding new identities and ways of engaging with politics that emerged in this era. Although this discourse provided a more sympathetic approach to the younger generation it was ultimately pessimistic and patronizing because it depicted the new generation as “lost” because of its so-called misgivings about political activism.

It is important to note that generations are not homogeneous units. Sweeping labels such as “the apolitical generation” or “consumerist youth” are not only superficial and misleading regarding young people’s diverse behaviors and attitudes towards politics and consumption; they also create a false impression of homogeneity among the members of an entire generation. As a way to avoid this fallacy, I borrow another concept from Mannheim, “the generation unit”:

The generation unit represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generational units (1952, p. 304, emphasis in original).

Following Mannheim, youth from different backgrounds such as “Islamic youth,” “Kurdish youth,” and “immigrant youth,” might be understood as separate generation units. Each of these generation units has certainly been shaped by the 1980 military coup and the following economic restructuring. However, the particular ways each unit

responded to these social changes are shaped by their unique positions in social- and economic-structural hierarchies as well as regional and cultural backgrounds.⁷

Relevant to this context, Pilcher (1994) points to an important nuance in Mannheim's sociology of generations: "the difference between basic 'generational location' and 'generation as actuality' [is] that of *potentially* being capable of being 'sucked into the vortex of social change' and in *actually participating* in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period" (p. 490, emphasis in original). Drawing on these two concepts of "generational location" and "generation as actuality," I suggest that in the Turkish context, youth from urban, middle-class, and secular backgrounds might be seen as a "generation unit," whose members were not only *potentially* located in the depoliticized emergent consumer society, but who also had the means and emotional disposition to *actually participate* in the new currents of the 1980s, such as displaying individualistic and materialistic attitudes. These youth had less motivation to develop an explicitly political identity, yet were more inclined to challenge social norms regarding gender and sexuality. Of course, I do not simply accept the existing discourse that insists these youth are apolitical, selfish, and materialistic, nor do I argue that every member of this generational unit rejects gender norms and conservative sexual morality. Rather, I aim to show that when public discourse invests this generation with such qualities, such discourse in fact refers only to youth from urban, secular, and middle-class backgrounds—and thus focuses on a specific

⁷ The example of the emergence of middle-class Islamic youth in Turkey demonstrates how various groups from various social backgrounds may have different responses to similar social changes. Saktanber (2002) identifies Islamic youth as a subculture within the broader framework of Turkish youth culture, and observes that as a distinct cultural group within their larger generation, Islamic youth consciously seek in certain aspects to differentiate themselves not only from the modernist, secularist dominant culture but also from other youth groups, even as they share similar aspirations in other areas.

demographic group.⁸ For this dissertation, then, “Generation 1980” refers to the members of the urban, secular, and middle-class “generation unit” that came of age in the 1980s.

The *self-assured* subjectivity described in this work, I argue, is the product of a combination of a particular sociohistorical context and its concomitant family dynamics. To understand the emergence and formation of this particular subjectivity, one needs to consider the depoliticizing effects of the 1980 military coup, and the subsequent transition to a consumer society, as well as the intersection of the early Republican formulation of the “modern Turkish woman,” the Turkish feminist movement, and the middle-class family structure, and its particular parents-daughter relationship. The combined effect of multiple factors—the continuing reproduction of the Kemalist discourse that pairs modernity and gender equality (to be achieved through secular mass education and mainstream media), strong parental devotion to daughters’ education and career success, and the sense of increased freedom associated with the rapid transition to an open-market economy in the consumerism of the 1980s—created a social atmosphere in which this cohort of women experienced themselves as unquestionably modern and independent.

Re-Entry

In October 2004, when I returned to Turkey to conduct my fieldwork, my parents picked me up at Istanbul Atatürk Airport. Together we drove to their new apartment in one of the recently built gated communities that have sprung up in the outskirts of

⁸ For a compelling discussion on how characterizing Generation 1980 as an apolitical generation deliberately ignores the existence of very political but marginalized Islamic and Kurdish youth organizations in urban centers, see Tugal (2002). In the American context, Ortner discusses the “whiteness” and the lower middle-class-ness of Generation X, even as public debates rarely acknowledge that specific demographic quality of Gen X-ers (1998).

Istanbul's Asian side, towering in the center of lower-income neighborhoods, which were previously shantytowns. The immediate area had no proper sidewalks. Some buildings had the look of "perpetual construction" and some were occupied already without a proper paint-job or even a completed roof. The older low-rise buildings on both sides of the road had no yards or greenery. Children played in the street among parked cars or in front of the small grocery or hardware stores.

As we approached the new compound where my parents live, the scenery changed drastically. The buildings were taller, surrounded by trees with carefully manicured lawns and colorful flowerbeds. Inside the gate, the contrast became almost surreal, with swimming pools and tennis courts, and children playing on a mini-soccer field covered with artificial grass. Private security guards checked residents' identity cards at the entrance.

While I was disturbed by how artificially neat everything looked, I was, of course, glad that my parents were able to afford to live here after my father's retirement. In fact, these new communities (with their payment plans) are much more affordable than buying an apartment in the older, elite parts of the city where housing is limited and much more expensive. Also, the increasing incidence of theft has become one of the biggest worries in Istanbul, leading more and more families and older people to move to gated complexes.

As I looked around in disbelief from the car window I heard my father saying, "Don't worry, we listed your name, but you need to go to the administrative office to get your own I.D. They will take your photo." I knew my father was very proud of being able to move here, so I did not say anything; I just sighed and wondered how long I would

have to stay before finding my own place—an issue that I had not yet raised with my parents, who assumed I would be staying with them as I carried out my fieldwork.

Daughter/Student/Anthropologist

It was strange living in this new apartment, and having both of my parents at home all the time. Yet, living with them was also familiar and comfortable. They had made a daily routine that consisted of driving to the supermarket for groceries, cooking (my mother did most of the cooking, but my father made his special salads, and peeled and cut apples and oranges for us), and watching favored television shows in separate rooms. Soon I, too, developed my own routine. I settled in my younger sister's vacant little room (as she was in America for her doctoral studies), and resumed the role of the student-daughter, picking up where I left off five years ago. I ate my mother's cooking whenever I was home, borrowed my father's car whenever I needed it, tagged along when they went shopping (if I wanted to), and did my "school work," as my mother called it, behind the closed door of my room. I was back to being their daughter, whose only responsibility was to be a good student.

The advantages and disadvantages of being a "daughter" (actual or fictive) for young, unmarried anthropologists in the field have been addressed by female anthropologists conducting their fieldwork either "at home" or among people from similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 2000). Among these anthropologists, Altorki (1988) has written about her experiences conducting research "at home" in Saudi Arabia among middle-class families. As a daughter from a middle-class family, Altorki notes that her class background, her existing social connections through

her family, and her knowledge of her culture were key to gaining access to their private lives. However, in order not to cause disturbance in her relationships, she had to be careful to play the role of a “proper” daughter, behaving as she was expected to by the people around her in this highly sex-segregated society. Altorki came to realize that the more her informants approved of her good behaviors, the more access they granted her into their private lives. Her identity as a “daughter” provided this access and, more importantly, it provided her with a respected status in the society where she conducted her research.

Although my identity as “daughter” required no such compliances to rigorous social obligations encountered by Altorki. In the context of Istanbul’s middle-class, I encountered a different kind of problem: the emotional obligation I felt towards my parents, who expressed at every possible moment how much they had missed me in the past five years. Unless I moved out as soon as possible, I felt doomed to a static role as their daughter: a student doing her “school work.” Kondo (1990) describes a similar experience, albeit in a different context, as a “collapse of identity.” Kondo explains that as a Japanese-American anthropologist doing her fieldwork in Japan while living with a Japanese family, she came to an emotional point where she feared she would lose her identity as an American career-woman and anthropologist. She felt too embedded in the role of the proper Japanese daughter and decided to move to her own apartment.

In my case, the problem was not that I was becoming too Turkish, as I am a native Turkish woman. Similar, rather, to Kondo’s wish to avoid the strict gender hierarchy in the Japanese family, I felt burdened by emotional responsibility towards my parents, and feared it would keep me from conducting my fieldwork freely. I soon began to feel

restricted living with my parents, even though, ostensibly, I was completely free to do as I wished. Every time I called my mother (like a “good daughter”) to let her know I was going to be late for dinner or that I would spend the night at a friend’s apartment, I heard disappointment in her voice. And every time I left their apartment for the day, I saw a worried expression on my mother’s face, as if she was sending me away and something horrible would happen to me. If I stayed away for two nights, even if nothing was said directly, I felt obliged to return home. My father was less involved in my daily schedule, but developed a habit of asking me about my research, wanting to know *exactly* what I was doing, exactly *how many* people I needed to interview, and *why* my fieldwork needed to take this long. One day he advised me I could conduct multiple interviews a day if I used his friends’ offices, and that he could arrange this for me if I wished. It was at that moment that I decided it was time for me to move out. Living in the same apartment with my parents eventually pushed me into a “sense of vertigo” (Kondo, 1990, p. 79), and I feared I would never again experience my adult, independent sense of self.

Looking for an Apartment, and Three Good Friends

I stayed with my parents for about two months. During that time I reached out to old friends and acquaintances, meeting them for lunches, dinners, and various group gatherings. As I reconnected with old friends and made new ones, my long commute from my parents’ place to the central parts of Istanbul became increasingly more fatiguing and time-wasting, especially due to Istanbul’s infamous car traffic and the unreliable public transportation between the Asian and European sides of the city.

I was already asking around for an affordable apartment close to Taksim—one of the main, and oldest, financial and entertainment centers in Istanbul. Because I had been looking for a place for less than a year, going through a real estate agent was useless. Subletting, not a common practice in Istanbul, was unlikely. I decided my only option would be to answer ads for foreigners and expatriates living in the city. However, I discover this path was very expensive (rents were based most often on US dollars or Euros) or restricted to shared apartments. I still thought I should give it a try, and replied to a posting to expats for an apartment share in Teşvikiye, an old middle-class neighborhood. I went to see the place with my friend Zeynep. Even as the apartment's location was convenient and the size of the room was large enough, I felt the idea of living with two European men (a Briton and a Swede) unsuitable for doing fieldwork among Turkish women. And Zeynep whispered into my ear, “Can you really be comfortable living with two men?”

I decided to find a place with a Turkish friend and approached one who lived in Nişantaşı (an old upper- and middle-class neighborhood) about renting one of the rooms in her place. She was separating from her husband at the time, so I thought it might work out well for the both of us. However, after struggling a little to find a way to answer my question, she politely declined, indicating to me she was not ready for someone to move in. Later, I realized that my friend and her husband were still seeing each other and were working on getting back together. If she were to let me share her apartment, this new arrangement would signal she was giving up on her marriage.

Zeynep, another close friend I thought to approach about sharing her apartment, was one of my oldest friends, and I was sure she could use the extra cash. She had

recently settled into a new apartment her parents had bought for her in Şişli. I also knew she received financial help from her parents because she earned (as an assistant professor in a public university) barely enough to meet expenses. Yet, when I asked if I could rent her extra room and share the utilities (she had complained several times about how high the gas bill was, especially in the winter), she was taken aback and struggled for words. Finally she explained she was looking forward to living alone. Although I was disappointed, I certainly empathized with her, as she too had returned to Istanbul after several years of living alone in Europe doctoral student. On re-entry she had lived with her parents for more than two years and I sensed she worried that her parents might not like the new arrangement. When I asked her if this was the case, her answer was evasive, which only strengthened my suspicion.

Yet, always a generous friend, Zeynep offered to let me stay with her as much as I desired while still based at my parents' home. And when I stayed at her place during my trips to the city, I realized that her mother had complete access to the apartment. She frequently stopped by—they lived in the same neighborhood—to check on the apartment and scolded Zeynep if the apartment was not tidy or clean enough. Zeynep once half-jokingly told me that she had found out her mother mopped the floors while Zeynep was at work. It seemed that while she complained about her mother's hovering she also secretly enjoyed her help with the cleaning.

The apartment-hunting disappointment had continued to mount when I heard good news from Şebnem (another friend from high school who had also recently returned to finish research in Istanbul and write her dissertation): a small apartment was available in her building in the neighborhood of Cihangir. Not only was Cihangir one of the most

convenient neighborhoods, given its walking distance to Taksim and easy commute to other parts of the city, but I would also be living in the same building as one of my oldest friends. Şebnem's mother knew the landlady and could help me secure the apartment. I was thrilled.

The next step was to break the news to my parents. I expected they would be unhappy about my living elsewhere in the same city. To make things even harder, a few weeks earlier I had left my American debit card at an ATM location after making a withdrawal, and it would take almost a month for me to receive my new card. That meant I had no access to my account, and I needed to ask my father for the first month of rent.

Moving Out: The Upsetting Daughter

My parents were sitting at the kitchen table enjoying their tea when I hesitantly opened up the conversation, telling them it would be better for my research if I lived closer to the city center where most of my friends lived. I gave the news about the apartment in Sebnem's parents' building. As expected, my father responded that renting a place was an "unnecessary" expense since I was already living at home. We went back and forth a few times as I gave more reasons. He remained unconvinced and expressed his disapproval.

My father finally looked at me said, "I don't have a budget for that," even as I had not asked for assistance. I knew the problem had little to do with money; for them it was the combination of the "unnecessary" expense and my wanting to live on my own, just when I had returned after many years away. I explained that I only needed to borrow the first month of rent because I had lost my ATM card. He shrugged his shoulders and

mumbled something, indicating that he could not stop me, and asked how much I would need.

The argument with my father reminded me of similar arguments we had when I was a teenager. I glanced at my mother to see her reaction. She was sitting by the cracked-open balcony door, slightly away from us, smoking a cigarette and sipping her Turkish coffee. She said nothing, as if the matter should be solved between me and my father. Perhaps she too was remembering other arguments between us, and figured we had always found a way to work it out.

Friend/Peer/Anthropologist

My efforts to settle into my own apartment and to create a livable space were topics of curious conversation among friends and informants. Gradually the mismatched furniture and appliances I had gathered from various sources—including my parents, Sebnem’s parents, friends, and secondhand and discount stores—became the subjects of jokes (mixed with curiosity and astonishment) among them. I knew that compared to my friends’ and informants’ apartments and furnishings, my apartment looked more like a graduate student’s apartment.

I was aware of my “oddness” to my friends and informants. While we still held things in common—growing up in Istanbul, attending the same educational institutions, enjoying the same urban popular culture—our lives had become quite different. I was only temporarily in Istanbul and “still a student,” as some friends frequently reminded me, while they were settled in the city, building adult lives there. Sometimes my friends picked up the check at restaurants, emphasizing that I was “still a student.” One friend

mused, not so approvingly, “So it is still possible to be a student while in your *thirties* . . .” My status as student, even at the graduate level—someone not settled in one place or not yet earning a steady income—caused some curiosity and to a certain extent disapproval among some friends. Other friends and informants told me that they partly envied my life, perceiving it as less restricted, defined less by expectations for the life course of women in Turkey. During an interview, one informant told me she had once had a job offer in Italy, remarking, “If I weren’t married and with my son, I would have taken it in a split second. That’s one of my biggest regrets. But in the end, I wanted my son to grow up with his grandparents.”

Studying Women’s Lives

Although the study of women’s lives forms a long tradition in anthropology (see for example, Feltcher, 1910; Mead, 1928; Underhill, 1936; Landes, 1947; Paulme, 1963; Leith-Ross, 1965), feminist anthropology became a more defined field and method in the 1970s, strongly influenced by the emerging “second wave” of feminism. During this decade, feminist anthropologists formulated a strong critique of the underlying androcentric bias and biological determinism in the discipline. Based on analysis of wide-ranging ethnographic materials, feminist anthropologists believed that gender asymmetry existed cross-culturally, hence focused their studies on finding universal laws that might explain women’s cross-cultural oppression (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974; Reiter, 1975; Sacks, 1974; Ortner, 1974). In the 1980s, alongside poststructural and postmodern debates that questioned constructions of the “other” and “the authority of the anthropologist,” feminist anthropologists began to rethink the assumptions and

universalizing tendencies of second-wave feminism (Rosaldo, 1980; Strathern, 1980; Ortner, 1996). In America, scholars and writers criticized white, heterosexual, middle-class feminist anthropology for displaying ethnocentric tendencies, particularly feminists from non-Western countries, (Lazreg, 1988; Mohanty, 1991), women of color (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1991; Ong, 1988) and lesbian feminists (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

Furthermore, the recognition that studying women's lives required scholars to avoid both privileging Anglo-Saxon middle-class women's experience and essentializing non-Western women's difference has led to constructive debates in search of a definition and set of goals for feminist ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Bell, 1993; Stacey, 1988; Viswesvaran, 1994; Wolf, 1992), and the production of rich cross-cultural ethnographies. This body of work focuses on understanding women's lives by asking "how power is related to gender, how gendered structuring is promoted, enacted, accommodated, and resisted in everyday practice, and how it is sometimes overturned by political practice" (Walter, 1995, p. 276; and see, for example, Abu-Lughod, 1991, 1993; Behar, 1993; Constable, 2003; Ginsburg, 1989; Hirsch, 2003; Kelly, 2008; Kelsky, 2001; Rofel, 1999; Wardlaw, 2006).

My research and writing have also been shaped by such works. Inspired by Bell (1993), who argues "[b]y privileging woman as knower, man is ethnographically decentered, and this is a profoundly political act" (p. 30), and Abu-Lughod (1990), who defines as feminist "ethnographies that try to bring to life what it means to be a woman in other places and under different conditions, ethnographies that explore what work, marriage, motherhood, sexuality, education, poetry, television, poverty, or illness mean to other women" (p. 27), I focus on the daily lives of urban women and, through their

narratives of self, explore how they negotiate identities as modern women in the midst of competing ideologies.

Finally, my work engages with the discussions aiming to increase communication between academic feminism and psychological anthropology. Seymour writes in a 2004 special volume of *Ethos* dedicated to this goal:

Psychological anthropology offers feminists a range of theories about the relationship between cultural systems of gender difference and gender inequality, about how individuals reproduce these systems in their child-care and educational practices, about the inner worlds that motivate individuals to enact gender, and about the basis for such internalized schemas in human development (Seymour, 2004, p. 424).

From a perspective of feminist psychological anthropology (Mahoney&Yngvesson, 1992; McHugh, 2004; Seymour, 2004), I explore the ways in which cultural models of selves, Turkish middle-class parenting practices, binary construction of a nationalistic vision for modern Turkish women and recent political transformation interact and play a significant role in the formation and transformation of a self-assured subjectivity shared among a cohort of contemporary Turkish women.

Fieldwork

I conducted the main portion of my fieldwork in Istanbul between October 2004 and August 2005. I returned for two months of follow-up research in 2006, and again in 2007. During my fieldwork, I closely followed the daily lives of 25 women from

Generation 1980, whose lives have many similarities. Almost all of the participants of this research were born and raised in middle-class families of Istanbul. All of the participants hold university degrees, and a majority attended elite (private or public) high schools whose instruction is conducted mostly in foreign languages (most in English or French, a few in German or Italian). These women have all traveled to various countries in Europe or the US as tourists, and many of them lived abroad for a month up to four years for their education or internships. At the time of my fieldwork, their ages ranged from 25 to 36 years old; roughly half were single, the others married, with two divorced. Only one woman was a mother (with one child); one other was pregnant. All but one were heterosexual.

I began my fieldwork by reaching out to old friends and acquaintances. As they generously invited me into their social lives and into their homes, I met new informants through their connections. With these informants, I conducted open-ended interviews lasting from two to four hours each. With most, I conducted second interviews, also in an open-ended format. Formal interviews were conducted mostly in informants' homes and all were audio-recorded. In addition to these interviews, I spent numerous hours with my informants—individually or in groups—sometimes in the presence of other family members, chatting, sharing meals, and watching television. As much as I spent time with my informants in the privacy of their homes, I also frequently socialized with them in the city, in coffee shops, restaurants, movie theaters, and shopping malls, or simply while running errands with them. In writing about these occasions, settings, and the conversations we had, I relied on my memory, my journal entries, and photographs I took.

Since I began recruiting my informants through existing connections, most of them knew each other to varying degrees, ranging from distant acquaintances in overlapping social circles to close friends. During my fieldwork I was regularly in touch with four circles of friends, which included all but a few of my informants. I was connected to three of these circles through high school and the fourth through college. However, each of the circles included other people who did not have these school connections; they had become part of the circle through a colleague, neighbor, or friend of friend. The four circles of friendship overlapped for some of the women.

I found that staying in touch with my informants through these friendship circles was fruitful in three ways. First, it made it more convenient to meet and recruit informants to participate in my research. Second, it was helpful for staying in touch with multiple informants at the same time. Often when I called one woman we would also talk about another friend, which helped me to learn that friend's schedule or whereabouts. Whenever I was at an informant's house, it was likely another would friend either drop by or be invited over. These linkages and social opportunities were invaluable for research in an urban context, where everyone has busy daily schedules and packed social lives. Finally, through these networks of friends, I had many opportunities to observe them in diverse contexts and in various combinations of friends. During these casual gatherings women talked (or gossiped) about their friends, some of who were also my informants. These occasions helped to broaden my understanding of the relationships among friends in their daily lives, and to learn about their values.

As I planned to ask questions about intimate subjects, including informants' early romantic and sexual experiences, marital problems, and potential domestic abuse and

public harassment experiences, I expected that conducting interviews with men would be uncomfortable for both parties, and ultimately not very productive. Furthermore, as I was in touch with close circles of friends, interviewing men who belong to the same circles (as significant others, ex-boyfriends and friends), I worried, would potentially have created a sense of lack of discretion.

Even as I did not interview men, I spent a great deal of time with them in informal contexts and observed interactions between women and men as couples, friends, and colleagues. In many of the social settings and gatherings in which I participated, men were also present, and all were aware that I was conducting research on women.

In interviews, as a result of closeness in age, similar social backgrounds, and my prior history with some of them, their interactions with me played a significant role in representations of themselves and their framing of their stories.⁹ I revealed myself more at some times than others. This is clear in certain chapters, both in terms of my informants' expectations of me—for example, when informants perceived me “as one of them,” including me in their generalizing comments about “women of our generation”—and in my reactions to them. Because they often assumed I was in agreement with them and shared similar values and views, I was quite conscious about my responses to them, particularly when I disagreed or felt frustrated with them. I often refrained from openly expressing such sentiments, yet there were moments that I either directly challenged them or they sensed my reaction. In those moments, we both had to reassess our identities for each other.

⁹ As Ewing (2006) states “From the perspective of the dynamics of identity negotiation, interviewing itself is a form of participant-observation in which the interviewer and respondent are engaged in a dance of carefully chosen communication that modulates their shifting identities” (p. 91).

Organization of the Work

In the first part of the dissertation, I analyze my informants' early lives, based on personal accounts of their youth, particularly their teenage years in high school and their college years, as they recalled them during interviews. In women's narratives of early youth, their relationships with parents, early sexual experiences with boyfriends, friendships at school, and experiences in the city all emerged as crucial sites in shaping their identities.

In Chapter 2, I provide background information on the 1980s, based on my informants' memories and on mainstream media archives. I demonstrate the ways youth have been simultaneously targeted by the state's depoliticizing apparatuses, and argue that women's earlier experiences and indirect exposure to this institutional violence and culture of fear deeply affected their attitudes towards politics and political engagement, and led to the formation of a collective 'apolitical' political self, and hence hindered the development of feminist identity. In Chapter 3, I look at middle-class family structure and parenting practices in urban Turkey through my informants' accounts of their parents and their memories of teenage years. Arguing that women of Generation 1980 received conflicting messages regarding women's identity, I show that, on the one hand, they have been socialized to be "modern and independent women," and been told that they were equal to men, and, on the other, by observing the dynamic between their parents, they learned that women had typically secondary status. Hence, in order for the women of Generation 1980 to be "modern and independent," they have to continuously disparage so-called feminine characteristics and roles. In Chapter 4 I explore women's narratives of early dating and sexual experiences, showing that while these women strongly believe in

the “normality” and “naturalness” of premarital sexuality, by insisting on maintaining marriage-like, long-term monogamous relationships, they uphold and retain norms of conservative sexual morality.

While the first half of my dissertation examines women’s experiences as they came of age in Istanbul in the 1980s and their college years in the 1990s, the second half focuses on their 30s, living in Istanbul. My informants’ narratives as well as my observations suggest that despite (and because of) significant breakthroughs in terms of self-empowerment, increasing public participation, and sexual liberation, many women are frustrated today as they experience an unexpected discontinuity between what they had imagined their future would be and how they perceive their lives at present.

In Chapter 5 I look at women’s experience in public spaces, particularly their understanding of their identity as working women. I argue that because women of Generation 1980 perceive themselves as modern and accomplished professionals, they focus on maintaining good relationships at work, but deny any possibility of gender inequality there. Focusing on women’s intimate relationships in Chapter 6, I show that women’s earlier perceptions of themselves as “modern and independent women” are systematically shattered as they come to realize their male counterparts at home fail to regard them as such, and expect them to conform to conventional gender roles. In this context, women of Generation 1980 experience a sense of discontinuity in the construction of their subjectivities, a result of the discrepancy they feel between the “free” and “independent” women they were supposed to be, and the betrayal they feel in the realization of not living up to this image. I further demonstrate that, in trying to make sense of their frustration, these women strive to explain and justify their decisions and

choices, particularly those affecting their self-identity as “modern” women, in hopes of creating a coherent life story and identity.

To understand women of Generation 1980 as a unique cohort, I conclude that it is crucial to consider the combined effect of two social and historical contexts: the dominant Kemalist discourse of gender equality along with the social transformation of the 1980s. The Kemalist discourse, and its binary representation of women as either “modern/emancipated” or “traditional/oppressed,” leaves no room for educated secular women to understand their struggle as a result of existing gender inequality; even when confronted with gendered divisions and inequalities they do not perceive themselves as “oppressed women.” The systematic depoliticization of the public sphere in the 1980s with the ensuing emergence of consumerism severely impeded the women of Generation 1980 in associating themselves with any form of collective resistance, including the feminist movement, and impelled them to turn to the private sphere. Only by locating women in the midst of these countercurrents can we arrive at a more complex understanding of how individual women experience and cope with the competing forces shaping their historical moment and social environment.

Chapter 2

Feminism and Apoliticism

The nightclub has not yet opened for the day by the time I arrived. The staff, attired in sleek black trousers and crisp white shirts, was busily working to dress the tables with white linens in preparation for a long night. The empty dance platform shining under several huge glass chandeliers and surrounded with black leather seats and mirrored walls, looked smaller than it actually was without anyone on it. The scene looked strange with the daylight still streaming in from the huge window behind the DJ booth, looking over one of the most luxurious views of Istanbul. I asked a staff member—a young, slim man with spiky hair full of gel—where I could find Seda. He gently directed me towards a narrow hallway hidden behind a dark velvet curtain. As soon as I walked through to the other side of the curtain, the glittery decoration of the club suddenly disappeared. The dark hallway led me to an open door. As I peeked through the door, I saw Seda sitting in a tiny, windowless room behind a crowded desk surrounded by towers of beer and wine cases. The room looked more like a small storage space than an office. Seda got up and greeted me with a big smile. “Oh! You’re here already; I was just going over the numbers.”

I was a little nervous when I asked Seda if she would let me interview her, as we were just acquaintances from years ago. When her cheerful voice on the other end of the phone invited me to her club for the interview I was relieved. She told me to arrive early so that we could have dinner in the club’s restaurant before it got too crowded and the music got too loud. I had first met Seda through mutual friends in 1998, about six years

before I began my fieldwork. At that time, she had recently opened a small café/bar located on a fashionable shopping strip on the Asian side of Istanbul, with her then-boyfriend. The locale had quickly become a popular spot, frequented mostly by young adults. Shortly after achieving this entrepreneurial success, Seda married her boyfriend; I attended their wedding party. The following year I left Istanbul to pursue my doctoral studies in the United States, and I had only seen her once in the interim, before I started my fieldwork. Over the years, however, I had occasionally heard news of her from mutual friends, including that she got a divorce after less than a month of marriage, and then closed their business. Soon after her divorce, she partnered with a friend and opened up a nightclub on the European side of the city, which apparently became an instant hit. (I actually had a chance to see this club once during one of my visits home.) Yet a few years later, high rent caused her and her partner to close the place. Then, just before I started my fieldwork, I heard that Seda opened up a new club—this time by herself.

As Seda got up to greet me, I noticed she was wearing a stylish black evening top with generous cleavage and a knee-high black skirt, the outfit completed with high-heel black leather boots. Next to her, I felt a little underdressed. Thankfully, at least I was wearing a black evening top. We walked out of her office and entered the glittery world of the club; the daylight by then had faded. It was a warm Istanbul evening and the skyline over the Golden Horn¹⁰ was breathtaking. One of the waiters escorted us to the terrace for dinner, where most of the tables were already occupied. I was relieved to see that most of the customers were in casual outfits. After we both sat down, I asked her if I could use a tape recorder. I hoped that she would not be worried about what the staff

¹⁰ The Golden Horn (*Halic*) is an inlet of the Bosphorus that divides the city of Istanbul and forms a natural harbor.

might think of all this, but she agreed without hesitation. Seda looked at the recorder and half-jokingly, half-nervously asked, “What are you going to ask me?” I told her that I was interested in learning about the lives of young women like her (I emphasized “like her” but purposefully did not elaborate further), in Istanbul. She asked, “What aspect of their lives? Careers, sexual lives, or what?” The direct way she posed her questions reminded me how straightforward she was. I replied that I would focus on all aspects of their lives, but, depending on each informant’s unique life, I would probably highlight some parts more than others. Overall, I said, I was trying to portray the lives of the young women who grew up in Istanbul in the 1980s. “It’s a very nice topic,” she responded, with a broad smile, and quickly launched into a passionate opening speech before I even asked any of my questions:

We lived in a completely free era in the 1980s, and this is reflected in all our actions, [and] career strategies. I mean our mothers, aunts, [they] didn’t live like us. Yes, my aunts went to college and all, but still their marriages were very typical (*klasik boyutta evlilikler yaptilar*). In fact, they got married without experiencing other relationships. I’m sure you know people like that in your family too. Later, we went to college, moved out of our parents’ homes, lived by ourselves, and so on. Previous generations didn’t live like this.

As I tried to follow this passionate, but unexpected, stream of words, one of the first things I noticed in her narrative was the way she tacked back and forth between her personal experiences and a shared, “we” experience. Throughout our conversation, she frequently used “we” while describing her experiences as a woman living in Istanbul. She

often sought my confirmation (“I’m sure you know people like that in your family too”), clearly perceiving me as someone “like her.” Seda’s use of “we” and “us” asserts a shared experience with her peers, exemplified in her statement “Our mothers didn’t live like us.” At the same time that her words posit shared experiences, she also represents herself as a woman who lived a life very different from her mother’s and aunts’ lives. By doing so, she constructs a generational (or age cohort) “we” identity by differentiating it from the women of previous generations. Throughout her interview, Seda compared her generation to her mother’s, reinforcing the impression of a common cohort experience and identity. This narrative of contrast between generations, constructed by emphasizing similarities among their peers and emphasizing their differences from the women of older generations, was articulated in interview after interview with women of this cohort. Based on the frequency of such representations, I argue that women of Generation 1980 share a subjectivity of self-assurance. With this term, I intend to evoke the sense of confidence and pride that women expressed when asserting that their independence and self-reliance was a new achievement for women, a significant break from the experiences of women in their mothers’ generation.

The Making of the “Modern Turkish Woman”

In order to explain the emergence of this cohort’s self-assured subjectivity, this section provides a brief background of the social and historical context in which they became “actual participants” in and not merely “potentially capable” members¹¹ (Pilcher, 1994) of Turkey’s fast-changing society in the 1980s. To begin, I introduce two cohorts

¹¹ Pilcher (1994) defines these concepts in her discussion of Mannheim’s formulation of the formations of generations, generational units, and generational consciousness (see the Introduction).

of Turkish women from two different generations that each played significant social roles as agents of change during their respective historical periods. I trace the construction of the identity of “modern women,” as it was yearned for by previous generations of educated women and actually experienced by Generation 1980, and explore the continuities of and ruptures between these generations.

“The First Generation”

During Turkey’s early modernization period (1923–late 1930s), under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, gender equality and women’s issues were considered an important component of the nation’s westernization project. In 1923, primary school education was made mandatory for both sexes. In 1926, the Grand National Assembly adopted the Swiss Civil Code as the basis of its Civil Law (which includes Family Law), which abolished polygamy; prevented child marriages by imposing a minimum age for marriage; recognized women as legal equals of men; and granted women the right to choose their spouses, initiate divorce, and maintain their maternal rights after a divorce. In 1930, women were granted the right to vote and run in municipal elections, and to run in national elections in 1934 (Arat, Z., 1994).¹²

Based on these reforms, the Kemalist regime declared that Turkish women were now elevated to the level of their Western counterparts. During this period, women were called upon by the nation’s elite to contribute to the country’s westernization by setting an example to other women (traditional, rural, uneducated) with their secular education and modern lifestyle, including wearing Western clothing and participating in the mixed-gender public sphere, as well as by raising the next generation with modern parenting and

¹² See Arat, Z. (1994) for more details on the legal policy framework of the era.

housekeeping practices. Memoirs, interviews, and testimonies indicate that women of this generation embraced these social responsibilities and embodied the “modern Turkish women” identity as envisioned by the nation’s elite (Durakbasa, 1998). This cohort of women, research shows, continues to display a strong commitment to the Republic’s ideals, and firmly believes that Kemalist reforms emancipated Turkish women.

Particularly as mothers and teachers, these modern Turkish women dutifully passed their convictions on to the younger generations. Based on the oral histories of these women, Durakbasa (2001) argues that they “played crucial roles as agents of modernization and presented role models for other women not only in their professional life but also in prime areas of socialization and family life” (p. 200).

In public discourse as well as in scholarly work, women who grew up in this era are frequently called “the first generation” of modern Turkish women (e.g., Arat, Z., 2003; Durakbasa, 2001; Ozyurek, 2006). Significantly, despite the use of the term “generation,” “the first generation” of women refers to a specific demographic cohort: urban and secular women who came from educated, civil-servant, and well-to-do merchant families. In other words, “the first generation” overwhelmingly consisted of women who could “actually participate” (Mannheim, 1952 [1923]) in the emerging mixed-gender public life and co-ed schools, as they received the necessary financial and emotional support from their parents—the elites devoted to Turkey’s westernization project and Kemalist reforms.

Turkish Feminists

The second era when Turkish women emerged as a considerable social force was the early 1980s. This cohort of women, comprised of the daughters of the “first generation,” organized Turkey’s first modern feminist movement in the early 1980s, influenced by the second-wave feminism of the West.¹³ Turkish feminists have argued that early Republican reforms never defined women’s issues within the framework of gender equality, but rather were focused on “saving women” from both “backward traditions” and the “misuse of Islam,” which were assumed to degrade women. Despite its emancipatory rhetoric and gender equality policies, they argue that the “Kemalist state continued to employ the domestic definition of the female role in society and emphasized reproduction and child care as the primary functions of women” (Arat, Z., 1994, p. 73). This body of feminist work convincingly demonstrates that even though women’s education was at the top of the modernizers’ list of reforms, the goal of education policy was to educate modern wives and mothers who would raise the next generation (Arat, Z., 1998, 2003; Gok, 1995; Ozbay, 1981; Tekeli, 1990; Toktas & Cindoglu, 2006). Research also shows that—despite the fact that Kemalist reforms gave women the right to vote and be elected—women were only encouraged to participate in politics “in a token fashion” (Tekeli, 1990, p. 273).¹⁴ Zehra Arat (1994) concludes that “development and modernization in Turkey meant Westernization, and the Kemalist reforms attempted to

¹³ Turkish feminists and feminist activists were largely involved in leftist movement in the 1970s, but they also criticized the leftist agenda for its perception of women’s issues and roles as secondary (see Bertkay, 1995).

¹⁴ Existing research, particularly in rural Turkey, shows that during the modernization process, rural women were in fact more marginalized due to their reliance on local men to access the institutions of the modern state (Erturk, 1995).

reorganize social life by replacement of the Islamic patriarchy with that of a secular, ‘Western’ one” (p. 59).

The Turkish feminist movement in the late 1980s provided the first systematic critique of the gender politics of the Turkish modernization project, challenging the widely held conviction that the Kemalist reforms emancipated Turkish women. Yesim Arat (1997) writes, “[u]ntil the 1980s, there was a consensus in society that Kemalist reforms had emancipated women and that this fact could not be contested. . . . The consensus broke down when a younger generation of educated women professionals who called themselves feminist challenged the tradition” (p. 103).

On the other hand, feminists also admit that despite its limited approach to women’s issues, “there is no doubt . . . the Kemalist reforms have directly benefited women of the urban bourgeoisie” (Kandiyoti, 1987, p. 322), “provided legitimacy for women’s claim to equality with men in the public realm” (Arat, Y., 1997, p. 101), created “a larger room for women in the public domain” (Arat, Z., 1994, p. 75), and “however unintentionally, . . . cultivated in women the first germs of individuation, because individual women were forced to define an ethic for themselves as they pushed forward to open up space in the public domain and challenge their gender-status” (Durakbasa, 1998, p. 150).

Although Turkish feminists positioned themselves in opposition to their the Kemalist “state feminism” of their mothers’ generation, and expressed their disappointment in the first-generation’s rejection of their critique of Kemalist gender ideology, these feminists also acknowledge that they have benefited from being raised by these Kemalist women and their commitment to raising “modern” daughters. The

relationship between these two generations of Turkish women who disagree on the definitions of gender equality and women's emancipation could be defined as a continuous love-hate relationship. Zehra Arat (2003) describes the influence of the first generation of modern women on her generation:

As my mother, aunts, parents' friends, neighbors, and most importantly as my teachers, they held powerful positions and used their power to *encourage* me, as well as to *constrain* me. Even though as educated (and professional, in some cases) women, they served as positive role models to be imitated by many women of my generation, their acceptance of the assigned gender roles and efforts to maintain them also provided reverse models that we would criticize, improve on and rebel against (p. 65; emphases in original).

Despite their apparent disagreement on the definitions of gender equality and women's emancipation, these two generations of elite women shared similar aspirations and responsibilities regarding the improvement of women's status in Turkish society. Both generations of women have clearly been shaped by the social, historical, and familial contexts in which they lived—Kemalist movement and leftist youth activism respectively—as well as they have shaped each other, which is reflected in their assumed collective responsibility towards elevating the social status of Turkish women nationwide.¹⁵

¹⁵ For example, on the activist front, Turkish feminists initiated heated debates in the public sphere about women's secondary status in Turkey and the problem of domestic violence, and accomplished considerable improvements in the legal sphere regarding women's rights. See Sirman (1989) for a detailed inquiry into the Turkish feminist movement.

Women of Generation 1980

In marked contrast to the women of the two cohorts discussed above, my informants, when asked, told me that they had never quite identified with feminism or felt obligated to help other women. For example, one informant, Arzu (34, single, freelance accountant), told me about her experience attending a feminist consciousness-raising group when she was in college, and why it was not for her:

Esin: Do you remember anything about feminism in the 1980s?

Arzu: Of course! We used to go to Duygu Asena¹⁶ meetings.

Esin: What do you remember from those meetings?

Arzu: When Asena's first book, *Kadinin Adi Yok* [*Woman Has No Name*, 1987]¹⁷, came out, I was a senior in high school. I read it like crazy and was really taken with it. . . . We got really into feminism—it was pretty important. [She became very excited while talking about this].

Esin: How were the meetings?

Arzu: We used to go . . . [her excitement suddenly diminished here] but after a while I got irritated (*kil oldum*) [youth slang, popular phrase in the 1980s] by the whole thing. Any systematic organization bothers me. You know, how you need to follow a certain style of speaking; you have to take their discourse very seriously. I get so bored and frustrated from that kind of imposed seriousness.

Because, I think that even if you are a feminist, unless you are getting beaten by

¹⁶ Duygu Asena was the most well-known face of the feminist movement in Turkey in 1980s, until her death in 1996. She was a writer, journalist, and magazine editor, including of the women's magazine *Kadinca* and the youth magazine *Onyedi*. Her book, *Woman Has No Name* (1987), became the manifesto of popular feminism.

¹⁷ *Kadinin Adi Yok* (2008) Dogan Kitapcilik 64th edition; first published in 1987 (in Turkish).

your husband, it is not really possible to feel really passionate about doing something about it. If you act passionate, then I don't believe you are sincere. I feel like they overdo it in their activism, speeches and protests and all that. I think it becomes comical . . . then I start thinking that there is something wrong with those women and that they are just trying to make up for something missing in their own lives by fighting for somebody else. Okay. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but let's accept this: if you are fighting for somebody, first, you do it to satisfy yourself; you like the myth of sacrificing yourself for somebody else. I find all this very insincere and comical. I am not motivated by that—by feminism.

Arzu was quite confident in her position. Her tone of voice oscillated between cynicism and anger. She also seemed to be quite proud of herself when she was analyzing the “real” motivation behind “activist” women, as she described them. Arzu does not deny that there are problems that needs to be fixed, however, she does not seem to believe in the possibility that someone could empathize with somebody else's problems and pain enough to motivate them to do something about it. Arzu seemed to believe that the “true” motivation to fight for justice could only emerge from the personal experience of oppression or injustice, not from the simple existence of an injustice—whether or not one is directly affected by it. According to her, if one does suffer personally, the intention and the effort to fix the problem cannot be genuine.

During my fieldwork, I collected similar responses from my informants. They all remembered Duygu Asena, and other popular topics and events related to the feminist movement, but none of them identified themselves as a feminist. In fact, the majority of them distanced themselves from feminism. How can we understand the lack of interest in

feminist politics among these women, and their indifference towards feminism despite the pride they take in living their lives so differently than their mothers, as Seda claimed above?

I suggest that a part of the answer to this question can be found in the larger context of Generation 1980's exposure to "the political" during the time that they came of age, and the way in which their relationship to Turkish politics in general have been shaped. I asked my informant Ebru (30, finance sector, single) if she was interested in politics when she was younger. She replied:

Nope, nada, zero, nothing (*hayir, hic, sifir, yok*). I mean talking about politics is a very common thing to do in our family. It's like that in most Turkish families; politics is the number one topic. You know, my father is a civil servant. I should say, he is a bureaucrat—so politics is an even more important topic at home . . . like for every Turkish youth. But other than that, politics—not interested. Like all Turkish youth (*her Turk genci gibi*).

Her unapologetic answer to my question is remarkable, and it is quite telling that Ebru assumes that "the Turkish youth" are not interested in politics even though, as she also generalizes, politics is a common topic of daily family conversations in "most Turkish families." Later in this chapter, I return to the topic of my informants' exposure to "talking about politics" at home, but first I focus on the youth's understanding of politics.

As discussed in the Introduction, public discourse in the 1980s notoriously labeled the generation that grew up in this period as "apolitical," "individualistic," and "selfish,"

characterizing them as the embodiment of the neoliberalism that emerged in Turkey at that time (Neyzi, 2001). Older generations, mostly intellectuals, writers, artists, and journalists, criticized the youth for not caring about social issues and problems and for their disinterest in politics, and labeled them as selfish, materialistic, and consumerist.¹⁸ Over the years, the “apolitical” label—one that is still alive today in public discourse—was reproduced so often, and taken for granted by so many people, that it has become a truism in Turkish culture.

In this context, my informants’ distancing themselves from feminism could be seen as an indication of the apoliticism of women of Generation 1980. However, such sweeping portrayals are simplistic and homogenizing, as they are detached from the sociohistorical context within which women of Generation 1980 learned to define concepts such as politics and feminism and developed collective understandings of what it means to be an activist or a feminist. Such portrayals also ignore the considerable radical changes that these women insisted on and incorporated into their personal lives—the very changes Seda listed in the opening of this chapter.

Post-1980 Youth and the Changing Public Representations of Turkish Youth

Instead of taking the depiction of post-1980 youth as an “apolitical” generation for granted, in a rare instance of an anthropological approach that draws on interviews with youth, Neyzi (2001) examines how the construction of such a discourse became possible. To illuminate the sociohistorical context in which the “apolitical” label arose,

¹⁸ See Neyzi (2001) for some of these published commentaries.

she examines the changing dominant discourses on youth over the course of three major eras in the history of modern Turkey.

The first period (1923–1950), according to Neyzi’s (2001) analysis, is marked by the establishment of the Turkish Republic and the single-party regime. Using historical documents and public speeches Neyzi shows that the Republican state ideology during this period constructed the Turkish youth as “the guardians of the regime” (p. 416). The youth, perceived as the future of the regime, were given the role of protecting the nation’s interests, and were expected to work towards the country’s modernization (following the Kemalist pillars of Westernization, secularization, and nationalism). Consistent with these expectations, as Neyzi (2001) documents with oral history research, biographies, and memoirs, the generation who grew up in this period identified with their role as “guardians of the regime,” and continued to display life-long loyalty to the Republican ideology. This is the same period when “the first generation” of modern Turkish women came of age, identifying themselves with the Republican vision and with the role of raising the next modern generation as mothers, teachers, and, in some cases, as professional women. The similarity between the male and female members of this generation in terms of their devotion and loyalty to Kemalist ideals and their identifications with their social roles is a significant indicator of generational consciousness, as defined by Mannheim (1952 [1923]).

The second period (1950–1980) is defined by Neyzi (2001) as “characterized by the widespread politicization of youth, particularly university students, who were increasingly divided into the two opposed camps of ‘rightists’ and ‘leftists’” (p. 419) and the brutal intervention of the 1980 military coup that halted all political activity and

organizing. During this period, public discourse associated young people with violence and anarchy, representing them as a “threat to the national interest” (p. 419). Contrary to their public representation, the youth of this period, Neyzi (2001) shows, perceived themselves as “the savior of the country” (p. 418) from either the “rightists” (nationalists and fascists, as called in the leftist discourse) or from the “leftists” (communists and anarchists, as called in the rightist discourse), depending on their ideological stance in the movement. There is, however, as Neyzi points out, a common point in these three seemingly opposite public representations of the youth (“the guardians of the regime,” a “threat to the national interest,” and the “saviors of the country”): all assign a homogeneous identity to the Turkish youth and a collective responsibility, “with a mission assigned to them of transforming society from above” (p. 412). Significantly, both generations of youth identified with this vision—that is, they perceived themselves as part of a collective, and assumed the responsibility of working towards achieving a social ideal in accordance with their ideological position.

Neyzi (2001) argues that there is a disconnect between the public vision of the post-1980 youth and youths’ own perception of themselves, based upon her interviews with youth and her analyses of written commentary about the post-1980 youth. She shows that public discourse in Turkey continues to characterize youth as a homogenous entity, and to insist that they should be working collectively towards a larger social goal. Representations of post-1980 youth as “apolitical,” “materialistic,” and “selfish,” she argues, are an indication of this ongoing perception of that generation of youth. However, unlike previous generations, Neyzi finds, post-1980 youth reject both collective responsibility and homogeneous identity. Instead, they associate with multiple identities

rather than one national identity; Neyzi (2001) writes, “the Turkish Republic is identified with a militaristic and bureaucratic state from which the individual feels increasingly detached” (p. 424). Neyzi also finds, in interviews with post-1980 youth, that they actively challenge their public representation as an “apolitical generation” and as “selfish, individualistic consumers” (p. 424). Neyzi’s informants, mainly young intellectuals, artists, and activists, perceive themselves socially conscious and politically active through their engagement in issue-focused identity politics, such as environmentalism and gay rights, and with the help of their increasing integration into the global youth culture via new social media. In this context, Neyzi (2001) argues, “the third and current period (post-1980) constitutes the *first serious rupture* with a modernist construction of youth in Turkey, just as it constitutes *a break* in Turkish political culture as a whole” (p. 412, emphases added).

Like Neyzi’s informants who resist a homogenous identity and collective responsibility, Arzu, after trying to be part of a feminist consciousness-raising group, resists defining herself through an ideology or a social movement and expresses that she does not feel any responsibility towards changing society or women because, according to her, it is not possible to fight somebody else’s fight.

While Neyzi turns her attention to some of the members of the post-1980 youth who seek ways to engage in identity politics, in this dissertation, I explore the formation of a female subjectivity of a rather narrowly defined age cohort, made up of middle-class, secular women in Istanbul, through exploring their narratives of “self” and “other” in the context of family, work, and romantic relationships. As a complement to Neyzi’s (2001) research on the politics, representation, and orientation of the larger generation of post-

1980 youth, I examine how these women have experienced the “rupture” of 1980. How has growing up in the 1980s affected their understanding of politics, Kemalism, and feminism? More importantly, how has this context shaped their sense of self?

The Depoliticization of Generation 1980

A closer look at the time period when Generation 1980 came of age is helpful. Ongoing street demonstrations between the leftists and rightists in 1970s Turkey often led to violent fights between the two camps of youth, and between the youth and the armed forces. Due to the heavy involvement of university students in the movement, and because most of the demonstrations and fights took place on university campuses, public discourse increasingly associated the youth with political violence and ideological fights that would “divide” the country and bring “anarchy” to the society.

On September 12, 1980, a military intervention brutally ended this period and halted all political activity. Tekeli (1990) recounts:

Officials and militants of radical left parties, of the radical underground, together with those of the (fascist) National Action Party and the (pious) National Salvation Party, were arrested. These were the groups largely involved in the street violence of the 1970s and their members were committed to trial in the martial law courts. The number of those arrested neared 10,000 (p. 261).

Following the coup, and during the three years of junta government (1980–1983), a period of systematic depoliticization of the public sphere through the institutionalized violation of freedom of speech and democratic rights, including the right to form political

organizations and the right to individual expression, dominated the cultural atmosphere. As Tekeli (1990) states the “anti-political attitude” of the 1980 military intervention was its most obvious characteristic (p. 261).

During the years of the junta government, in addition to the legal and institutional changes that significantly reduced democratic rights, the government frequently reminded Turkish people that they should keep their children under constant surveillance if they did not want to return to the years of street fights and violence. The youths’ political engagement was represented as the main reason behind the years of “terror” in Turkey, until the military “saved” the country and brought order to rebuild the democracy. A newspaper article published in 1981,¹⁹²⁰ for example, reported on General Kenan Evren, the head of the National Security Council,²¹ and his address to Turkish teachers on the occasion of April 23rd, “Children’s Day.”²² The headline—a quote from Evren’s speech—read: “We must protect our children from deviant ideologies.” (“*Cocuklarimizi sapik ideolojilerden korumaliyiz.*”) The Turkish word “*sapik*” (deviant) in its daily use is almost always used in the context of sexual deviance. The word has a strong and a disturbing connotation, referring to people who engage in sexual behaviors that are perceived as abnormal and immoral by the public, and who are harmful to society. In this context, Evren’s choice of the word “*sapik*” in reference to ideologies is a well-thought

¹⁹ *Tercuman*, April 24, 1981 as reprinted in *Aradiginiz Kisiye Su An Ulasilamiyor: Turkiye’de Hayat Tarzi Temsilleri 1980-2005*. (2006.) Istanbul: Osmanli Bankasi Arsiv ve Arastirma Merkezi. Page 336.

²⁰ Some of the newspaper clips discussed in this chapter are reprinted in the published materials of an exhibition in Istanbul in 2006 organized by Meltem Ahiska, a Turkish sociologist, and Zafer Yenel, a historian. The exhibition focused on “the representations of lifestyles” in the last 25 years of Turkish media; the content was published as a volume under the same title: *Aradiginiz Kisiye Ulasilamiyor: Turkiye’de Hayat Tarzi Temsilleri 1980-2005*. (2006). Istanbul: Osmanli Bankasi Arsiv ve Arastirma Merkezi.

²¹ Kenan Evren became Turkey’s president in November of 1982, and remained in the position until 1989.

²² April 23, 1920 was the opening day of the Turkish Parliament. The day was dedicated to the Turkish children by Ataturk and has become a national holiday.

out strategy to mobilize common sensibilities, especially parents', for it is, of course, everybody's responsibility to detect and protect themselves and others, especially children, from "deviant" people.

Evren's speech seems also to intend to remind people that the youth have the potential to be a "threat to the national interest" unless parents and teachers are careful. It is important to note that in this discourse youth is represented as lacking reason, unable to decide for themselves, and vulnerable—easily misled into following "deviant" ideologies. Here Evren's words are strategically placed within a cultural understanding of youth as an easy target, one needing protection and guidance.²³ As Saktanber (2002) states, in Turkish culture "the irrationality of youth is a given" (p. 256). Youth are both the danger and the potential victim.

In the same news piece, next to a photograph where a general is shown shaking hands with young, uniformed, military student, another quote of Evren's speech is printed: "In order not to go back to *those days of full of nightmares*, teachers have a major responsibility" (emphasis added). The threat of "going back to those days full of nightmares" is also a strategically chosen phrase to remind the public that "those days" could come back unless children are kept under constant surveillance in schools. The photograph, on the other hand, idealizes military education for the younger generations, and indirectly reminds the reader that it was the military's intervention that saved the country from "those days full of nightmares."

The education system, particularly the nationwide standardization of the curriculum, was one of the main targets of the military regime because it was a way to maintain control over the youth. Based on her analysis of the publications of the Ministry

²³ Also, see Neyzi (2001) regarding age hierarchy in Turkish society.

of Education or other official documents in the early 1980s, Kaplan (2003) explains that Turkish generals made sure that:

the military tightened the institutional links between the armed forces and the education system, including stricter control of personnel, children, and the curriculum. At the core of the curriculum was emphasis on both discipline and total allegiance to the state. That is to say, the new curriculum sought to prevent at all costs the consolidation of identities that threatened to fragment the nation into a politics of difference—whether rooted in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or religion (p. 404).

Kaplan continues:

Should pupils . . . refuse to listen to their parents or to cooperate with teachers, or should they persist in expressing ideas that diverge considerably from the intentions of the curriculum, they are assumed to pose a danger to state and society. Less than a year after the coup, the ministry published a detailed list of offenses, ranging from disrespect of persons of authority to politically objectionable activities. Until recently, punishment has ranged from temporary withdrawal to permanent ban from the school system (p. 405).

The front cover of a very popular weekly satire magazine, *Girgir* (Figure 1) addresses the disproportionate severity of disciplinary measures to which high school students were exposed, by drawing schoolchildren tied up with ropes as if they were going to prison instead of their first day of school. The cover captures the social atmosphere of the mid-1980s regarding the government's constant scrutiny over students

and the general notion that being young and a student was enough reason to be seen as a potential threat to society.



Figure 1: “Good news Mr. Principal, the first group of students of the new school year is arriving.” (Girgir, September 29, 1985, Sunday, issue 682)

The military government frequently encouraged greater surveillance on the part of parents toward their children. For example, Hasan Saglam, the minister of education appointed by the military, urged parents “to closely follow your children, to protect them from harmful habits, and to keep them away from activities that have no relation to their studies” (*Tebliğler Dergisi* 1981b: 310, as cited in Kaplan, 2003, p. 405). As Kaplan (2003) notes, in Turkey “parents are expected to fully cooperate with the state and prevent their children from running afoul of the authorities” (p. 405).

Another cartoon, published in *Gırgır*²⁴ in 1989, nearly four years after the cover described above, addresses a similar issue by depicting a mother sending her elementary-school-age son (shown wearing the typical elementary school uniform of a black button-up cloak and white collar) to school saying “Don't get into trouble at school! Don't ever do communist propaganda!” The boy is naïvely smiling, clearly too young to comprehend his mother's concern. It is important to note that *Gırgır* published this issue in 1989, almost a decade after the coup, which indicates the long-lasting consequences of the institutionalized oppression of the junta government. In fact, even today, long after the coup, the discourse that represents the youth as “a threat to the social order” continues to remain powerful. As seen above, this fear was strategically kept alive through frequent reminders and speeches delivered by key government officers; families and parents were urged to keep their children away from any political organization, activity, and ideology.

I emphasize in this section that simply criticizing the youth for being “apolitical” or “consumerist” ignores the fact that Generation 1980 grew up under strict familial and institutional disciplinary control, and in a social context in which any criticism of the state was silenced in the public sphere. The systematic depoliticization of the public sphere, the focus on youths' and students' activities through curriculum change, and the implementation of other mundane disciplinary practices both at school and at home did not leave much room for the youth of this period to develop an interest in politics.

When I asked my informants how much they knew or remembered about the events before, during, and after the coup, most of them said they said they were too young at the time to remember much of the actual events. Most told me that they did not

²⁴ *Gırgır*, April 2, 1989 in *Aradığımız Kişiye Şu An Ulaşılamıyor*, 2006, p. 338.

remember any specific events except the news on television, hearsay, secondhand stories, and conversations they heard at home. They told me that they overheard their parents talking about people who got involved with the movement, who were arrested, jailed, or killed:

Esin: Do you remember the events that happened in the '70s and '80s?

Ebru: Not really . . . I think we didn't get to hear many things; they didn't want us to know many things. I mean, I feel like those days and events never even happened. I am that removed from it all. The only rumor I heard was that one of our teachers' fiancées died during some fight on the street . . . we all said "too bad!" (*vah vah!*); that was it. [Emphasizing that they did not really care or understand the seriousness of this event]. This wasn't something we talked about at home at all. I'm sure my father had some books that he had to hide. I don't know, maybe they weren't sharing their concerns with me. But that era is over, done. (*Bir dönem geçti, bitti.*)

Like Ebru, most of my informants remembered their parents' anxiety over the violence on the street and the equally violent response by the army and police forces during arrests and interrogations. Even though Ebru's father was a social democrat and was in politics himself, she does not remember him talking to her about the political events of the 1980s or what happened in their aftermath. When I asked the same question to Seda, unlike Ebru, she had more vivid memories about what was happening on the streets. But like Ebru, Seda too felt her parents' over protectiveness as a result of the social unrest targeting youth.

Esin: Do you remember much from the political events in the 1980s?

Seda: Of course I remember. I was born in 1970. . . . There were always slogans written on the walls outside buildings or under the overpasses—armed fights on the streets, banks were attacked—I remember those very clearly. . . . My uncle did not want to continue sending his sons to college. You had to be either a communist or a nationalist. My uncle's sons were leftists so they got into trouble in college, they were almost going to go to prison; my uncle sent them to Europe. My father got very scared too. He used to always check on us [her and her sisters], to see if we were engaging in such activities, I mean we were very young but my father had that fear. We all sensed that.

Seda continued with a vivid memory of a street demonstration, six years after the coup:

One year on May 1st, my mother and I happened to be at the dentist, somewhere close to Taksim Square. Police [officers] shot two protestors in front of McDonalds during the May 1st events. Do you remember that? I think it was 1986. So we were at the dentist's office. Some people came barging into the dentist's office and wanted to hide there. They were running away from the police. One man wanted to pretend to be a patient. He was begging the dentist to pull his tooth! Funny . . . I mean it sounds funny now, but he was trying to save his life.

Seda's memories, including the police raid on her house in the middle of the night, searching for somebody that she knew, gunshots near her house, demonstrators escaping from the police, are quite vivid and detailed. She was quite animated while sharing these

memories, talking quickly, clearly remembering one event after the other, and rushing to tell them all. However, in her delivery, I could hear a sense of indifference towards the events she witnessed, and even an attempt to diminish their significance. Laughing while recounting her memory at the dentist's office, her use of the word "funny" suggests that she was quite removed from the severity of the situation for the parties who were involved that day. After using the word "funny," Seda may have noticed something in my reaction that conveyed that I didn't think it was funny at all, or perhaps she felt so herself, and thus amended, "I mean it sounds funny now. But he was trying to save his life."

The significance of these experiences needs to be explored both at the personal and social level. Ebru was quite unapologetic when she was telling me that she (and her friends) pretended to be sad when they heard that their teacher's fiancée died in a street battle. Similarly, Seda thought that, at least during the interview, the story of the activists in the dentist office who were trying to save their lives was funny. Judith Herman (1997) argues that public discourse demonizing activists and the criminalization of free speech and public demonstration make it easier for bystanders to identify with the perpetrator rather than the victim. Generation 1980 grew up within a discourse associating political engagement with violence, and activists as a "menace to society," as Neyzi's (2001) research shows.

Secondly, both women's memories of their parents suggest that families made sure that the younger generation did not hear and learn much about this recent past. Both Seda's and Ebru's narratives indicate that the events of the 1980s were never quite communicated or explained to them at the time. Even parents who identified themselves as politically minded, such as Ebru's father, seemed to not be able to communicate what

was going on to their children. As Ebru remembers, her father identifies himself with Generation '68, but has never communicated what that means to Ebru: "My father says he belongs to Generation '68; the conversation stops there."

Seda concluded her recollection of the events of the 1980s with the statement, "But once I started college, those things were long gone." Seda seems to think that those events do not have any connection to her current life. This perceived disconnect between past events and life today is equally present in Ebru's narrative. Both women's memories indicate that they associate the events that led up to the coup with violence, and, significantly, both claim that those days were "gone" and an era was "over." They both seem to believe that those events and the aftermath of the coup did not have a lasting effect on their lives.²⁵

These examples show that explanations for the youth's lack of connection to politics—which either emphasize the coerciveness of the social and political environment and call it depoliticization, or which state that youth do not trust how politics operate in Turkey—are not entirely sufficient for understanding women's indifference to politics or social issues, because they ignore the psychology and feelings attached to women's interaction with social issues and politics, particularly feminist politics and activism.

Women's narratives point to the significant role of their socialization at home in developing their relationship with the world outside, and the importance of the cultural models they internalized over the years in the formation of their political selves. For example, during our interview, while Arzu was talking about her relationship with her

²⁵ A significant and relevant point of Herman's (1997) research for my analysis is her emphasis that it is not only the sufferers but also the witnesses, helpers, schoolchildren, and other bystanders who experience reactions to trauma. She writes, "In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation, and denial are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness" (p. 9).

father, she attributed her father's short temper and his inability to communicate with her and with her half-sisters, to his past as a political activist and his "depressed mood" since the "communist movement failed." She explains:

They are all communist, my mother, my father, and my stepmother too. My uncle and great-uncle got killed in the 1980s during the events. My father [still] has an important position in Turkey's Laborer Party [TIP]. But since the communist movement ended up not being successful, he's been depressed (*moralî bozuk*). I mean he is very idealistic . . . never one of those narrow-minded communists, he is a person who really thinks, can put things in perspective . . . even though he knew that his dream would have never realized. Still though, for example, he's never expanded his business [a small independent publishing house]—he's very principled like that. You know, he actually likes to talk, explain things if somebody asks him a question, but he can get very angry very suddenly, you don't even realize what's happened. He can get angry at an idea and cut everything short saying, "You all are like that!" (*siz hepiniz böylesiniz zaten*) He has a very clear idea of what's right and what's wrong. And he is very certain how the world should be, and it is very hard for him to be flexible. And, for example, my father and my mother got separated when I was seven years old. But the year before that they'd never talked to each other! My mom told me. They were writing notes to each other. And my father could never understand why my mother left him.

It is striking how Arzu shifts from talking about her father's political past to his marital past, and makes a direct connection between his rigid devotion to communism and his inflexibility in his personal relationships.

It is equally striking to see the similarities between the way she describes her father's inflexibility in his worldview and her own explanation of why she does not like the set structure of a movement organized around an ideology, like the feminist meetings she stopped attending. It is tempting to suggest that Arzu's memories of her father at home, not talking to her mother, and later Arzu's rocky relationship with him, might have led her to associate being politically active—working towards solving other people's problems—with ignoring or being disconnected from loved ones and being unable to identify one's own problems. Although she did not make a direct connection between the two, the back and forth in her narrative between her father's commitment to the communist movement, the principles he followed in running his business, and his lack of communication with his family suggests that Arzu sees some connection, or, at least, her narrative seems to reveal that she is making that connection.

Furthermore, witnessing that once his "dream" did not come true, her father became depressed and even less capable of engaging in everyday life, might have solidified her distrust in politics and political ideals. In this context, I argue that the lack of political activism evinced by Arzu and women of Generation 1980 in general is not simply apoliticism, but rather their response to the sociopolitical and familial context within which they grew up, the milieu that shaped their initial perceptions of "politics" and "the political," domains that have been associated with, on the one hand, violence and crime, and, on the other hand, with failure and futility.

The theme of futility appeared in women's narratives in other ways, as well. During Seda's interview, while she was telling me her memories of the 1980 coup, she became quite excited when talking about how all those young activists and students were killed on the streets during the coup, when all they wanted was to establish "democracy," and how all this brutality was kept as a secret from the Turkish people. I was impressed to hear these critical and socially conscious comments from her. Seda then suggested that, if I was interested in this era, I should watch a recent television drama that had become very popular in Turkey, which told the stories of the events from the leftists' point of view, revolving around a love story.²⁶ (I had heard about this show, but had never had a chance to watch it.) It seemed to me that Seda's main source of information about the political events in the 1970s and the 1980 coup was this television show. Interestingly, however, she then said these words, revealing her continuing distrust towards the possibility of any social and political honesty in Turkey:

You know, our journalists and political columnists never wrote about these things truthfully or gave us correct information, and it seems like only now there is this show and some other writings about that era. Thanks to those, some of the hidden things have begun to become public (*gün ışığına çıktı*). I wonder why now, though—there is definitely another political reason behind this too. I'm sure somebody is benefiting from this.

The distrust in the Turkish political system, particularly in politicians' motivations, and the sense of powerlessness of the civilians before the existing social and political system

²⁶ Recently Turkish people have had more access to new journalistic and academic research and critical analysis of the 1980 coup, which has given rise to more popular attention to the 1980s in the form of newspaper series, documentaries, and television dramas.

are quite pervasive in Ebru's memories of the way in which politics was discussed at her house as well:

We, at home, had an oppositional stance towards Özal. [She refers to the Prime Minister of Turkey (1983–1989), who initiated the transformation of the Turkish economy by implementing open-market and Western-oriented economic policies, and initiating privatization of several state-owned institutions.] We are more of a social democrat family. So the conversations were always about, “They [Özal and his party] all abused the state, there's corruption everywhere.” They weren't too supportive of that [economic] opening. And now, because my father is a bureaucrat, these are the topics discussed all the time at home. Corruption, foreign goods, rising income gap because of the rich, you know, the *nouveau riche* (*sonradan görmeler*).

Ebru remembers listening to her parents' comments at home. While her parents did not talk with her about the coup, they seemed to talk about politics after the coup, once civilian rule was reestablished. Ebru's memories of these events indicate the significance of the interaction within family, particularly with regard to the ways in which her parents communicated the daily news. Perhaps in relation to this, Ebru's idea of politics is something that is discussed among adults around the dinner table, and is comprised of complaining about the social and political corruption of the government, political parties, and politicians—with the indirect message of how powerless civilians are to do anything to change the corrupt system.

Most of my informants, like Ebru, associate politics and politicians in Turkey with corruption and personal interests. They think nothing can be done to change how politics and politicians work in Turkey. Therefore, according to them, there is no hope in believing that one can solve social problems through political involvement. In her recent sociological research, Lüküslü (2009) finds a continuing lack of political engagement among contemporary Turkish youth. Based on interviews conducted in Istanbul between 2000–2004 with 80 youths (between the ages of 18 and 25), she explains this lack of political engagement through their pervasive and strong distrust in politics and politicians (p. 147). She argues that the post-1980 youth are not apolitical; they just do not believe that engaging in politics or activism would change anything.

So far, I have aimed to show that the sociohistorical and familial context within which the members of the Generation 1980 came of age hindered the formation of consciously political selves. Particularly for women of Generation 1980, this has also translated into their distancing themselves from feminist politics, and their alienation from a feminist identity, as they seemed to associate it with larger homogenizing collective movements, and with the political activism they learned to perceive as futile.

The Modern Woman vs. the Traditional Woman

I argue above that Generation 1980's experiences of the political tumult of the 1980s, as filtered through their families, has prevented them from forming politically conscious selves. Particularly for women of Generation 1980, this has translated into their distancing themselves from the feminist movement, as they associate it with larger social movements and political activism that they believe is doomed to fail. Another important

factor, I argue, that also steers women away from identifying with feminism and feminist politics has to do, as discussed above, with the pervasive official Kemalist discourse that insists that men and women in Turkey are equals. Women were told that they have equal rights and that the Turkish woman is at the level of the Western woman. Like all official discourses, this claim had to have its other in order to justify its legitimacy. Veiled and uneducated rural women were defined as the victims of the backward traditions and misinterpretation of Islam; through modern, secular education, it was said, all Turkish women would eventually be modernized (Arat, Z., 1998; Durakbaşa, 1998). In the context of this discourse, I find that my informants, who are educated and consider themselves modern women, perceive that feminism is something for other women. That is, they can only think about feminism in the context of extreme oppression and violence towards women, which are conditions they are aware that exist; however, they do not perceive them affecting their own lives.

Towards the end of my three-hour-long interview with Selin (33, married with no children, artist) after we had talked extensively about her experiences of dating, sex, and her marriage, and particularly some of the ongoing problems she has having with her husband (I focus on this story in Chapter 6), I asked her how much she remembered about the feminist movement in the late 1980s. She was suddenly brief in her answers, clearly uninterested in talking about this topic. As I insisted on asking a couple more questions to try to understand her stance better, she became visibly uncomfortable and a little embarrassed:

Esin: Do you remember the feminist movement in the 1980s?

Selin: I remember. [Flat and short.]

Esin: What do you remember?

Selin: Duygu Asena, and her book *Woman Has No Name*, and then the movie based on the book. That was the time the word feminism entered the daily language.

Esin: Anything else?

Selin: I don't remember anything else but that book was the reason we all got to talk about these things. All the women in our building [neighbors living in the same apartment building], my mother's friends read the book. They talked about it during tea gatherings. I don't remember what exactly they used to say, but some of my mother's friends hated it . . .

Esin: What about you?

Selin: To be honest, I've never been a feminist. I've never approached my work from that perspective either, you know, advocating for women. I always look at myself but I don't look at myself in relation to other women. I don't know what else to say. [She looked perplexed and a little embarrassed.] Of course I get sad whenever I hear bad things happen to other women, but I feel like: I did it, I always lived by myself, like it's supposed to be, not restricted, free. Why can't they do it? Of course, there is so much going on like honor killings and all that . . . [She stopped and looked at me with a blank expression and that ended the interview.]

Selin seemed embarrassed that she could not present an opinion about feminism or the feminist movement in Turkey. She said she did not know what else to say, and looked quite uncomfortable. It was as if she was behaving like a guilty student who was caught

unprepared for class. On the other hand, she seemed she was proud of herself for being able to “live by herself,” “freely,” like “it’s supposed to be.” She, therefore, does not need feminism—but she seems to think that those other women who are the victims of “honor killings and all that” might need it.

The firm belief that education and secularism are the precondition of women’s emancipation in Turkey is one of the strongest myths in Turkey. The transmission of this belief from the first generation’s state feminism and the second generation’s Western feminism is noted by Yeşim Arat (1997), as she argues, “The most significant function of Kemalist reforms on women’s status may have been the strengthening of secularism” (p. 108). She explains that the reason the new generation of feminists are passionate about “the responsibility of upholding secularism” (p. 108) is because, “in the 1980s, the state no longer sought to suppress Islamic groups; rather it supported them. The socio-economic transformation that took place since the 1930s and the attempt of the 1980s regime to relocate political life beyond a right-left axis gave the Islamist groups a new impetus and a new status” (p. 108). “Under these conditions,” Arat (1997) continues:

the women’s movement was an important force for the secular wing. For the liberal or Kemalist feminist within the women’s movement, secularism was of primary importance. They neither believed that there could be egalitarian interpretations within the confines of Islam, nor that the hierarchic gender-based division of labor most Islamists upheld was just. *Islam was the biggest threat to male-female equality. Islam was the biggest problem of the women’s movement.* (pp. 108-109, emphases added).

Dilek (32, executive officer at a private financial corporation, married and mother of one) complained effusively several times about the conditions in Turkey regarding a religious party that was in power. Her words were very typical as it was common to hear people rant about the Islamists coming to power. At one point I asked:

Esin: You have mentioned AKP and Turkey's future—what is it exactly that is bothering you?

Dilek: This might have to do with me coming from a family of social democrats and raised as Atatürk followers. My father wears an Atatürk pin on his jacket every day. These days a lot of emails regarding this are circulating. I mean it just drives me crazy that we are still discussing the veil today [that should be something of the past]. I think about all the things that the man [Atatürk] did in the 1920s—think about it, how wide his vision was for those days; everybody was backward (*gerici*) or ignorant (*cahil*)—he changed the alphabet [from Arabic to Roman], he created clothing reform (*şapka devrimi*). He did as much as what could be done for those days. So I am very bothered by the fact that we still discuss the veil, and that the people in power are the ones who do not value or respect women. First of all as a woman, I'm disturbed by all this. Because you know their mentality—they all want sharia law. What's sharia law? It does not value women at all.

On the other hand, when I asked Dilek about what she thought about women's rights and women's issues in Turkey, she replied with these words:

Women’s rights . . . let me put it this way. For example, my mother was the head of the women’s organization in Baharsehir [pseudonym; a small city about an hour northwest of Istanbul]. Women get together to do charity work, or they do handmade crafts and sell them for charity, and I always liked that, for both bringing women together, and doing creative things—you know instead of going around and visiting each other (*günlere gitmek yerine*). But I never took this as feminism but as women taking a part in society, and helping people in need. I think, things like feminism (*feminizim falan*) [very dismissive; I could tell she was very annoyed by this topic], or to say that man and woman are equal is not right. This is how I think, there are times women are in charge, and there are times that men are in charge. . . . Some people work hard to get somewhere; again this could be both men and women. Can I explain it well? Unfortunately, in our society . . . the reason feminism emerged, and maybe we should give some credit to feminists, because women have always been oppressed by men. This could only be stopped by becoming financially independent. I bet this wouldn’t be discussed in *developed* [original in English] countries. (*developed ülkelerde bunun lafi bile edilmiyordur.*) Did I explain it well? I think it has to do with education.

She was so passionate while giving this speech and so sure that what she was saying was correct, I decided not to challenge her. I could sense that she was getting a little annoyed by this topic. For Dilek, and Selin, feminism exists only because there are women who live under extreme oppression. Feminism, for her, like the debate of “the veil” is a thing in the past, as she is convinced that in “developed countries,” feminism is no longer a topic of discussion.

The strong binary between secularism and Islam, and the binary between “the modern woman” and “the traditional woman”/“Islamic woman” that exists in similar forms in both Kemalist and feminist discourses, first, solidifies its effect in the public sphere and makes it impossible to criticize. Secondly, it does not leave any room for those Turkish women who are educated and consider themselves to be modern in terms of their secular lifestyles to acknowledge that they live in a patriarchal system and under a gender hierarchy. This context, I argue, makes it almost unthinkable for the women of Generation 1980 not only to accept that they could ever be discriminated against because of their gender, and, further, it makes it almost impossible for women to even be able to recognize and identify when they are discriminated against (c.f. Arat-Koç, 2007).

In this context, the combined effect of these sociohistorical and familial dynamics should be kept in mind when thinking about women of Generation 1980’s relationship with politics in general and feminism in particular. My interviews and conversations with my informants suggest that, first, women’s lack of interest in political engagement and their distrust of politics and politicians stem from the indirect messages they began receiving at home, which were also reflective of the general sentiments of the Turkish society at large. Secondly, their orientation toward the political realm is shaped by their strong conviction that Kemalist reforms have done everything necessary for women to be equals, and that there is, therefore, no need for them fight as long as they have access to education and jobs. These women’s lived experiences are defined by the specific time and conditions within which they grew up, the nationalism they were taught at school, the magazines they read, as well as the constantly changing ideas, images, and objects that were available to them in their everyday life. As Mannheim (1952 [1923]) and Neyzi

(2001) show, individuals are shaped by the specific time and conditions within which they grow up, and I argue that this is where a cohort analysis that emphasizes the continuities and the ruptures between generational units among Turkish women might be useful in providing a more complex understanding of Turkish women's formation of sense of self and their shared cohort subjectivity.

Chapter 3

Growing Up in a Middle-Class Family

So far I have argued that major historical events and social transformations in Turkish society have played a significant role in the formation of distinct generational identities. However, focusing solely on larger social issues draws attention away from the ways family and kinship shape generational identity and subjectivity. This is especially important in societies such as Turkey where the institution of family shows strong resistance to major social structural changes (Duben, 1982; Tekeli, 1995 [1991]; Vergin, 1985). Examining women's accounts of their family environments during their teenage years through their early twenties, this chapter argues that family relationships constitute a crucial site in the formation of women's self-assured subjectivity as a cohort. In particular, this chapter focuses on women's relationships with their mothers and fathers, and their perception of the relationships between their mothers and fathers. Arguing that women of Generation 1980 received conflicting messages regarding women's identity, this chapter shows that they, first, have been told that they are 'modern and independent women' who are equal to men, and, second, that women are generally and typically submissive and dependent as they perceived their mothers' married lives to be.

Financial and Emotional Support Among Family Members

During the interviews, women talked very lovingly about their parents and praised their efforts and the sacrifices they made to provide them with good education and other social opportunities. When they talked about the past they were nostalgic, affectionate, and forgiving towards their parents, emphasizing the close relationship they have with

them now. All of my informants have close relationships and live in the same city with their parents, and the majority live within walking distance or a short car ride to their parents' home.²⁷ The majority of the women I interviewed reported visiting their parents at least once a week, and all said they talk with their mothers on the phone a few times a week, if not every day. During my fieldwork there were many occasions when my informants' parents were either present or had called on the phone to just chat or make plans for a future gathering. The closeness of the family relationships in Turkish society has long been documented: According to an earlier study (1969) of family relations of university graduates in three major cities in Turkey, 64 percent of all females and 68 percent of all males interviewed reported getting together with their parents at least once or twice a week; a quarter of the females said that they see their parents daily (Dirks, 1969 in Duben, 1982, p. 87). Duben (1982), based on his research in the late 1970s in İzmir, Turkey's third largest metropolis, reports that, "At present [in urban Turkey], despite separate residence, it is quite common for parents and their married children, uncles and their married nephews and nieces, and various sorts of married cousins to live with their nuclear families in separate flats in the same or adjacent apartment buildings or in the same neighborhood" (p. 86).

Furthermore, Duben (1982) notes, "Nearly a third of all families in Izmir are involved with each other in some sort of mutual assistance or cooperative activity in relation to their work" (p. 87). "Close relatives from middle and upper middle families share many important decisions, and seek support or advice in personal matters from each other. They regularly use their individual or joint personal and social assets, personal and

²⁷ The apartment building where I rent a flat in during my fieldwork was partially owned by the parents of a high school friend. Her younger sister and her husband, and their parents also lived in the same building, on different floors.

political contacts, to obtain favors for each other in the public sphere” (p. 87). He also points out that it is very common for “parents to subsidize, directly or indirectly, the income of their married children in the early years of their marriage, or even into the middle years, if the children have followed careers in various relatively low-income but prestigious professions such as government service, university teaching or the arts” (p. 87).

I, too, found that it is very common for my informants to receive support from their parents, financial or otherwise. For example, parents allow their daughters to live in family-owned apartments, provide down payments for their big purchases, or simply support them financially on regular basis if they do not have a well-paying job. Parents also get involved in crucial times such as helping with a newborn. One of my informants told me that her mother, who lives in the same neighborhood, comes to her apartment every morning along with the new nanny and stays there supervising the nanny until my informant gets back from work. She told me that her mother jokes every morning, saying “I’m reporting for duty” (*mesayiye geldim*).

Distant Fathers and Close Mothers

During the interviews, when I asked women to describe their relationships with their parents and the general dynamics at home, particularly when they were younger and living with their parents, they frequently spoke of “distant fathers and close mothers.” This narrative of distant fathers emerged in two different versions. In the first version, women explained their fathers’ distance through their fathers’ authoritative and strict attitude at home, especially towards their daughters’ social activities and mobility. The

mothers in these cases emerged as helpful and supportive, and often as allies who covered up for their daughters when they did things that their fathers would not allow or of which they would not approve. In the second version, women explained their fathers' distance through their indifference towards daily life at home. In these narratives, women described their mothers as having a more active and leading role at home and in their lives. However, in both cases, my informants stated that they did not talk to their fathers about their personal and intimate lives and did not interact with them too much about daily issues. Instead, their mothers appeared to be directly involved in their daily lives.

Nesrin described her father as quite authoritarian, and her relationship with him as distant (*mesafeli*):

We [she and her two sisters] didn't talk of personal things with our father, there was always this male-female distance between us (*erkek bayan mesafesi vardi*). For instance, our dad doesn't even change his shirt in front of us; he closes the door. When he passes by our room, and if the door is open, he says, "Excuse me ladies." You know, there was this sense of privacy (*mahremiyet duygusu*). And we always sensed the presence of our father's authority at home. We were closer with our mother.

Berrin, on the other hand, described her father as sweet and her relationship with him as warm. Yet she still said that she and her older sister did not interact with him very much.

It was very clear in our house. My mother was very dominant, because my father is a mild-mannered and non-confrontational man, almost to the point of being inattentive to what's going on at home. He was very sweet to us when were

children. If I wanted some dessert in the middle of the night, he used to change from his pajamas and go out and get it for me. In the house we didn't interact with him much though, but we had a warm relationship. We didn't have the parent-child problems with our father but we did have it with our mother. Our father was always distant. You know, in the Turkish family, there is such a thing, fathers being inattentive, I don't mean he didn't care, but he didn't see things as problems like my mother did. She was more of a problem for us, [saying] "Don't go there; don't come home late." I remember she used to ask our father to say something to us, to yell at us.

This excerpt shows that Berrin does not interpret her father's "being distant" as lack of affection. On the contrary, her narrative shows that her father is quite affectionate towards her. However, she does not have the intimate relation with him that mothers typically have with their daughters. Interestingly, Berrin interprets this lack of intimacy as a quality of a typical Turkish family. On the other hand, it seems that Berrin's mother insists that her husband should act as authority figure to complement her day-to-day control over their daughters.

These accounts suggest that parents play a complementary role at home. Mothers seem to be more involved in the daily operation of the household and daily lives of the children, whereas fathers have a quasi-outsider position with much authority. Studies of urban, middle-class families show that the relationship between husbands and wives is characterized as equal but separate, based on distinctive sex roles at home and same-sex friendship networks (Fallers & Fallers, 1976; Kıray, 1982; Kandiyoti, 1982; Olson, 1982;

Fişek, 1993, Fişek, 1995).²⁸ Based on her ethnographic research among urban, middle-class families in Ankara, Olson (1982) observes that “[e]ven within the family, the most intimate relationships tend to be among the members of the same sex” (p. 45). She writes:

In the majority of Turkish families, there is no single center of intra-familial relationships. Instead, each adult tends to be the focus of his/her own rather separate social network. Thus, in a “nuclear” family in which the conjugal relationships are highly segregated, there are two “foci”—the husband and the wife—a type of family structure, which I will refer to as “duofocal” (Olson, 1982 pp. 36-37).

By showing the separation that exists between husbands and wives in urban families of highly educated professionals, Olson’s research challenges the assumption that sexual segregation is an archaic characteristic of rural and extended families headed by patriarchs. It also shows that the dyad of husband and wife in the modern nuclear family, which assumes an egalitarian relationship and “communication and companionship between spouses and by joint decision-making” (Olson, 1982, p. 34), is not the only dynamic among family members everywhere.

Of particular significance for my own research is the fact that Olson’s ethnographic data was collected among people who were in the same age cohort of my informants’ parents and who shared similar urban, secular, and middle-class backgrounds. Because of this similarity, I am able to use Olson’s research to better contextualize my informants’ memories and accounts of their parents. These women’s

²⁸ Also see Ayata (2002) and Durakbasa (2002) for their discussions of the separate but equally valued responsibilities of husbands and wives in the new middle-class family.

narratives of their teenage years and early twenties at home and their portrayal of their families closely correspond with Olson's descriptions of husbands and wives having separate and complementary duties at home and separate social lives revolving around relatives and friends of the same gender. Importantly, Olson argues that this segregation does not automatically translate into women's oppression; on the contrary, it provides autonomy and social freedom to wives. Supporting this argument, my informants' narratives revealed that their parents often had separate social lives, friend and interest that that they pursue with a group friends or relatives of the same gender.

My research further shows that this specific family dynamic has affected women's relationships with their parents in particular ways, as mothers' and fathers' parental roles and their attitudes towards their daughters tend to be quite different from one another. In the next section, I show that, as a result of the sexual division of labor at home and the tendency towards same-sex networking, daughters establish separate relationships with their mothers and fathers by building closer relationships with their mothers and establishing affectionate but distant relationships with their fathers.

“Raised Like a Son”

Existing research has documented that the Turkish family is largely traditional and patriarchal (Fişek, 1993; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982; Kandiyoti, 1988; Kıray, 1976; Sunar, 2002). It operates within the traditional social system of an honor code in which women are assumed to be under the protection of their husbands, fathers, and other male kin (Kandiyoti, 1987). The traditional Turkish family idealizes masculinity and denigrates femininity (Sunar & Fişek, 2005), which is observed in families' preference for sons over

daughters and women's secondary role in decision-making at home (Ataca & Sunar, 1999). Recent research, however, reveals that urban, middle-class families display these traditional characteristics to varying degrees (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). Particularly, the gender hierarchy between married couples is significantly lessened, as husbands and wives perform separate but equally valued complementary roles in their marriages and in parenting (Olson, 1982; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1986; Fişek, 1995). Recent studies also indicate that in urban, middle-class families, the education of both sons and daughters is given equal emphasis (Erkut, 1982; Sunar, 2002; Sunar & Fişek, 2005).

In my interviews and other informal conversations with women, each woman, without exception, told me that her parents provided her the best education available and that she never felt she was treated differently than her brothers and male peers in terms of education opportunities or encouragement towards her future career. Parents encouraged women to continue their education after college, supported their participation in relevant extracurricular activities, and most importantly, "dictated" that they must have professional careers and become financially independent. At the beginning of my interview with Özlem (35, a producer at a small, struggling advertising company, single), while I was explaining how my research was about the lives of women who grew up in the 1980s and the factors that influenced them to become the women they are today, she interrupted me like an eager student who wanted to respond before anyone else in the classroom:

Our families, aren't they? All of us have similar families. (*Hepimizin ailesi birbirine çok benzer.*) For instance, since I was a child my mother dictated to me one thing: I would earn my own money; I would own my own house. We were

raised like this, [with the idea that] women and men are equal; we were the children of that experimental era. (*İşte biz öyle yetiştirilmişiz kız erkek eşit, hani o dönemin deneme çocuklarıyız.*)

However, what this statement—“women and men are equal”—really means in this context needs to be explored. On various occasions women told me their parents did not raise them to be housewives. In fact, some women proudly told me they were raised “like a man” (*erkek gibi*), or “like a son” (*erkek çocuk gibi*). My interview with Seda (36, an independent business owner, divorced, no children) provides a good example of this common narrative, as she explained that she and her four sisters were raised as if they were all sons.

During her interview, Seda repeated several times that her family was from the region of Karadeniz (*Karadenizli*) in order to explain why the family was conservative and “very patriarchal” (*cok ataerki*). Situated in the northern region of Turkey by the North Sea, Karadeniz is famous for its commercial fishing and gun manufacturing, and is thus popularly stereotyped as a place with conservative “macho men with tempers,” as well as street-smart and headstrong people. Seda’s father, a retired fisherman, owned a commercial fleet of fishing boats and ran the family business alongside his father and two brothers. She told me that her father was now too old to go out to sea, and said, “It’s a family tradition but it couldn’t go on . . . you know, there is no son in the family.” In response, I asked if she felt her father ever wished for a son. She replied, “Of course! He wanted a son so badly . . . all those years. That’s why they had five attempts . . . all ended up with failure.” [She laughs, referring to herself and her four sisters.] While talking about this, Seda did not sound resentful, sad, or angry. In fact, she quickly and

proudly added, “But now this is not an issue at all because he raised all of us like sons . . . You know I converted one of his boats into a restaurant—haven’t you seen it at Bebek [an upper-middle-class neighborhood by the water with a small marina]?”

In her narrative, “raised like a son” refers to being brave, outgoing, and being able to run a business by herself. More importantly, it means being able to work with her father and receiving his respect as a business partner. When I asked Seda about her current relationship with her father, she replied, “My relationship with my father has always been good, still is, and yet we always argue. You know what they say, I was my father’s daughter (*babasının kızı derler ya*), because we both have the same strong personality.”

Another informant, Didem (33, journalist, single), told me how much she appreciated the way her parents raised her and her younger sister. She said,

They’ve always given us whatever we needed, but never spoiled us. They gave everything to us in a measured way. They always said, “Ok let’s see when we can do this, see if we have enough money.” My sister and I never asked for things above the family budget. They really raised us to be very non-materialistic (*tok gözlü*). They raised us like boys; they really wanted us to be able to stand on our own two feet. And my sister and I took this message way too far [half-sarcastic, half-proud]; we both are overly independent and generous.

Similar to Seda, in Didem’s narrative being raised like a boy appears as a matter of pride, a badge of honor. It is also associated with being independent, generous, and unselfish. Significantly, both Seda and Didem explained that their ability to act like a man is a

product of a specific kind of parenting, not an innate characteristic, nor even a personal accomplishment. Seda gave credit to her father for teaching her how to run a business, and Didem credited her parents for not spoiling her and her younger sister, and teaching them the value of being generous and non-materialistic.

When I interviewed my informants and asked them to generally describe their childhood or teenage years at home, none of the women mentioned spending time with their mothers in order to learn about certain household tasks traditionally assigned to women. When I asked directly if their mothers asked them to do certain chores at home or teach them certain domestic skills, women looked at me in a way that suggested they did not understand the question, with a puzzled expression, and mumbled that they helped their mothers in setting up the dinner table or said, “of course,” if their mother called for help, but, significantly, none of them told me that they were assigned to routine chores at home or were expected to be their mothers’ helpers. Another informant, Dilek (34, executive officer) at an international corporate bank, married with a two-year old son) lowered her voice during our interview to a confessional tone and said, “Esin, between us, I’ve never learned how to even cook rice.”

Based on my interviews and other informal conversations, it is clear that women of Generation 1980 were not asked to help their mothers in household chores; it is equally clear that they were not raised to think that that in the future they would have to perform these tasks as a wife. For example, Demet (33, a lawyer, married with no children), after telling me about the fights she was having with her husband who expected her to be more attentive at home, forcefully and proudly stated:

Nobody at home taught me to be a housewife . . . you know, nobody told me “You are the daughter, set the table,” or like “You’ll get married and take care of your husband.” I’ve never had that kind of attitude at home. I wasn’t raised with those ideas in my mind.

Noticeably in women’s narratives, however, these so-called male characteristics are constructed in opposition to the assumed female qualities of being dependent, insecure, selfish, and spoiled. My informants generally expressed negative comments about being “just a typical housewife,” associating it with dependence and a negligible lack of relevance to larger society. By rejecting the role of housewife, and admitting that they do not know how to perform certain household tasks, women are differentiating themselves from “typical housewives” while simultaneously reproducing existing discourse devaluing women’s domestic roles. My informants are proud of the fact that they were raised like sons and not as housewives. This sense of pride and empowerment is still with them and emerged often during the interviews, particularly when they spoke about their professional successes, their moral behavior, and their expectations of their intimate relationships. Women of Generation 1980 were raised in a family environment where they were told that they were capable of doing whatever their male counterparts could do in terms of education and careers, and where they were provided with the guidance and the opportunities to pursue these goals. I argue that this family setting and these parental dynamics played a crucial role in these women’s socialization and became a lasting source of motivation later in their adult lives.

Shattering Fathers' Authority

Existing research on the Turkish family, as mentioned above, suggests that among urban, middle-class families, daughters and sons are treated equally with respect to their education and career choices. However, it is also common in such studies to make passing remarks about the 'continuing parental control' over daughters' mobility and sexuality as compared to sons. For example, in a study examining the continuity and change in childrearing practices among three generations of middle- and upper-middle-class families, Sunar (2002) argues, in accordance with the previous studies, that there is an increase in the psychological value of children and a decrease in authoritarian control by parents. However, in her conclusion Sunar (2002) writes, "Despite *continued relative restrictions of daughters*, a trend towards increased egalitarian treatment of sons and daughters can, nevertheless, be observed" (p. 233, emphasis added). Yet the extent and the implication of such "continued relative restrictions of daughters" have never been further elaborated; it is just taken for granted. Similarly, in a review article Sunar and Fişek state that,

Among educated urban youth, male-female encounters are *much less closely controlled* than in other sectors of the population, and Western-style dating is common. *Relative autonomy* is recognized by young people in the management of their affairs, including their marriage decisions. The importance of virginity is openly questioned in the media, and cohabitation without marriage is *occasionally* seen . . . In other words, *although traditional values have not disappeared* in the urban setting they have been heavily moderated by a new emphasis on love,

personal fulfillment, independence, and happiness (2005, p. 173, emphases added).

Although the above quotes herald positive changes in young women's increasing social and perhaps sexual freedom, these studies avoid detailing what being "much less controlled," and having "a relative autonomy" actually mean and what exactly they entail. Further, the literature does not provide any insight into how women actually achieve these "occasional" and "relative" freedoms and how they interpret them and what they do with them.

Nesrin (32, director of the human resources department at a national insurance company, married with no children) describes her father as very authoritarian when she was growing up.

Esin: Have you ever felt that your father treated you unfairly because of you are a daughter?

Nesrin: "Of course! And we [she and her sisters] have told him this many times. You can't help but compare yourself to your male peers. You see how much more freedom they have and how less they struggle at home compared to us. I talked about this with Ahmet [her husband] too. He, too, was exposed to many rules and pressures at home, but as a man, his moment of 'enough is enough' came quicker. As a woman, that moment comes pretty late; I don't know why exactly.

In Nesrin's narratives, parental control, especially father's authority, emerges as the primary obstacle to her social freedom and independence. Her narrative indicates that she was clearly aware of her disadvantaged position growing up as a young woman who

faced a rather traditional and conservative framework that defined her parents' expectations of her in terms of proper conduct with men.

“We pushed him; he pushed us back”

All of my informants talked about the arguments they used to have with their parents over getting permission to go out after school or stay out late with their friends. Aylin (29, professional photographer, single) told me her father, a retired engineer, “was causing a lot of problems” when she was living with her parents. She said, “My father was causing a lot of problems—Let’s see, how old was I? When we were 18, we began going out at night to Flatline [a popular club] and my father was very annoyed that we were going out at night. Around that period, there was a lot of fighting at home. (*İtişme kakışma oluyordu.*) Some of my friends were having a lot of difficulties at home as well. This went on until I was 25, when I began staying very little at home. I really pushed them to get used to this.”

During my interview with Seda, after I explained to her that I was interested learning about the women of her generation, she said:

Seda: We built the foundation (*alt yapı*) of the freedom that the young generations are now enjoying . . . we were at war [at home] for something everyday.

Esin: What do you mean by “at war”?

Seda: We [she and her four sisters] were in the war zone everyday. I mean I don’t know your family but that’s how it was with my family. We were fighting for something every single day. For instance, my father used to set a time for us to come home . . . and then we used to sit down for the negotiation part (*otururduk*

pazarlığa). He would say 5 [pm], we'd say 2 [am]; then he'd say 6 [pm], we'd say 1 [am] and so on. He used to get very angry. He would say, "You will be back home by 7 pm" [she imitated her father's angry voice], and by the way [her voice got very serious], he was not kidding. He used to yell us and say, "I'm locking the doors after 10 [pm]; you'll sleep on the doormat, or don't come at all! I'll disown you," blah blah blah (*evlatlıktan reddederim, bilmem ne*) [continued imitating her father's angry voice]. But he would always push it, we would back off a bit, and then we pushed it and he backed off . . . and this is how we managed. (*Tatlı sert, tatlı sert idare ederdik.*)

Both Aylin and Seda persistently resisted their fathers and argued with them directly. Both believe that as a result of this, their fathers have begun to accept their daughters' social life outside home. Another informant, Nesrin, believes that she and her older sister caused some positive changes in their younger sister's life at home by pushing their father to change his attitude towards his daughters' social activities. She said, "Today, my younger sister still lives with them, and she lives a lot freer, because we pushed certain things, and now she enjoys that freedom. She can stay overnight at her friend's house. This was unthinkable for us." Seda's comment above even suggests that she perceives this as a generational accomplishment, in which her generation as a whole changed things for the younger generations.

Women of Generation 1980 were clearly proud of these fights with their fathers and they see them as resulting in relative victory. I argue that these open and persistent fights are an indication of diminishing fathers' authority at home, and increasing confidence among young women in believing that what they were asking for was not

morally and socially ‘wrong’ and therefore worth insisting on until at least both parties made some compromise.

Secrecy and Lying

Significantly, however, women told me that they never allowed these arguments to get to a breaking point. After a certain point, they said they simply began hiding and lying. Secrecy and lying appeared often in women’s narratives, mainly in relation to going out with boyfriends, and staying out late or overnight. Women’s narratives indicate that they lied as a last resort because they felt there was an irreconcilable gap between what they were asking for and what their parents, especially their fathers, believed as appropriate for their daughters. They wanted their parents to change, but they also understood that this would not happen quickly or to the extent that they wanted. They challenged and pushed some ground rules at home but they also said that they understood that their parents had limits, and did not want to “hurt” them or make them “worry.” Based on her fieldwork among families in urban Lebanon, Joseph Suad (1993) explains some of the dynamics among family members she observes:

In . . . connective dynamics, persons saw themselves as linked to others and others linked to themselves. They are part of one another’s perceptions and experiences of self. They were expected to read each other’s mind, anticipate each other’s needs, and shape likes and dislikes in response to each others. Connectivity summarizes processes that support the production of personas receptive to and requiring the continual involvement of others in the crafting of the self, in either egalitarian or hierarchical relationships (p. 11).

Of significance in these narratives is that women did not appear to have lied because they were afraid of what their fathers might have said or done to them, but because, they acted with similar connective dynamics, as described by Suad. For example Nesrin explained:

My preferred strategy was to push my father, but I never brought it to the point where he would feel he lost his authority as a father (*baba olma otoritesi*), because I didn't want him feel that he was losing his ground (*alt üst olma duygusunu yaşatmak istemedim*). I could have done it, but I didn't want to. My older sister pushed his limits as well, but after a certain point we did everything in secret (*gizli kapaklı*). My father is very important to me; I didn't want to hurt him. Honestly, I didn't think it was worth it.

Even though Nesrin criticized her father many times during the interview for being strict and old fashioned, her affection towards her father stopped her from standing up to him fully. It seems that it was at this point, Nesrin would switch from direct confrontation to secrecy. Switching to secrecy and lying was in fact not to protect herself, but, more importantly, to protect her father and his patriarchal status at home. Nesrin's preferred strategy could be explained, at least partly, with the concept of "connectivity" (Suad 1993).

Ceylan (29, office worker at a research institute, single), although not seeming as affectionate towards her parents as Nesrin, also used a similar justification for lying.

When I first began dating Murat, one night we planned to go out. My friend Aylin and her boyfriend were also coming. I told my mother that I was going spend the night at Aylin's house. We went to *Kemancı* [a popular rock bar] and then we decided not to end the night there, but ended up just driving around and hanging out on the streets until the morning. It was actually very boring. Anyway, in the meantime, early in the morning my mother, I don't know why, decides to call Aylin's mother and learns that I wasn't there. You have no idea how anxious (*pimpirik*) people they are normally anyway! When I said nothing happened between Murat and me, they didn't believe it. So, anyway, because I lied, I lost their trust. But the thing is, that the "thing" [her having sex] that they were afraid of could happen during the day as well. It doesn't have to be at night. So I lied—but why did I lie? I lied because I knew they wouldn't understand. They simply couldn't understand. So why worry them?

Similar to Nesrin, Ceylan said that she lied not because she feared getting into trouble with her parents (in fact, she did get into trouble for lying), but because she simply thought that her parents would not have understood that there was nothing wrong with being out at night with friends dating. While she believed there was nothing wrong in what she did, she thought that telling the truth was not going to prevent her parents from worrying. Similarly, many women said that after a certain point they chose to lie or hide because telling the truth was, in their estimation, more hurtful than lying. Importantly, none of them expressed any feelings of guilt or regret about lying to their parents, neither at the time nor in retrospect.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that in both Ceylan's and Nesrin's cases, lying and secrecy can be interpreted as a conformist strategy to protect the status quo at home, particularly about the father's authority and the norms about proper behavior for young women and virginity. By avoiding direct and open conflict "after a certain point" women seemed to retreat to reproducing existing hierarchies and norms, even though they claimed that they were only pretending.

Yüz Göz Olmamak (Don't Ask, Don't Tell)

Women told me that they sensed that their fathers knew that they were lying or hiding something, but, they said, their fathers never asked them directly or tried to find out about what actually was going on in their lives. The expression "*yüz göz olmamak*," which in this context I translate as "don't ask, don't tell," came up frequently when women were explaining their fathers' silent attitude. Women used this idiom often to explain why their fathers did not directly confront them about their boyfriends, even though they expressed their disapproval of the situation. Aylin described her father's avoidance:

Aylin: My father . . . I mean . . . this issue [her living with her boyfriend], it was never discussed with my father—as if there was no such thing (*yok öyle bir şey*).

[She laughs.]

Esin: Really? How?

Aylin: For long time he pretended that he didn't know. He said he'd rather not get involved (*yüz göz olmamak için kendi deęimiyle*).

I had a similar conversation with Seda:

Esin: What about your boyfriend? Did your parents know that he was staying with you?

Seda: They both knew about him, of course, no matter how much my father hated the fact that we were living together. They knew it but they pretended that they didn't know. My mother certainly knew about him. When she called me, my boyfriend would answer the phone, but my mother tried to ignore it. There is such a thing in my family—*don't ask don't tell (yüz göz olmama)*.

Nesrin provided her own quite elaborate analysis of this situation:

Nesrin: I think that my father sensed some of them [lies and secrets] but since he trusted us, and since he preferred not to dig too deep (*deşmek istemediği için*), I believe he showed some tolerance (*müsamaha*) to a certain extent. I mean I think there is a silent agreement (*yani böyle bir sessiz anlaşma oluyor bence*).

Esin: That's very interesting. What do you mean by that?

Nesrin: I mean after a while they [parents] begin to understand that you are not going to change your mind. First, they think you are acting out simply because you are young, and you don't know any better. But finally they understand that you are consistent in what you want. And once they realize they can't change you, they also accept that they have to stop. That's why I called it a silent agreement. They know it, even if you don't say it out loud, so they realize they have to stop digging (*söylemesen bile tahmin ediyor belki ama çok da eşlemiyor*).

All three women's memories of lying to their parents and the way their parents—especially their fathers—avoided finding out what exactly was going on suggest that both parties avoid conflict in order not to disturb the status quo in the relationship. In this context, I argue that avoiding open conflict by following the rule of “don't ask, don't tell,” or creating a “silent agreement,” women got to do whatever they want, and fathers did not have to face the fact that their authority was gradually becoming more and more nominal. Later, in Chapter 6, I will show that this tactic has hurt women in the long run, because rather than pushing for a more open and radical social change, these women settled for a partially hidden and private change, in which they gained freedom and mobility but remained within the comfortable framework of social expectations.

Financial Independence and the Power of Being 'Modern'

Some of my informants said that when their fathers did not approve of a trip or other social activities, they would attempt to halt the conversation with, “You can't do it. I'm not paying for it.” They told me that this threat was the main reason they began looking for jobs. Some of these women started earning money as early as high school, mostly through tutoring younger students. For example, Ebru (30, finance, single) described her father, a high-level bureaucrat, as a “typical cranky Turkish father” (*klasik huysuz Türk babası*) and her family as a “typical Turkish family where you don't see any display of affection between mothers and fathers.” Ebru's story indicates that her financial independence ultimately both empowers her and silences her father:

You know in college, during the spring break, everybody makes plans for a trip to the beach. My father would say “No! I won't allow you; if you want to go, find

your own money.” So I began tutoring high school students and saved my money for these trips. And I guess he comforted himself thinking, “at least she didn’t go with my money” [she laughs].

Esin: But did he say why he didn’t want you to go?

Ebru: The “boy - girl” issue (*erkek- kız meselesi*).

Esin: What about the “boy - girl issue?”

Ebru: Yeah, “What are they going to do to there the entire week? I don’t want to hear, I don’t want to know” (*duymayayım bilmeyeyim şeklinde*) . . . Things like ‘honor’ (*namus*) . . . or things like “What will the neighbors say?” were still going on. My father used to yell, “Do you know what time it is? You are coming home this late, what will the neighbors think if you come home after midnight?” and I would yell back, “I don’t care—they can think whatever they want.”

Esin: But he let you go with your own money.

Ebru: Probably he had some conflicts in him too . . .

During Turkey’s early modernization period, Kandiyoti (1997) argues, new masculinities were formulated. While the Ottoman patriarch lost its legitimacy “as the remote, authoritarian father figure,” a new patriarch emerged in the modern husband-father “who had a special link to his daughters who were valued, educated, and nurtured—men gave social birth to the new woman of the Republic” (Kandiyoti, 1997, p. 61). In this context, in contemporary modern Turkish life, especially among the urban middle class, the level of Turkish fathers’ “modernity” is still measured by how much freedom they allow their daughters. Fathers who are too strict and controlling are blamed

for being traditionalist, conservative, backward, and ignorant (*tutucu, gerici, dinci, cahil*) depending on the level of their strictness and their justification for it.

When Seda was an art student in college, she said, she began designing display windows for high-end clothing stores in order to gain some financial independence:

Especially in my college days, 1991-1992, when I started at the College of Art [Akademi] I began designing store windows. Because my father often threatened to cut our allowance—and he had done it too! He used to ground us. So then I was like, I need to be financially independent. After I became financially independent (*ekonomik özgürlüğü elde edince*), it was all over. He did not have any control over me (*hiç bir hegemonyası kalmadı*). First he started saying, “You’re not going to work!” I’d answer back, “What do you mean, don’t work? This is my career! Then don’t send me to school.” He just stood still (*duruyor böyle*).

Seda’s retort “Then don’t send me to school” is an obvious reference to the most known cultural stereotype: villainous, ‘backward’ fathers who don’t send their daughters to school because they don’t believe that women need neither education nor careers. By making that reference, Seda warns her father that he is about to be in that category if he does not let work. Seda makes a clear and direct connection between her education and her career. Importantly, she believes she is going to college because she is pursuing a career, and not only receiving an education for education’s sake. Seda’s closing description of her father, “He just stood still” is a powerful image of a patriarch who has already lost the traditional legitimacy of his authority, who has just lost his last means of control over his daughter, and who is now out of words.

If sending their daughters to school and encouraging them to work is the quintessential definition of what it means to be a “progressive man” in Turkish modernity, then my informants’ narratives indicate that their fathers have met these requirements. Durakbaşa (1998) argues that in the early Republican era fathers raised their daughters in accordance with the regime’s ideals of modernization and Westernization, and therefore encouraged them to pursue education and participate in public social life.²⁹ Yet, in this context, Durakbaşa (1998) suggests, “[i]t seems that a *tacit agreement* existed between fathers and daughters: the daughters were granted the opportunities of education, career, and certain liberties in participating social activities; in return, fathers expected their daughters to be extremely careful in their interactions with men and to repress their sexuality until acceptable husbands were found for them” (p. 152, emphasis added).

The above dialogue between Ebru and her father alludes to the dyad of “Kemalist fathers-modern daughters” in the 1930s, which has taken a more complicated turn in contemporary Turkey. Women of Generation 1980 were told that they were modern and Western women with access to education, financial independence, and public social life, but unlike the previous generations they believed that they were not subjected to the cultural codes of “honor” and “shame.” Those, they were socialized to believe, were a thing of the past, representing a conservatism and backwardness that Turkey left behind on the way to become Western and modern.

In the context of Istanbul in the 1980s, then, it seems that what was unexpected was that when the young women of Generation 1980 left their homes to go to school and

²⁹ Oral history research on women who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s shows that women often reported their fathers as being their role models and the main source of power behind their accomplishments as the first generation of modern Turkish women (Durakbaşa, 2002; Özyürek, 2006).

to participate in extracurricular activities, with the encouragement they received from their parents, they began to spend increasingly more time away from home, and, consequently, began to have a social life of their own. Since contemporary women believe that access to education and public space is their right, not a privilege, they do not feel obliged to limit, out of propriety, their potential social and sexual experiences. In this context the “tacit agreement” Durakbaşa described had to be rewritten. I argue that women of Generation 1980 were aware that their fathers were facing a dilemma about how to raise ‘modern’ daughters. Women seemed to realize that their fathers were left without adequate tools to handle the changing lives of their daughters, such as having boyfriends and independent social lives. In this context, after a certain point in the conflicts between daughters and fathers, it seems that the earlier generation’s “tacit agreement”, in which women repressed their sexuality in exchange for education, career, and social freedom, has evolved into a new agreement: “Don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Mother-Daughter Alliances

When I asked Seda how she managed to go out at night three to four times a week when her father was absolutely against it, she told me that her mother was very helpful in covering up for her:

Nothing in our family comes to an end suddenly (*bizim ailede hiç bir şey bıçak gibi kesilmez*). My mother is always acting as a go between (*annem hep arada*). For instance, you know my family comes from Karadeniz [indicating the traditional and conservative roots of her family]. Just imagine . . . you love [pressing on the word love] the nightlife and you don’t have people in your family

who understand this. Thank God my father is a fisherman so he was frequently out at sea. But even when he was home, we [she and her sisters] still didn't give up; we had to go out. And God bless my mother. She always helped us. She used to put pillows in our bed because our father used to check our rooms to see if we were home. When we came home late, our mother used to open the door for us; everybody was quiet and tiptoeing . . . [she mischievously laughs.]

A study conducted by Kıray in 1969, one of the earlier researches into these family dynamics, attends to the close relationship between mothers and daughters. Arguing that mothers play a strategic role mediating the relationship between daughters and their fathers, Kıray (1969) defines the mother's role in the Turkish family as a mediator, or a "buffer" that smoothes and lessens the damages from the clashes between children and fathers. Kıray writes:

Both boys and girls express their wishes through their mother, and, no matter how wild these wishes may be, she will always find *a middle course* to satisfy both the children and their father. It is for the mother to *reconcile* her husband to this and to affect a *compromise* between the values of the older generation of women and the present relationships between the two sexes, thus *avoiding open conflict* (1969, p. 268, emphasis added).

About three decades later, Fişek's (1995) work documents a continuing division of labor between mothers and fathers regarding parenting roles and the way they interact with their children. In urban, middle-class families, mothers maintain a more direct and daily relationship with the children, while fathers keep their authoritative distance and

interact with their wives with regard to their children. This dynamic allows for the avoidance of direct confrontation between the fathers and children, by placing the mothers in between as the daily manager of the family since “[o]pen displays of anger, towards either the father or other authority figures such as teachers, are not tolerated” (Sunar & Fişek, 2005, p. 175).

Seda’s story of the way her mother helped Seda and her sisters in their desire to go out, against their father’s consent, is a good example of how mothers prevent open conflict. However, it is not an act of reconciliation, or finding common ground. I argue that, in many cases, what women told me indicates that their mothers did more than just find “a middle course” through “reconciliation.” For example, Aylin told me that her mother in fact lied to her husband (Aylin’s father) to cover up for her. Aylin described the presence of her father (a retired engineer) at home as “annoying” and “causing a lot of problems.” She said when she was in college and living with her parents, there were a lot of fights at home because she wanted to go out at night with friends and spend the night at friends’ places. Later in the interview, she told me that she did indeed spend several nights out at friends’ places as well as her boyfriend’s apartment. I wondered how she managed to do this.

Aylin: When I was living with my parents, I would stay out 3 to 4 times a week and my father would turn this into a big issue, but my mother would cover up for me (*kompanse ediyordu*) one way or another.

Esin: How did she do that? Did your mother even know that you were staying at your boyfriend’s place?

Aylin: Yes, she knew. My mother used to tell my father that I was staying at a friend's house.

Based on my informants' accounts I argue that the "duofocal" (Olson, 1982) family structure and the relative persistence of sexual segregation among the family members created a milieu for women of Generation 1980 that led to female solidarity at home against male authority. Olson (1982) argues that in the context of separate female and male spheres within the family, "the female members of the family seek emotional support and companionship primarily from each other" (p. 45). However, I argue that the relationship between my informants and their mothers is more than "emotional support and companionship." Mothers' lying and hiding, instead of finding "a middle course," suggests that daughters benefit from their mothers' actions, and that mothers are not acting solely as "buffers" but becoming *allies*. My informants' accounts of their mothers' actually lying to their husbands and deliberately hiding certain facts about the social activities of their daughters, I argue, has kept the fathers' authority symbolically intact, but actually almost powerless. In this context, the mother-daughter alliance emerges as one of the main sources of daughters' empowerment against fathers' authority.

Women's narratives also suggest that they were not alone in relying on their mothers; as they relied on their mothers to navigate their fathers' authority, fathers, too, seemed to rely on their wives to monitor their daughters' activities without getting themselves involved. Ebru related an example of how her father kept her mother in between him and Ebru, instead of dealing with the situation himself, when I asked her. I what happened when her father learned she had a boyfriend when she was seventeen:

Ebru: “Silent protest.” [in English] He didn’t talk to me for a while.

Esin: But do you remember what he said?

Ebru: He didn’t say anything.

Esin: Then how did you know what he was angry about?

Ebru: He told my mother of course!

I heard several similar anecdotes from women in which fathers simply talked with their wives but not directly with their daughters. In this way, it seems, fathers kept their distant-but-authoritative position, and daughters, without creating much open conflict and with the help of their mothers, managed to increase their social mobility and power. On the other hand, it also seems like mothers benefited from this alliance, particularly in the long run, by having a permanent place in their daughters’ social lives, knowing all their friends, and sometimes even becoming a confidante.

Several women also spoke of their mothers as playing a much more active role in their lives, even more than being an ally; their mothers were described as their biggest supporters in pursuing their education and careers. In these narratives, women describe their mothers not only as close, sharing their daily problems and helping them maneuver around their fathers’ rules, but also as determined and passionate women invested in their daughters’ education and future. It appears that the observation Olson (1982) made in the late 1970s, saying that “although it is said to be father’s ultimate responsibility to preserve the honor of each family member, it is the mother’s immediate responsibility to see that the daughters develop the attributes and skills” (p. 45) took a different turn as well. As I have shown, women insisted that they did not learn much housework from their mothers and were not asked to participate any housekeeping duties on a regular

basis. Instead, they praised their mothers for being their biggest champion and motivator in achieving their academic and professional goals.

For example Ezgi (33, psychologist, married with no children) told me that although her mother was a good student, she never worked. Instead she devoted herself to raising her two daughters, doing everything she could to help Ezgi receive a good education.

I think our mothers raised us with this ambition that they never had in their own lives. For instance, my mother still supports me even in the little things I do for my personal and intellectual growth, because they couldn't do such things. I know there are working mothers but my mother hadn't done anything for herself. My mother, for instance, used to be a good student in high school and in college but then she got married and never worked. But she gives tremendous importance to education. And our parents' generation . . . they give such importance to success in school.

Through these narratives, my aim is to show that mothers here emerge as more than emotional support or buffers between their daughters and their fathers. Rather, they are active allies helping their daughters to have a life that was never available to them.

In her intergenerational study of upper- and upper-middle-class mother-daughter pairs in Istanbul in 1978, Kandiyoti compares a group of female college students to their mothers. She examines to what extent the processes of social change since the foundation of the Turkish Republic have affected "women's self-concepts, role expectations and attitudes about work and marriage" (1978, p. 233). Kandiyoti demonstrates that the

mothers in her sample (born roughly between the years 1935-1950), who did not have the opportunity to realize their ideals, encouraged and supported their daughters in getting a good education and pursuing careers. The mothers in Kandiyoti's sample were quite similar to their own mothers, who were the first generation of modern Turkish women of the Republic (coming of age in the 1920s), in terms of their traditional expectations and roles in the sexual division of labor. This similarity existed despite the substantial social transformations of the 1940s that provided this second generation of modern women with educational advantages and more a westernized urban life, which Kandiyoti (1978) argues is suggestive of a psychological continuity with the previous generation despite structural changes in their social worlds. In the daughters' generation, on the other hand, Kandiyoti (1978) finds a higher degree of "psycho-social change" than structural change in their social worlds, and she concludes that there is a "possibility that although the social changes which mothers have undergone that may not have changed their own sex-role expectations fundamentally, they might have made a different orientation to their daughters, possibly reflecting itself in their socialization practices" (p. 258).

The women who are the subject of this dissertation came of age about fifteen years after the daughters in Kandiyoti's research. During our in-depth interviews, the women of Generation 1980 told me that their mothers, regardless of whether they worked outside the home, encouraged them to have careers. This relationship is different from forming an in-house alliance with their daughters or helping them in daily problems. Rather it involves leading their daughters towards a certain goal and expecting them to work towards it. My informants recognized their mothers' efforts and how those efforts have affected them, even though—similar to Kandiyoti's findings—the women of

Generation 1980's expectations about gender roles and attitudes towards marriage and sexuality are quite different from their mothers'.

Women's Perceptions of Their Parents

While my informants praised and appreciated their mothers for all the things they did for them, they also frequently differentiated themselves from their mothers. After Seda described her father as very authoritarian, she spoke about her mother:

My mother, of course, is a more passive character at home. But even if it seems like things are always going the way that my father wants it, in fact, my mother always makes my father do things her way . . . I don't know how she does it. I don't understand; I can't do it like she does it. I'm more like my father . . . my mother is more passive aggressive. I'm not like her at all.

Here, Seda on the one hand praises her mother's ability to handle her husband's temper and authoritarian attitude at home by acting "passive aggressive" and gradually and strategically manipulating her husband into doing what she wants. On the other hand, Seda differentiates herself from her mother, and associates herself more with her father's directness and power. Seda represents her mother as a passive woman whose only weapon is manipulation—an image that does not match with the ideal of the modern educated woman who has confidence and skills to be and act as an equal with men. In so doing, she ignores that these are the same strategies that her mother used to help her against her father. While Seda benefited from her mother's strategies of manipulating her husband, she did not seem to define herself with this type of behavior or associate herself

with her mother. Rather she associates herself with her father who is authoritarian, direct with no hidden agenda. This of course is not too surprising considering that she is proud of being raised like a son.

Nesrin portrays her mother as a woman who keeps order in the family and is seemingly happy doing it—but she is a woman who could only exist at home, and in particular in the kitchen:

I remember our home, where everything is in order and neat . . . my mother is in the kitchen . . . cooking happily . . . she is always happy despite everything, despite all the hardship . . . a happy and a strong woman . . . she only exists in the kitchen and happy. (*Sadece orada var ve yaşamaktan mutlu.*)

However, in Nesrin's account of her parents' marriage, the depiction of her mother casts her as oppressed and dependent, without any tools to resist. Compared to Seda, Nesrin is more empathetic towards her mother's status at home. However, even though she recognized her father's oppression over her mother, she did not perceive male domination as the source of women's oppression, perhaps because she managed to evade father's authority with the help of her mother. And, she still associated herself more with her father. She told me a story about how she quit her job because she did not agree with some of the core values and principles of the firm and proudly added that her father approved of what she did, saying that he would have done the same thing.

Even in cases where women do not describe their fathers as authoritarian and emphasize that their mothers were not a "typical selfless housewife," they also pointed out that their mothers did not have a chance to date prior to their marriage, did not enjoy

a social life, and had to sacrifice a lot from their work and their personal needs for their marriages and their children. This suggests that even though this cohort of women were raised in a relatively gender-blind environment at home and, with their mothers' help, evaded their fathers' authority, they have not developed a criticism towards existing patriarchy and sexism. By disparaging other women and qualities culturally associated with femininity, and associating themselves with male characteristics, they construct themselves as closer to men, more independent and having more power in their social relationships. Yet they simultaneously continue reproducing mainstream gender hierarchy favoring men and so-called male qualities.

Despite the argument in the existing literature that the “duo-focal” structure provides women with more freedom and equality, my informants do not perceive their parents' marriage as egalitarian or their mothers' status in marriage as equal. To be clear, I am not arguing that the literature is misleading or inaccurate, or that the mothers perceive themselves as oppressed or secondary in their marriages. Rather, what I emphasize here is that the daughters' perception is different; their expectations of their husbands and of themselves as wives and mothers is different from their mothers'. They imagine a more egalitarian marriage based on companionship, communication, and love, not a one with dual structure.

In this chapter, I argue that because of parents who believe in educating their daughters, following the gender equality teachings of Turkish modernity, the women of Generation 1980 received the skills and confidence they needed to participate in public life, and, importantly, were encouraged to see themselves as modern and independent

women. Growing up in a family environment where male authority was sufficiently undermined, this generation of women seemed to conclude that the fight with patriarchy had been overcome. As a result, even though they observed their mothers' secondary status at home, they attributed this to a generational period when women were expected to primarily perform domestic roles and not work outside home, rather than seeing their mothers as victims of a persisting patriarchal order. In this context, women of Generation 1980 were satisfied so long as they could differentiate themselves from their mothers, and construct themselves as free and independent women. Ironically, by locating the source of the problem in the "passivity" of their mothers, these women continue to reproduce the dominant discourse of gender hierarchy.

My goal in this discussion is to show that although women of Generation 1980 claim to be treated equally with respect to their education and careers, their narratives suggest that they learn to associate themselves with so-called male characteristics, such as being independent and brave, and to distance themselves from the messages about women that they constantly and indirectly received, depicting them as typically and generally dependent, weak, and passive. In this context, while my informants did not feel that they were discriminated against as a daughter by their parents, in order not to fall into this category of dependent women, they constantly differentiate themselves from this notion of women by emphasizing their so-called male qualities.

Chapter 4

Early Experiences of Sexuality and Dating Culture

Arzu and I sat comfortably on her divan covered with lots of pillows, enjoying pastry and the hot black tea she had made, while outside it was a miserable cold and snowy Istanbul day. Her house in Arnavutköy, an old middle-class neighborhood in the European side of Istanbul, was playfully decorated with pop-art memorabilia and action heroes and cult movie posters. Arzu, a smarty, witty, single woman of 34, is a pop culture junkie and a movie buff, and she works as an assistant to a film producer. In our interview Arzu recalled memories from her high school years in Istanbul during the mid-1980s and the early 1990s:

For instance, the concept of slut (*orospu kavramı*), changed dramatically over only a few years in the 1980s when I was in high school. I mean, for instance, in my high school years the girls who slept with their boyfriends were called “sluts” but in your time they weren’t. [Here she refers to the fact that I am three years younger than her, in a way that suggests that during the fast-evolving 1980s three years was a long enough time for such substantial changes.] Sometimes it was even changing partially and randomly. In one high school those girls were still called “sluts” and in another one they were not. In high school the girls who put out [“*veren*,” meaning “those who give” (their body)] were called “sluts” but in college everybody was having one-night stands.

While Arzu was sharing these memories and observations she was both passionate and excited, clearly thinking she was making an important point. She believed that the change

in her peers' attitudes towards sexuality was fast and unpredictable, and that it also affected more than just her and her friends adding, "*This was a very significant thing in the name of sexual liberation.*"

In Turkish culture, dating' and especially premarital sexual relations are not typically accepted. Even though the social transformations of the 1980s included more egalitarian relationships between husbands and wives, not all relations were as open to change. Tekeli (1995) writes, based on data collected in 1989³⁰, that "not all values concerning gender relations change as rapidly as the above mentioned. For instance relations between young girls and boys, especially sexual relations, are not easily tolerated, and boys are given more freedom than girls" (p. 10). Olson (1982), in her ethnographic research conducted in 1970 and 1971 among middle-class youth in Ankara, Turkey's capital, observes that although youth socialize together in parks and tea gardens, "they do very little 'dating' since they visit such places in unisexual groups, not as heterosexual couples. . . . [T]here is little heterosexual 'pairing off' either within or between groups" (p. 48). And, she writes, "even if a girl and boy are dating each other, they are likely to do so in the company of friends rather than as a twosome" (Olson, p. 49).

The radical difference between Olson's observations on gender relations among middle-class youth in a major city in Turkey and Arzu's comments on changing attitudes towards premarital sexuality among similar youth more or less 15 years after Olson's research, indicates the suddenness and the relative magnitude of the change that Generation 1980 experienced as they were coming of age in the 1980s. Although not all

³⁰ Tekeli refers to a survey focused on attitudes, conducted by PIAR Marketing Research Co. Ltd., that are published in *Profile Turkey 1989: Values, Attitudes, Behaviors* (1989, Istanbul: PIAR).

my informants defined their early sexual experiences as an indication of “sexual liberation,” significantly, all my informants insisted that they experienced their sexuality “freely.”

In this chapter, I examine changing discourses on and attitudes towards sexuality in my informants’ accounts of their dating and sexual experiences. Expanding Neyzi’s (2001) argument (see Chapter 2) about the social and the political “rupture” that occurred in the post-1980 era, I argue that the Generation 1980’s dating practices and their open engagement in premarital sexuality represent a rupture with the conservative sexual morality, creating a context for some young women to break away from established gender and sexual norms. Through studying narratives of self and sexuality, I argue that my informants’ changing experiences and practices of sexuality indicate a generational change in the 1980s, and that their guilt- and shame-free accounts about these experiences reflect the self-assured subjectivity shared among women of Generation 1980.

I argue that a teenage dating culture emerged in the 1980s, which, on the one hand, subverted the cultural significance of female virginity and normalized premarital sexuality but, on the other hand, continued to control female sexuality through insisting on exclusive boyfriend/girlfriend coupledness. By doing so, the youth of Generation 1980 caused a major ‘rupture’ in conservative sexual morality, while simultaneously reproducing social control over women’s sexuality and bodies. Women’s narratives of their early sexuality indicate that the experience of the 1980s “rupture,” as defined by Neyzi (2001) led them to feel that they experienced their sexuality and relationships “naturally” and “freely,” and to perceive their premarital sexuality as a sign of their

modern and independent identity. On the other hand, they expressed that they struggled, especially in high school, in their decisions to break up with a boyfriend because of the fear that they would be perceived as “loose.”

“Explosion of Sexuality”

Gürbilek (1992) describes the “cultural climate” of the 1980s as the coexistence of “repression of the word” [lack of freedom of speech] and “explosion the word” [increasing public display of topics that were previously considered strictly ‘private’ matters, such as sexuality] (p. 22). She argues that, on the one hand, there was repression of political language and freedom of speech, and on the other hand, an explosion of private and intimate matters in the public sphere. In this context, in Turkey, in the mid-1980s, sex and sexuality—topics that had strictly been considered private until then—became public matters (Gürbilek, 1989; Boratav, 2006). Innumerable medical ‘expert’ commentaries on sex and ‘sexual problems,’ and guides for correct sex that included titillating images of female nudity became available for public consumption so fast and ubiquitously that Gurbilek calls this phenomenon an “explosion of sexuality” (*cinsellik patlaması*) (1992, p. 22).

However, despite the increasing public discussions about sexuality, the dominant discourse on sexuality remained within a conservative and heteronormative framework that conceptualized proper and legitimate sexuality only within marriage between a man and a woman. Ahıska and Yenal (2006) argue that a disciplinary medical discourse on sexuality had become available through the media, which aimed to categorize and teach

Turkish people about “normal” and “abnormal” sexualities (p. 211).³¹ Television programs, popular magazines and newspapers began covering news about “abnormal” sexualities, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, fetishes, as well as sex crimes such as rape, incest, pedophilia, and so-called crimes of passion. This coverage tended to be scandalous, moralistic, shaming, yet, simultaneously, titillating with explicit images and descriptions (Ahıska & Yenal, 2006).

This conservative framework also defined the public media representation of women as well. Saktanber’s (1995) [1988] research on the representation of women in Turkish mass media in the 1980s shows that women were mainly represented as the “devoted mother” and the “faithful good wife.” On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, women who did not fall under those two categories automatically were represented as fallen, free, or available women. Saktanber argues that “according to [women’s] position in this framework, women in Turkish society can be divided, at least at the representational level, into those who are almost devoid of sexuality and those who are nothing but sexuality” (p. 155).

Even with the emergence of the Turkish feminist movement, the binary and two-dimensional portrayal of women has not been challenged effectively. A few women’s magazines published in the 1980s put the emphasis on the “independent, successful, dynamic, intellectual woman who has earned a place for herself in society at large” (Saktanber, 1995, p. 158). Among such women’s magazines, Saktanber points out that *Kadınca (Womanly)* was a rare example that tried to “define womanhood outside male discourse” (p. 158). However, even though *Kadınca* encouraged women to learn about

³¹ Also, during this period, adult magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse* began to be published in Turkish.

their body and enjoy their sexuality, Saktanber argues that the magazine “cannot ignore the dominant view in Turkey that allows women a legitimate sexuality only within marriage” (p. 159). Similarly, the feminist historian Arzu Öztürkmen (1998), in her detailed study on *Kadınca*, argues that “[t]he foremost contribution of *Kadınca* to the rising women's movement in Turkey . . . was its voicing and popularization of problems in women's everyday life (p. 282). However, Öztürkmen, along the same lines as Saktanber, argues, “*Kadınca's* attitude toward female sexuality can be considered *Kadınca's* weak point reflecting a double standard or inconsistency” (p. 282).

The binary representation of women and the conservative sexual morality were also the dominant discourses through which public anxiety about youth's so-called degeneration in the context of increasing interests in sexuality and opportunities for mixed-gender socialization was formulated. With increasing tension between the public display of sexuality and grand narratives of morality, public representations of youth in the late 1980s and early 1990s not only bemoaned youth's “apoliticism,” but increasingly their lack of values and moral decay. Though this type of anxiety about youth is not entirely new, as Öncü (2002), a Turkish sociologist, argues, “a special twist” was added to the stories of “excessive consumption,” “excessive materialism,” and “excessive westernization.” Öncü states:

[O]n reality shows on television, as well as lifestyle magazines, stories of ‘wasted lives’ among youth have proliferated. Pathetic narratives of girls who arrive in Istanbul to become television stars or singers and then drift into the trade of vice are of course classic, and have been around for a long time. But they have now been displaced, as favourite tabloid material, with stories about ‘children of

affluence', who wear designer clothes, frequent expensive restaurants, bars and discos, and celebrate promiscuity in sex and drugs, but eventually end up committing suicide, or are found dead of an overdose in some filthy basement, or fall into the clutches of some religious cult . . . illustrating how 'excess consumerism' breeds 'identity confusion' because it is contrary to Turkish values and ways of life (p. 174).

However, these types of storylines, now sending the message that not only the poor and the uneducated young girls are in danger of this lifestyle, but also the wealthy and the educated youth could be the victim of the "excesses" that consumption society brings, although they managed to scare the parents to some extent, they did not have much effect on young people themselves, perhaps because they tended to be too exaggerated and too removed from the daily realities of youth. For example, Arzu, whose narratives were examined at the beginning of this chapter, made fun her mother who was worried about her going out to a club at night, and who used to ask her if she was going to be "an alcoholic like Sue Ellen" (a character on the television show *Dallas*). Similarly one of Lüküslü's (2010) young informants complains about her mother's "naiveté" and says that every time she goes out at night her mother thinks that someone is going to put a "something" in her drink in order to take advantage of her, as it often happens to young women in overly dramatic Turkish movies (p. 183).

Youth's Changing Attitudes Towards Premarital Sexuality

Studies on youths' sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in Turkey are still very rare, and mainly based on surveys conducted among university students (Çok et al.

2001; Duyan & Duyan, 2005; Erkmen et al. 1990; Gelbal et al. 2008; Gökengin et al. 2003). Although these surveys largely report that young women engage in sexual activity much less than their male counterparts, which indicates the continuing power of norms about the social conduct of women with men and the significance of virginity as the ultimate sign of an unmarried woman's virtue and her family's honor, the more recent surveys and those that were conducted in larger cities suggest an increase in sexual activity among youth since the 1990s.

For example, a relatively early survey, consisting of 166 female and 172 male undergraduate students at a state university in Eskisehir (a mid-size city in North West of Turkey), found that 66.2% of the male students and 8.5 % of female students had premarital intercourse (Erkmen et al., 1990). Comparing male and female students' responses regarding their attitudes and behaviors towards virginity, masturbation, and pornography, the survey concludes that, "Turkish female students carry out sexual activities less than their males counterparts. This is quite understandable, considering that females have traditionally been subjected to far greater psychosocial inhibitions (especially of a religious nature) than males with respect to sexual behavior" (Erkmen et al., p. 254).

On the other hand, more recent survey data on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of Turkish college students, collected in major cities in Turkey, indicate a significant increase in the number of students who are sexually active. (Çok et al., 2001; Gelbal et al., 2008). The research conducted by Çok et al. (2001) surveyed 530 public university students in Ankara (40% of them were freshmen), and found that 33% of total participants had sexual intercourse at one point in their life. When analyzed in terms of

gender, 48% of male and 19.2% of female students reported that they had intercourse. Similar to the previous research, the authors of this research attributed the lower percentage of female students who had sexual experience to “societal pressures on Turkish women to remain virgins until marriage” (Çok et al., p. 94). Yet significantly, the authors also predict that these numbers could have been higher if such a large percentage of the participants were not freshmen, as older college students are more likely to be sexually active than younger students.

Another survey (Gelbal et al., 2008), conducted among 614 undergraduates (330 female and 284 male) from Ege University in Izmir (Turkey’s third largest city), reveals that although the percentage of females who have sexual experiences is significantly lower than their male counterparts (53.5 % of males and 19.7% of female reported that they had sexual experiences), more than half of the females (51.2 %) approve of premarital sexual intercourse for women (p. 1041), suggesting a tendency towards an increasing acceptance of premarital female sexuality among women.

In addition to living in large urban centers, higher socio-economic status appears to be a factor in the increasing approval of premarital sexual activity. The Konrad Foundation’s nationwide survey among Turkish youth shows that “the tendency to approve of pre-marital sex grows stronger with increasing SES [socio-economic status]” (Konrad Foundation, 1998, p. 56). Along these lines, a recent study on the formation of heterosexual identity among youth at a private university in Istanbul (with a student body mainly coming from middle- and upper-middle-class families) indicates that the number of students who have been in a relationship is much higher than the numbers given in the above surveys (Boratav, 2006). The study further finds that “the majority of the

heterosexuals (84% of the women and 77% of the men) reported having had a number of relationships that matched their current sexual identity” (Boratov, p. 219).³² Although the study does not specify if these “relationships” involve intercourse, the significantly higher percentages of reported relationships among these youth suggest higher sexual activity among this body of college students.

Discourses of Sexuality in Youth Magazines

A subtle but noticeable change in the language of media targeting youth in the mid-1980s points, at the same time, to an emerging discourse on youth’s sexuality that managed to remain somewhat outside the mainstream, anxiety-driven morality about sexuality. *Onyedi (Seventeen)* first published in 1983, and marketed itself as a music and culture magazine. The magazine also extensively focused on issues facing young people, particularly their romantic interests, changing bodies, and problems at school and at home. In each issue, the two-page readers’ letters section, titled “Let’s share our problems” (*Dertleşelim*), was full of letters asking advice on a variety of issues, such as how to approach somebody from the opposite sex, dealing with authoritative and unsympathetic parents, and questions about adolescents’ changing bodies and sex. Importantly, the editors’ responses to these letters were always in an understanding and sympathetic tone. The magazine was clearly supportive of youth having boyfriends and girlfriends; dating and developing romantic interests towards the opposite sex was defined as normal and natural, and encouraged as a part of a young person’s healthy development.

³² Participants included 225 students, 66.5% women, 33.5% men, in an age range between 18 and 30, and 98% heterosexual identified.

For example, another regular section (Figure 1) entitled “Growing up: A Mini Encyclopedia” (*Büyürken: Mini Ansiklopedi*) frequently focused on issues and problems related to romantic interests among youth, and approached these issues from a point of view that was not restrictive or moralistic. The author of this column signed her name after the title “*ablanız*” (your big sister) and then her professional title of “psychological counselor,” and addressed her readers as “*sevgili kardeşlerim*” (my dear younger siblings), both of which evoke the loving and understanding relationship between older and younger siblings, as opposed to authoritative and prohibitionist approach of the parents. The general advice remained within the discourse of “the naturalness” of the relationship between young men and women. The author writes, “To like somebody of the opposite sex, think about her/him constantly and to develop feelings different than a friendship is a natural fact.”³³ Then she identifies some of the possible issues or problems that might arise as a result of these feelings. For example, she says she understands how hard it is to concentrate on schoolwork when one begins to develop romantic feelings towards someone of the opposite sex, and continues on to give advice about how to manage such romantic feelings so that one is able to focus on schoolwork. The tone of the text is both trustworthy as well as understanding.

³³ “Karşı cinsten birini beğenmeniz, hep onu düşünmeniz, arkadaşlıktan farklı birşeyler duymanız belki yeni ama doğal bir olay.” Growing Up: A Mini Encyclopedia, *Onyedi* (1984) 17, p. 50.



Figure 1: From “Growing up: A Mini Encyclopedia,” 1984, *Onyedi*, 17, pp: 50-51.

On the other hand, she also reminds the reader that most parents in Turkey do not approve of relationships between young men and women. She says in such cases she understands the youth must feel sad, but does not offer suggestions towards this issue. Her commentary stops after stating the power of the norm, as perceived by parents. Parents’ disapproval is accepted as an unchangeable fact; she does not suggest any solution or way out for the reader.

Overall, *Onyedi*’s comments remained timid when it came to sexuality and openly challenging the conservative sexual morality. There was no direct encouragement to be sexually active. The advice on this topic was usually to wait until the youth get to know their boyfriends/girlfriends better and not to rush. Significantly, while the magazine fell short on challenging traditional conservative morality about sexuality, it did not define sexuality within marriage and did not assume that flirting and dating would necessarily

lead to marriage. In fact, there were often messages about the negative consequences of marriage at an early age.

Blue Jean, similar to *Onyedi*, defined itself as “a youth and music magazine,” and published its first issue in February 1987. Quickly *Blue Jean* became a big hit among urban youth and remained unique for a long time (Akyıldız, 2007). There were some substantial differences between *Blue Jean* and *Onyedi*. First of all, *Blue Jean* was physically different than *Onyedi*. The magazine had a higher quality paper, and its images and flashier page layout were quite similar to its European counterparts available in Turkey, such as the German magazine *Bravo*. The content of *Blue Jean* was also quite different than *Onyedi*, as it was mainly concerned with western pop and rock music and nationwide concert and cultural events. *Blue Jean* did not focus on issues such as youth’s daily problems, and, moreover, did not have a didactic educational tone aimed at teaching youth about cultural events, books, or new professions, or helping them plan their future after school.

While *Onyedi* in the early 1980s was teaching youths how to be teenagers through developing interests in music, sports, and popular culture, *Blue Jean* assumed that its target audience was already an established group of sophisticated young consumers of urban life and pop culture. More importantly, while *Onyedi* was encouraging youth to learn about their changing bodies and not be embarrassed by emerging feelings towards the opposite sex, *Blue Jean* already assumed that its readers were sexually active. The magazine’s section for readers’ letters, which was the only regular section where young people’s problems were addressed, was explicitly titled “SexTeen.” The editorial advice, complete with provocative photographs, indicated a major shift in the representation of

youth and their sexuality. Only a few years after *Onyedi*, sexually explicit letters were published in the *Blue Jean*'s "SexTeen" section (Figure 2) suggesting that youth (both male and female in the age range of 15-19) were sexually active. The content of the letters were mostly about masturbation, penis size, oral and anal sex, protection, and AIDS. The editorial responses were equally explicit and unapologetic in their answers to the readers' letters. By acknowledging teenagers' sexuality, and even blaming parents who did not accept their children's active sexuality for being traditional and oppressive, the magazine's narrative tone suggested an ongoing change among the youth towards accepting premarital sexuality and diminishing the significance of female virginity. *Blue Jean*'s presence in the public sphere provided an alternative portrayal of youth, one which undermined the dominant public discourse that had represented youth as senseless consumers or as victims of changing Turkey due to excessive consumption, materialism, and promiscuity.



Figure 2: “SexTeen,” *Blue Jean*, 1993, 7(12).

The general goal of both magazines was to portray Turkish youth as a mixed-gender group that has the right to have fun, discover love, and learn about the opposite sex. In this context, the advertisements in the magazine were not in conflict with the message of the magazine as often the case in the women’s magazines.³⁴ Since most advertisements portrayed young people of both sexes having fun together, or a young couple romantically and/or suggestively posed, these images supported the general message of the magazines, which assert the normality and naturalness of young people developing sexual interests in the opposite sex and pursuing romantic relationships.

The observable change from *Onyedi* to *Blue Jean* suggests an ongoing change in youths’ attitudes towards premarital sexuality, and, I argue, indicates a shift in the

³⁴ See Durakbaşa (1997).

discourse towards normalizing dating and premarital sexuality among urban youth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. My argument here is not that *Onyedi* and *Blue Jean* magazines single handedly shaped youth. Rather, I see that these magazines' rhetoric—normalizing dating and even premarital sexuality—indicates a possible space for the formation of an alternative female subjectivity outside the dichotomy of “the free, available woman” and “the good wife,” and the acceptance of sexuality outside marriage.

Talking About Sex

Ethnographic and qualitative data on Turkish youths' sexual behavior and their changing attitudes towards sexuality are largely missing in the social scientific literature. My informants' narratives indicate that premarital sexuality was increasingly common among middle-class youth in Istanbul in the early to mid-1980s when they were teenagers in high school, as dating had become an important and increasingly socially accepted part of young people's life. During my fieldwork, the majority of women I met told me that they had their first boyfriends in high school and had sexual relationships with them. While some of my informants told me that even though they had only flirtations in high school and did not have boyfriends until college, they also acknowledged that they were “late in the game” compared to their friends. Significantly, all of informants claimed that “everybody,” around the same time, began dating and having sex.

When I asked women how they learned about sex, they looked confused or dismissed my question, answering that they did not think that sex is something that needs to be learned; they simply knew it. Some of them mentioned that around the time they began to have sex, they read some books and magazines, but they did not think they

learned much from them. They all, however, said they talked a lot with their friends, who were going through similar experiences. For instance Ceylan (30, project manager, single) said:

We were three or four girlfriends who were very curious about sex and loved to talk about it. You know, when we were about to start studying, somebody says “You know I slept with so and so.” And of course, everybody put down the textbooks and we used to talk about it for hours. There was this one group that only talked about sex, I mean, only sex [emphasizes the word only].

I asked Deniz (29, assistant at a small advertisement firm, single) where she learned about sex, and she said:

Well, these things . . . I didn't make a plan or a list of questions of anything. I mean you become curious about something, and then . . . I mean because I was at a boarding school, I had plenty of friends and plenty of time to talk about these topics [She laughs]. I wish we recorded those conversations, I bet we would be laughing out loud right now about the things we had been talking about then. But really, I think you learn some things from your friends, talking with them, reading books. In fact I only began talking about sex after I started having sex.

One of the important findings based on my interviews with women is that none of the women had a talk about sex with their parents or another adult.³⁵ When I asked them if any of their parents talked to them about sex, most burst into laughter and said “No way!”, while a few mentioned that their mothers made an attempt, but one so clumsy and

³⁵ The educational system in Turkey is completely silent on sex education.

naïve that they stopped the conversation, realizing that there would not be any common ground. Unlike the changing discourse in the youth media, women's narratives indicate that their mothers' attitudes had not changed in the same direction.

This perceived difference between their own generational experiences and their mothers' is quite apparent in women's stories about what happened when their mothers confronted them about their very first boyfriends. For example, Arzu (34, freelance accountant, single) told me this anecdote during our interview about her first boyfriend and her mother's reaction:

When I was in junior high, I met this boy at our school party (*okul çayı*). I was 15 or 16. So we went out few times to the movies or to have pizza. We were acting very romantic; we weren't having sex but we were kissing. And since I was thinking this was all very normal [with emphasis], I told my mother about him. I said something like, "There is this boy, he is going to come pick me up, and we are going to stroll on *Bağdat Avenue*." Guess what my mother told me? [She chuckles.] She said, "Ok, you can walk hand-in-hand but don't kiss." [And she bursts into laughter.]

Arzu attributed her mother's reaction to her naiveté and said, "At that moment I realized that I would not be talking about these matters with my mother. I'd already kissed the boy weeks ago!" In other similar cases, women told me that they remember thinking their mothers' attempts to talk with them were too "clumsy," "way too late," or so "exaggerated" that they could not take their mothers' warnings seriously.

In rare cases women received harsher reactions from their mothers.³⁶ Ayşe (32, lawyer, married with one child) told me during our interview that she had such a “hopeless” start with her mother that it only made her realize that she would never be able to talk to her mother about “these issues.”

Esin: Did you ever talk with your mother about dating and boys?

Ayşe: Are you kidding me?! (*Yok canım!*)

Esin: So you didn’t mention any of your boyfriends to her?

Ayşe: Ahh my mother! [implying that she was tough on these issues]. I used to hide that from my mother because . . . well, the very first boy that I actually could call “my boyfriend” . . . I was either in eighth or ninth grade; we were at our summer apartment in a compound (*yazlık*). I had a very nice a group of friends there. You know those summer places . . . as a group we used to hang out in the compound [a gated community at a beach town], go to the beach, go to the tea garden in the evenings, and make bonfires on the beach . . . So anyway, there was this boy from Ankara. I liked him. I knew he liked me too. That summer, right outside our compound, a new outdoor disco/bar opened on the vacant lot across the road . . . it was a very nice looking place. But it was outside of the compound. One night, as a group we decided to go there . . . so my friends came over and asked my mother for her permission for me to join them. She said, “No” [imitating her mother’s assertive voice]. My friends insisted, saying that everybody was going. My mother said, “Everybody can go, but Ayşe can’t” [again imitating her mother’s non-negotiable stance].

³⁶ As previously discussed, fathers typically would not be expected to participate in a conversation about private matters.

Esin: Is your mother usually like that?

Ayşe: Oh yes she is . . . but of course, I've never listened to her . . . ever . . .

[emphasizing each word very strongly]. By the way, my younger brother, in those days, he used to follow me wherever I went. That night after dinner, I left our apartment as always, as if I was going to the tea garden, but we all went to that bar instead . . . and that boy and I began slow dancing, no kissing, nothing like that . . . then all of a sudden I noticed that my mother was standing in front of me and my brother was next to her. Oh, I'll never forget that scene. I got very mad at my brother because he totally ratted me out. [slang: *tamamen kardeşim ispiyonlamış vaziyette.*] My mother looked at me in a way that I knew I was going to be in major trouble. She just said, "Come with me right away, we're going home" (*yürü, dedi, çabuk eve gidiyoruz*).

Esin: Then what happened?

Ayşe: At home, neither of us slept that night. I was shaking with anger, my mother kept yelling at me, "What were you thinking? Dancing like that, that close . . . what a disgrace! Shame on you!" (*Bu ne terbiyesizlik!*) By the way, my mother is a psychology major, and she is licensed to work in high schools as a counselor [she laughs, sarcastically]. So since her reaction to my first boyfriend was like that, I said, "Ok, from now on, everything will be in secrecy." After this incident, I did not tell her about any of my boyfriends. None.

Esin: Did she ever ask?

Ayşe: Nope. She never asked.

Interestingly, instead of taking their mothers' message seriously, both Arzu and Ayşe interpreted it as a sign of their naiveté or conservatism, and simply decided to keep everything to themselves. It is important to note that women did not explain their decision to cease communication with their mothers regarding their romantic and sexual experiences as the result of fear or guilt, but instead out of the conviction that they could never change their mothers' opinions. Women perceived an unbridgeable gap between themselves and their mothers—a gap so wide that they did not even argue with their mothers or see any worth in trying to change their mind.

“Naturalness” of (having) sex

During the interviews while talking about their first sexual experiences, women frequently described their sexual experiences as “natural” (*doğal*) and “normal (*olağan/normal*)” They said it came “naturally” to them as if it was something they had always known. Nesrin, for example, said that she did not think that she needed to learn about sex first:

I think sex is something one simply knows, I don't think of it as something we need to learn. This is something very normal and natural. It is something very important and beautiful. I think of sex as a place when one could express oneself freely. I had some flirtations in high school. Then I had my first relationship in college and discovered sexuality, and apparently I was very ready, that's why everything happened very naturally. It's like I've always known it; I felt very comfortable (*hiç bir rahatsızlık hissetmedim*).

When I asked her if she had talked about sex with her mother or anybody in her family before or after she had sex. She said:

I told my mother about my flirtations in high school but, if you are asking me if I told my family that I had sex in college, no, I didn't. And I didn't feel obliged to share it either. Why should I make them sad? I mean, for example, if someone's family is very strict about this, very oppressive, then one could feel guilty towards her family, you know, she might feel that she betrayed them or something. But for me, I knew that what I was doing was something very natural and I knew I wasn't doing anything wrong. I never felt guilty. I think this is something very natural.

In other parts of the interview, Nesrin repeatedly describes her parents, especially her father, as quite strict (see Chapter 3). In her case, similar to Arzu's and Ayşe's, the reason for hiding is not that her parents were strict, but because she seemed to be convinced that what she was doing was "something very natural," and because she was equally convinced that there was no common ground to explain and share these experiences with her parents. She, like the others, decided to keep it to herself.

The narrative of 'normality' and the 'naturalness of sex' appeared in Ceylan's account as well. Ceylan was 30 years old during my fieldwork and was working as a staff member at a research center of a private university. I met her through Aylin, but had not seen her since our first meeting. I asked Aylin to ask Ceylan if she would be interested in participating in my research. A few days later Aylin called me and gave me Ceylan's cell phone number and told me that she was expecting my call.

On the phone, Ceylan's tone was rather cold. She said she did not want us to meet at her parents' place where she currently lived because she did not think we would have

privacy. I was a little nervous when Ceylan arrived at my apartment around eight at night carrying a plastic bottle of water and a small package of thin pretzels, and wearing trendy ‘skinny jeans’ and Adidas sneakers. Contrary to my expectations, which were based on our cold phone conversation and an awkward start, Ceylan was very open during the interview. As we began talking about more intimate subjects, I asked her about her early relationships and sexual experiences. She brought up the subject of virginity before I had even asked:

I had my first boyfriend when I was 15, we started fooling around, but we did not have intercourse for a while. But because we used to spend so much time in bed, the intercourse came along very normally and naturally (*olağan ve doğa*) to me. I mean, I’m thinking about what I was thinking about virginity . . . I never felt guilty towards my family or society because of it [with sarcasm]. So I guess I never saw losing my virginity as a taboo. Or even if I did, it disappeared very quickly. I can’t even use the phrase, I ‘lost my virginity’ (*bekaretim gitti, kayboldu diyemeyeceğim*). I just felt like I handled a problem. Because the more you wait, the more it feels like a problem, you know, ‘when it is going to happen, who is it going to be.’ I mean it wasn’t the sex of my dreams. In fact, it was a complete disappointment. But I didn’t feel bad at all.

Both Nesrin and Ceylan insisted that they did not feel guilt with regard to their family because they had sex. They both acknowledged the significance of existing norms and their parents’ expectation of them to behave within these norms, yet they seemed to perceive themselves outside of these norms. The discourse of sex being “normal” and

“natural” does not suggest resistance or rebellious behavior. Women almost talk about sex as something they discovered or figured it out by themselves, and something that the previous generations unnaturally try to suppress or control.

Women’s stories of their early sexual experiences might give an idea about how they came to believe that they experienced their sexuality naturally and freely, and how the discourse of ‘naturalness of sex’ has come to be the dominant theme in women’s narratives. Aylin (29, single, event planner) and I met late in college through our common friends Nazli and Deniz. Although she and I have never been close friends, for a while we socialized together in the same circle of college friends. She is an energetic and athletic woman who enjoys Istanbul’s nightlife. Her broad shoulders and strong, muscled body shows that she was a competitive volleyball player from a young age. When I began my fieldwork, I called her and she said she would gladly participate in my research, yet her busy schedule made it a bit tricky to set up a time for our interview. During the day she worked on building her business as a wedding photographer and most evenings and weekends she was busy tutoring high school students.

Both Deniz and Nazli, during their respective interviews, told me that Aylin loved to talk about sex, and in fact, with her initiation, their group of friends began to talk about sex explicitly. During the interview, when I asked if she could tell me about her first sexual experience, I was curious to see how she would talk about it. As I suspected Aylin was pretty explicit in her descriptions, and it was clear that she was enjoying what she was talking about.

Esin: Can you tell me about your first sexual experience? What do you remember?

Aylin: Of course, I remember very clearly because I kept journals. When I was 12. I used to like this boy. His name was Ahmet. He was a basketball player. I was in love with him for three years, platonically; I filled my journals with writings about him. [She laughs, making fun of her teenage self.] Then finally when I was 14 and a half, he asked me out and I accepted.

Esin: How old was he?

Aylin: I was 14 and a half; he was 15 and a half. I accepted, but I didn't let him hold my hand; I didn't let him kiss me. Because Ahmet was acting like a macho guy, I knew he was sleeping with other girls. And I was acting like a symbol of morality [she rolled her eyes, making fun of herself then]. He asked me when we would kiss, I said in three years, and I wasn't joking, I meant it. He, then, of course, dumped me in two weeks (*iki haftada sepetledi beni zaten.*). [She laughs.]

Esin: And then?

Aylin: And in those days, another boy, Selim was already my friend. When I was 16, Selim and I started dating. We kissed and all that. I'd never thought I would sleep with him. I'd never thought I would have sex before marriage. I mean I wasn't thinking anything like that. When we first started making out that summer, we both kept our bathing suits on. Then one day he began doing other things, you know . . . he was using his fingers, then without me realizing, he went inside me a little. Then I cried and cried (*ağladım zırladım*). So we stopped making out for a couple of weeks. I was thinking that this was something that I shouldn't do, yet

strangely I wanted to and I was curious too. Then we started making out again. At first, because I didn't like my breasts, I wasn't taking my top off. This lasted about six or seven months. But we were having sex like crazy, everywhere, in the bathroom, in my room when my mother was inside the house, in the basement of our building. I mean we were acting crazy (*delirdik yani*). We were seventeen, and we were acting out our fantasies with costumes and all. We were doing all sorts of crazy, nonsensical things. I swear, once I slept with Selim on the overnight bus from Istanbul to the south, while my mother and her friend were sitting in front of us. I mean we were out of control, we didn't know what to do with that energy. I remember, for example, Ceylan was in one bed with her boyfriend, I was on the other with my boyfriend; we weren't really having sex, but kissing for hours, ridiculous things like that (*saçma sapan şeyler*). When her [older] brother was 15 and his girlfriend was 13, they were doing things like trying to kiss non-stop during an entire song . . . we had phases like this . . . how absurd! I don't do things like that anymore [laughs].

I have provided the entirety of this long quote with the purpose of sharing her detailed narrative and reenactment of her almost-teenaged excitement during her delivery. I was really fascinated by the comfortable way she talked about her sex life, and how many details she remembered. She represented herself, first, as naïve and moralistic towards sex, then timid but experimenting, then later daring and adventurous, and finally settled and matured. Her transition, at least in the way that she remembered and portrayed it, does not include a third-party influence; after the fading of her young, moralistic self, she describes only herself and her boyfriend. At the end, she brings her best friend, her

brother and his girlfriend into her story; in her narrative they are there to support her experience and transition, as they went through similar paths as Aylin Her sexual experience in this story appears as it was lived: as part of her coming of age, developing and progressing with more experience, and being shared with peers.

Selin (33, artist, married with no children)

I met Selin during my fieldwork through a common friend. She is a lively and talkative woman and a heavy smoker. As I was shaking off the snow from my boots, Selin opened the door of her art studio on the ground floor. A nice surprise was waiting: an old-fashioned cast iron stove was sitting near the entrance, burning full force with a teapot steaming on top. I had not seen a working iron stove since I was a child at my grandmother's house in a small town. Her building used to be an inn and her studio was the rest area for the horses and therefore not connected to the main building's heating system. She said, "Because of this stove, the frequency of friends' visiting has actually increased." We made ourselves comfortable around the stove and enjoyed the hot tea. After we talked about her work and relationships, I felt she was comfortable enough with me to talk about more intimate issues.

Esin: Do you mind talking about your first sexual experience?

Selin: In those days this was an extraordinary thing. I don't think today's kids experience it like we did. This was such taboo then. I was 17. For a while there was this boy from the same neighborhood. We were flirting . . . Kumburgaz was a popular summer town in those days. I had a friend whose family rented a house there for the summer (*yazlık*) and I was going to stay with them for a week. And,

of course, we had to take advantage of that week, because when we were there, we were allowed to stay out late. And one night we decided . . . no . . . actually we didn't decide; we were on the beach, it was very late. Maybe it wasn't that late but I thought it was. Not sure now. But it was dark and we were far away from where people were. It was going to happen (*olucaktı*) and I don't know why, but he changed his mind. I think he got scared. I remember being very sad and surprised that it didn't happen (*olmadı*). Later, in Istanbul, it happened (*oldu*). We were at a friend's apartment when her parents weren't at home. Of course, I was very nervous and excited, because I was thinking I was going to experience something extraordinary, you know . . . It wasn't like anything I dreamed of. I didn't feel anything. I mean, it was weird; I didn't understand what really happened. Then we tried again, that one was little better. Then it got better each time. [She laughs, half-embarrassed and half-nervous.]

Selin was not as comfortable and explicit as Aylin was in her narrative. She actually never used the word "sex" but rather referred to it indirectly, saying, "*it* happened" or "*it* did not happen," which is a common way of referring to sex among friends. Another significance of this type of phrasing is that it does not require the speaker to use the first-person subject in a sentence, as in "*I* had sex." On the other hand, her detailed memories of the intricate planning for an opportunity to be alone with her boyfriend, her emotional state before and after her first time having sex, and the gradual improvement of her experience is quite similar to that of Aylin. Selin, too, did not talk about third-party interference or influence in shaping her experience, instead, her friends, her peers, also emerged as source of support and facilitators of her sexual experience.

Women's accounts of their early sexual experiences suggest most members of Generation 1980 were practically 'left alone' during their teenage years when it came to sexuality. As I mentioned above, none of my informants had a formal talk about sex with their parents. A few said, after some early, clumsy attempts, their mothers did not pick up the topic again. Even Ayşe's mother (above), after her strong negative reaction to Ayşe's first boyfriend, seemed to avoid the topic altogether.

My informants' guilt and shame-free narratives about their early experiences indicate that they did not experience a significant or lasting dilemma neither before nor after their first sexual encounters. Between the public "explosion of sexuality" and parents' inability to adjust their approach in the face of youth's changing attitude towards sexuality, and within the exclusivity of their relationships with their boyfriends, I argue, premarital sexuality has been accepted among Generation 1980. The contrast between the exaggerated moral narratives in the public space and the silence at home regarding sexuality have created a space for Generation 1980 to be able to ignore both sides and to experiment on their own within the intimacy of their romantic relationships. In this context, based on the women's accounts, I argue, Generation 1980 experienced their sexuality—unexpectedly—in a rather less restricted fashion outside the cultural norms. As a result of these almost-experimental initiations into sexuality, I argue, women perceive sex as "natural" and "normal," and believe that they experienced their sexuality "freely" and did not feel guilty towards their families or the society.

Girlfriends: Secrecy and Sharing

Although women told me that they experienced their sexuality freely with their boyfriends and did not feel guilty or ashamed, they also remembered that they hesitated to share their sexual experience with their friends and sometimes even were afraid they were going to find out. This suggests that even though women individually believed that they were not doing anything wrong, they were not sure, at least initially, if their peers thought the same way. When I asked Selin what she remembers thinking around the time she had sex for the first time, I was expecting that she was going to, perhaps, reveal some of her inner dilemmas about it. However, she gave me a completely different story:

In those days, when you had sex with your boyfriend, you had to hide it from your other male friends. But there was the danger that your boyfriend could tell his friends, plus there was the close-knit neighborhood situation. You know, friendships in the neighborhood (*mahalle arkadaşlığı*), everybody knows everybody. We used to hang out in front of the apartment buildings, in very large groups, eating sunflower seeds all night. I had permission to stay out until 11 at night or midnight in the summertime. There were big groups like ours in every neighborhood. So, since this boy was in the same group as me, it was a dangerous situation for me if other people heard about us. He could tell his friends. It was a big stress. Of course, I told all the girls about it—they all experienced something similar, but still, at that time, you had to be careful to not get into a fight with the girls, because they could leak it to the other boys. It was very stressful. I don't think it's like that anymore. I don't see it among my [younger] brother's friends.

Both Ceylan and Aylin told me in their separate interviews that they are each other's best friends, and have been so since the sixth grade. They both remembered that there was a period of time when they hid from each other that they were sexually active.

Esin: Did you tell anyone that you were having sex with Selim?

Aylin: I didn't tell anyone for a long time. Then, I first mentioned that I was having sex to my best friend at school, Ceylan, and at the same time she confessed that she was also having sex with her boyfriend. She had sex when she was sixteen, and she too didn't tell anyone. Then I opened up and told all my friends, and found out that everyone had sex pretty much at the same period.

Esin: Do you remember why you didn't talk about this earlier?

Aylin: I think I was thinking they might blame me, or something. I mean in those years, my friends and I were acting a little conservative. But once I told one, then I told everybody.

Ceylan shared memories quite similar to Aylin's:

Esin: Did you tell anyone [that you were having sex]? Friends?

Ceylan: No, at first, nobody. For example, Aylin was my closest friend then. And she was in a steady relationship, but she used to say, "He wants to, but I'm not doing it yet." She and I apparently had a phase of dishonesty about this (*öyle de bir sahtekarlığımız varmış meğer*). Then we spilled everything.

Although women shared their experiences with their friends, as Ceylan and Aylin and Deniz (see above) did, they also had periods of hesitation before they opened up to

others. This suggests that even though they felt that they experienced their sexuality naturally and believed that they were not doing anything wrong, those experiences did not necessarily diminish their anxiety over the taboo of premarital sex. All of them expressed that having sex “in those days” was a big deal, even taboo. However, after they shared their experiences, they found out that “everybody” had similar experiences. Similarly, in Selin’s case, although she said she had to be strategic about hiding her sexual experience from male friends, she said, “Of course I told all the girls about it; they all experienced something similar.”

Women’s narratives of friends talking about their boyfriends, discovering their bodies and sexuality, comparing experiences, and giving each other advice appears to be a fundamental and intimate source of power for them. It seems that women received the confirmation they needed to not feel guilty or shameful, and never really internalized the norms about virginity and other norms regarding social conduct with men. As I argue above, both the moralistic public discourse on sexuality, and their parents’ approach to youth’s dating seemed to be too out of touch and unrealistic for women of Generation 1980 to take it seriously. They have already been socialized to believe that they are “like boys,” and that, with education, they could do anything they wanted. With the realization that “everybody” around them had developed similar sensibilities and had similar experiences regarding discovering their sexuality, women of Generation 1980 grew up perceiving themselves outside the conservative sexual morality that was dominant in the public sphere.

Dating Culture: Boyfriends and Coupledom

Women insisted on the naturalness of their sexual experience, but to what extent, and under what conditions and cost did women experience their sexuality outside the existing norms that define proper sexuality as within marriage? Significantly, all of my informants' first sexual experiences were with their relatively long-term boyfriends at the time. Although women told me that losing their virginity was not something they cared or worried about, they cared about having this first-time experience with the person with whom they were in a relationship. They all said that they "really liked" their boyfriends and they "felt ready." Aylin said, "For example, I had some friends who were telling me that they had this attitude, you know, "Let's get rid of this virginity." It didn't matter with whom . . . let's just get over with it. It wasn't like that for me. I really liked Selim." Similarly, when I asked Nesrin to tell me more about what she meant by "feeling ready" to have sex, she said, "When you love somebody, you care about him, feel very close to him. You want to smell his scent, touch his skin, and when that moment comes, everything flows smoothly, you know you're ready, and you don't feel any discomfort" (*herhangi bir rahatsızlık duymuyorsun*). Women's accounts suggest that "liking" their boyfriends helped them justify their decision to have sex and also define sex as an indication of their emotional commitment to their boyfriends, not as an immoral act.

Another related significant pattern is that all of my informants reported that their early relationships were relatively long-term relationships. Selin said, "We tried to keep the relationship for a long time. It was an important thing to announce to other friends, say, "We are entering our seventh month" (emphasizing the word "seven" in imitation of a teenage girl, and making fun of the idea of counting the months). And she added, "I

don't think the younger generation now lives their sexuality the way we did. Boyfriends and girlfriends are changing so quickly now. I know from my younger brother's friends. It wasn't like that for us."

The very first relationship of many of the women I interviewed lasted over two years, but four- and five-year relationships were quite common as well. Many had relationships that started in high school and carried on into college. One of the main reasons for these long-lasting relationships, according to my informants, was the peer pressure they felt from their close groups of friends at school or in their neighborhoods. For example, Berrin (31, married, expecting her first child) told me she stayed in her first relationship because she did not think that it was a good idea to break up with him while they were still in the same high school:

Since an early age, I had long-lasting relationships. That's why my relationship with Devrim [her first boyfriend] was like growing up together. When I look back now, we were children. You know, between the ages 15 and 20. We were very good friends but he was very possessive, not in a macho way, but he wanted me to do everything with him. He did not understand that we could have separate lives. There were always problems between us. For that age, we used to argue a lot, fight a lot. But when I was in high school, I was thinking that I could not break up with him and date somebody else. That would not have made me look good. So I stayed with him.

Another informant, Ezgi (33, married, no children) told me that all of her earlier relationships were long-term, all of which she assumed would lead to marriage:

My relationship with Ahmet [her first boyfriend in high school, through sophomore year in college] should have been a lot shorter. I should have said, “That’s it! This is not working for me.” But noooo [slow and dragging], in our society, we have this way of quickly being very possessive (*otomatik sahiplenme*) towards each other, acting like a husband and a wife (*karı koca olayına dönüşme*). It was like that for me, otherwise, I thought at the time, it wouldn’t be morally acceptable (*ahlaki olarak kabul edilemez diye*). I had to make sure that my relationship was a solid one with a future . . . in the name of protecting myself (*kendimi koruma altına alma adına*) . . . you know there is no such thing, like, “Now you are with somebody, and then break up and go ahead date somebody else.” Living like that was risky . . . I remember very well, my sister [three years older] had the same worries. She could not get a divorce for a long time. We tried to keep the relationships going, and I think that’s why they were a bit forced, not so natural.

The story of Selin’s first ‘break up’ shows how potentially vulnerable women were in these relationships:

So I broke up with my first boyfriend, for somebody else. He got so mad that he came to my house when I was at school and told my mother that we slept together and all that. I came home from school; my mother was crying . . . She dragged me to the kitchen and told me what he told her . . . and asked if it was true. I remember thinking, “Ok, should I admit it now that it is out, or deny it because, you know, I am still living with my parents?” I decided that my life would be

really difficult if they knew. So I denied it. I told my mother that he got angry because I dumped him. And my mother did not insist at all; she immediately dropped the subject.

I argue that Generation 1980 created a dating culture in which premarital sex was accepted as normal, but the conservative cultural form of monogamy and the expectation of ever-lasting relationships remained dominant. Women, particularly from their teenage years, remembered feeling an obligation to keeping their relationships lengthy, and worrying that breaking up might hurt their reputation. Although some women told me that since college they had had one-night stands, suggesting the separation of ‘sex’ from ‘love,’ the majority of women experienced their sexuality in marriage-like, long-term relationships, which, in the long run, led to the perpetuation of a conservative morality that defines legitimate female sexuality as within marriage.

Women’s narratives of their early dating and sexual experiences indicate that they found a space to create a discourse on sexuality outside the mainstream conservative one, and be able experience their sexuality apart from adult guidance. However, in terms of the relationships between a young woman and young man, the overarching model seemed to remain quite conservative. I argue that Generation 1980 created a dating culture in which premarital sex was accepted as normal and natural, but kept the conservative cultural form of monogamy. Coming of age in their particular context, Generation 1980 is the first generation, I argue, to have the opportunity to push the limits of conservative sexual morality. However, experiencing their early sexuality mainly within the exclusivity of long-term relationships, has not led to the sexual liberation that my informant Arzu declared at the opening of this chapter.

Chapter 5

Gendered Experiences at Work

My interviews and informal conversations with my informants and my observations of their daily lives indicate that contemporary educated Turkish women perceived that pursuing careers was an expected course of their lives, not an out-of-ordinary experience. During my fieldwork all my informants had full-time jobs and had been employed since at least their graduation from college. They worked in a range of sectors, including finance, media, education, arts, and law, and held a variety of positions such as CEOs, department director, customer representative, dance instructor, and independent business owner. In the interviews, my informants proudly talked about how much they had accomplished in terms of advancing in their professions and having proved themselves as successful professional women. They emphasized that they still worked long hours and strived to produce good work, and they considered themselves ambitious and perfectionist.

During the interviews, they insisted that there was not any difference between men and women at work, reporting that they had never experienced any gender-based discrimination, and reacting strongly to the possibility of the existence of gender inequality at work. In this chapter, I explore the reasons for these women's strong reaction against recognizing, and even considering, the possibility of gender discrimination at work. Their secular, Kemalist, middle-class upbringing; their achievements of financial independence and professional titles; and the empowerment they feel from being recognized within their careers, together clearly point to a major breakthrough for Turkish women's status in both public and private spheres. However, I

argue that even though women highly value the abstract notion of ‘gender equality,’ the primary motivational force, as found in their narratives about their dedication to a professional career, is their desire to never be bound by “the dependent life” that their mothers had. Since women perceive themselves to have achieved this goal, they are not reacting to larger and subtle gender inequalities they face at work.

In order to contextualize the experiences of Turkish women at work and in the public sphere in general, comparing them to some of the recent research on young women in other more traditional societies is helpful. Contemporary research on the changing social and intimate lives of youth, particularly young women, reveals an ongoing tension between the younger generation’s increasing experience of social freedom and mobility, and adults’ social anxiety over so-called acculturation and degeneration, and the loss of traditional values. These studies examine the tension created by these competing discourses of traditional expectations and modern promises, as it forces the individual to choose between realities. Certainly, in comparing Turkish women’s experiences with those of women in other Middle Eastern societies, the longer history of gender equality and women’s equal rights in Turkey should be taken into account. My research shows that my informants, as a cohort of Generation 1980, and in contrast to their counterparts elsewhere, have always felt entitled to equal participation in public space.

Young Women in Public Space

Over the last two decades, anthropological studies focusing on youth have inquired into “how young people around the world produce and negotiate cultural forms”

(Bucholtz, 2002, p. 526), especially in the process of rapid cultural change and globalization in non-Western contexts (e.g., Burbank, 1988; Condon, 1999; Liechty, 1995; Markowitz, 2000). An emerging body of work examines young urban women's changing lives in the Middle East and Islamic societies as the world becomes increasingly interconnecting (Davis, 1995; De Koning, 2006; Fuglesang, 1994; Moruzzi & Sadeghi, 2006; Newcomb 2006, 2010; Wynn, 1997).

These works show that young women, especially those who come mostly from middle-class and urban backgrounds, have begun to push the boundaries of expected proper behavior for women, and to seek ways to gain more social freedom and mobility in urban public space. Women increasingly challenge existing norms regarding gender relations and sexuality, and push the boundaries of expected proper behavior and gender roles with their daily choices and actions. For example, Wynn's (1997) research explores a new shopping mall in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, that has become a popular hangout space for young men and women despite the patrolling of religious authorities on the lookout for inappropriate behavior. Wynn (1997) states that, "public space has long been an arena for asserting and challenging hegemonic gender, generational and moral hierarchies" (p. 30). Such opportunities are even more significant for women as they have less freedom of movement in and out of public space. Wynn writes, "Several young women with whom I spoke had met boyfriends and even fiancés in public places. They saw this as one way to find a partner outside of family-and friend-based social networks" (p. 31). In Iran, Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006) report that "daughters of Khomeini . . . have famously discarded the black chador in favor of ever more snug-fitting manteaux and ever colorful

headscarves. Along with the looser adherence to veiling (*bad hejab*) has come a set of looser attitudes toward social and sexual freedoms” (p. 23).

On the other hand, the studies also reveal that these young women often find themselves in difficult positions that require them to take risks—more than their male counterparts—when they engage in behaviors that are not the norm. Some of Wynn’s (1997) female informants in Jiddah express that meeting boyfriends in public space is “too risky” as they lose the protection of the family and their kinship network that is usually there in the process of choosing a spouse (p. 31). Similarly Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006) write, “Young women find themselves caught between the conventions of feminine sexual virtue and the youth discourse of sexual freedom, which nonetheless includes a strong element of the sexual double standard” (p. 26).

During interviews, my informants, too, often complained about the verbal and even physical abuse on the streets towards women, remembering it especially from when they were younger. For example, Leyla said, “When we were teenagers, we were very frustrated about what to wear, I mean there was a lot of verbal and physical abuse on the streets, even at Bağdat Avenue³⁷ I remember once I went out, I was wearing a mini-skirt, I was harassed so much (*o kadar tacize uğradım ki*), I came back home crying. It was very upsetting.” Most women also shared their experiences of verbal and physical harassment (being touched, grabbed) on crowded streets, especially in public transportation, and being stalked when they were teenagers.³⁸ However, in these women’s

³⁷ A popular avenue and shopping district stretching through a few middle and upper-middle-class neighborhoods in the Asian part of the city, where youth stroll, shop, and hang out in the few cafés and fast food restaurants that slowly began appearing in the late 1980s.

³⁸ This problem became one of the top issues on the feminist organizations’ agenda in the late 1980s and 1990s, taking the form of the “purple needle” campaign, in which needles with a purple ribbon were distributed to women as a “weapon” to protect them against assault by men. The campaign was very successful in attracting the media’s attention to this problem.

narratives I have not detected the same high level of anxiety about protecting their reputation as ‘proper girls,’ as reportedly experienced by their counterparts in other societies in the Middle East. In my informants’ accounts, such incidents appeared as “annoying” incidents, yet did not stop them from going out into the streets. Leyla confidently added to her above recollection, “Today I go out, and come back in the middle of the night, and I am very comfortable and feel safe.”

Focusing on how women navigate among competing ideologies of gender in Fez, Morocco, Newcomb (2006) argues that women “creat[e] a bricolage among available rules for conduct . . . improvising where necessary” (p. 305). Women’s everyday strategies for negotiating their presence in public space show that these women (age ranging from 20 to 50), who are from the lower-middle and middle classes, re-incorporate local concepts such as “shame,” “hospitality,” and “kinship” in ways that make acceptable and respectable their presence in public spaces, such as streets, cafes, exercise clubs, and cyber space. In the context of a larger metropolis, De Koning’s research (2006) looks at the ways upper-middle-class, single, working women in Cairo negotiate their participation in mixed-gender public space. She observes that “[t]he presence of women in both professional and social public life has become critical to upper-middle-class lifestyle, yet it is a fragile one, lived out in closed class-homogenous spaces, with the respectability and protection being the sine qua non of their ventures into public space” (2006, p. 230). In this context, with the availability of upscale coffee shops as part of an emerging class-based consumer culture, young Egyptian women report that they enjoy these new places and socialize in a mixed-gender environment without being harassed. Still, De Koning finds that women employ various subtle strategies to protect

their respectability even among their own circles of friends and colleagues. For example, De Koning observes,

Coffee-shop discussions often playfully touch on issues of respectability and virtue, especially in a mixed-gender group. . . . These topics are brought up in the presence of male friends and acquaintances to publicly illustrate concern over respectability, in case men might think that by virtue of being present in the mixed-gender leisure space of a coffee shop, the women might just be a little too *available*” (2006, pp. 231-232) (emphasis in original).

These works suggest that contemporary, urban, and mostly educated women in the Middle East and the Islamic world encounter experiences in public space that present new opportunities as well as risks. They convincingly show cases where women develop various strategies to gain legitimate access to public space and to increase their social mobility. Women transfer skills that are culturally valued to other parts of their lives to make a legitimate and culturally accepted change. These contemporary experiences of women from relatively traditional and sex-segregated Muslim societies suggest that these women seem to simultaneously maintain two cultural frameworks and models of self in mind (the traditional/the modern and the private/the public) and adjust their bodies, mannerisms, and language to negotiate their identities depending on the expectations of any given frame. This process of maintaining two mental frameworks, and going back and forth between them, leads to the construction of multiple, culture-specific, social and individual strategies and ways of negotiation (Ewing, 1997; 2002).

As young, educated, middle-class women, my informants, too, often relied on culturally valued images of being a “good daughter” or “successful student” to negotiate their presence on the streets. However, even though the emergence of new youth-friendly locales in Istanbul’s middle-class neighborhoods in the late 1980s facilitated young women’s access to safer public space, women’s narratives do not indicate an absolute separation between those upscale locales they could visit and feel accepted, and those they could not because the spaces were too traditional or conservative. For example, when I asked Selin (32, artists, married) where she liked to go in Istanbul, she did not mention any of the commonly known middle-class districts, instead citing historical districts where a range of local people work and tourists visit every day. She made it clear to me that these were neighborhoods she has frequented regularly since her college years:

I like the *Galata* area. I visit *Sultan Ahmet*, and *Kapalı Çarşı* (Grand Bazaar) very often to look for knick-knacks and discover things. I like the garden of the *Arkeoloji* [Archeology Museum]. I used to do my homework there when I was in college. I feel very loyal to that place. I go often. The other day I had to wait for about an hour for an order, so I walked towards *Çemberlitaş*—it was beautiful. There is a coffeehouse there called *Ali Paşa Medresesi* (Ali Pasha Madrasa). We used to go there a lot when were in college. They had only a few hookahs in those days. Now every table has one. It gets pretty smoky. I like Kadiköy a lot. But I like Istanbul very much in general.

Selin's account here clearly indicates that she did not feel restricted to the consumption-oriented new middle-class spaces when she was younger, and she still feels that she could visit anywhere in the city when she wants to.

When my informants talked about growing up in the 1980s in Istanbul and their college years in the 1990s, they often remembered those times in terms of the “freedom” that they experienced in a “changing society.” They perceived themselves as active participants in this larger social change. Consider, for example, this excerpt from my interview with Arzu, in which she talks about her first impressions of a nightclub she visited in Istanbul:

One night we went to *Twenty* [a popular nightclub in the early 1990s]. It was packed inside. I noticed Mehmet Barlas [a well-known journalist who also has a television news show] hanging out by the bar. Young boys were dancing half-naked on the stage . . . and we were like . . . in shock. We could not believe all this was happening before our eyes. We were like “How could this be happening? Where are we? This is life!!!”

Another informant, Seda, explained to me about the early phase of nightlife in Istanbul:

Taksim Night Bar was very also important. It opened up when I was a senior in high school. The beginning of Istanbul's ‘underground’ [in English] nightlife . . . we'd never seen anything like that until then—we hadn't traveled outside Turkey yet. Decorated with all-American cars like ‘57 Chevrolets, with dancers from Amsterdam, transsexual dancers—and we were like what is this? What is this? . . . We felt like kids from a small town who'd never seen a big city (*biz böyle köydem*

indim şehire). We used to leave *Taksim Night* and hop over to *Twenty*; there were a lot of gays and transsexuals there as well. A complete mix of people. In those days, this was huge . . . it wasn't like today [now it is more common to see such a mixture of people]. We breathed a very different air there.

My informants, unlike their counterparts in the studies mentioned above, did not report any anxiety regarding damaging their 'respectability' by being on the streets or being seen in mixed-gender groups or with a boyfriend. In contrast, they seemed to embrace their new freedoms and without reservation. Neither did I detect in women's narratives a process of going back and forth between two worldviews.

Managing Women's Body at Work

Turkish women's participation in public space has a longer history than most Middle Eastern and majority-Islamic societies. Referring to Turkey's modernization project and the Kemalist reforms of the early 1930s, Yeşim Arat states that:

[C]ompared to their counterparts in other developing countries, especially those in the Muslim world, Turkish women have enjoyed considerable civil and political rights and been more visible in the public domain. . . . Consequently, many women in Turkey gained access to education, public office, and employment opportunities comparable to those in industrial countries, although not equally enjoyed by the whole female population (1994, pp. 57-58).

This does not mean that Turkish women's initiation into the public sphere in the 1930s was without dilemmas and complications. During the early Republican era, women were

asked by the Republican elite to participate in public life as an indication of the country's westernization. However, as Durakbaşa (1998) details, "the women question" was dealt within an eclectic formula, combining a modernizing ideology with an extremely conservative, puritan morality about sex. The sudden political invitation to public space left women unprotected against the long-standing cultural norms that associate women in public space with being "loose" or "available." Durakbaşa (1998) argues that:

[t]he notion of female modesty—that is, the traditional values of virginity before marriage, fidelity of the wife, and a particular public comportment and dress—was carried over with an heavier emotional load to the new generations of Kemalist women and became the basic theme of the "new morality" for the Kemalist elite (p. 148).

In response, she argues, Kemalist women adopted a new form of "femininity" and acquired the skills to "veil" their sexuality in their relationships within the male world of public affairs (p. 149).

This new morality, Kandiyoti (1997) argues, "created a split between the public and the domestic personas of women professionals," impelling modern Kemalist women to "construct a new set of signals and codes that would enable [them] to function in the public realm without being importuned or molested" (p. 126, emphasis added). Similar to Durakbasa's argument, Kandiyoti (1997) posits "the very fact that women were no longer secluded or veiled might, paradoxically, have mandated new forms of puritanism that could be mobilized as symbolic shields in a society where femininity was incompatible with a public presence" (p. 126). One of the tactics comprising these "new management

skills,” for example, was wearing outfits deemphasizing femininity and embodying a slightly masculinized identity, “[that] does not have to be “butch or unfeminine but simply unremittingly chaste” (Kandiyoti 1997, p. 127).³⁹ Durakbaşa (1998) argues that “the Kemalist women who became active in the public domain, which typically meant [working] within a predominantly male bureaucratic structure, had to present a ‘suitable’ body image, a new femininity that was somewhat connected to the image of a *male* body” (pp. 147-148).

During my fieldwork I observed many women going to work in the morning on public transportation and on the streets, and I visited most of my informants at work. As a whole, women dress in accordance with the culture of their profession. Women who work for corporations usually wear pantsuits or skirts and blazers, and high heels. None wear clothes that revealed too much of their skin, or dress in a suggestive or a provocative way, but they still follow current fashions. Women do not take overt measures to suppress their femininity; they use cosmetics and wear accessories emphasizing their femininity. I certainly did not observe women trying to shape their body presentation into that of a “male body.”

When I asked if she had observed or experienced any gender-based inequality between men and women at work, Dilek (32, married, one child), a CEO at a multi-national corporation, answered my question by emphasizing the advantages of being a woman:

No. On the contrary, because if women use their intelligence, and take care of how they look, I mean this is true for men as well, but it’s more applicable to

³⁹ See also Faller and Faller (1976) for a similar argument on professional women’s dress code and bodily behavior at work and in public space in a small town in Turkey.

women—because even an ugly (*çirkin*) woman could increase her attractiveness, with make up and nice clothes—And if she uses this well, she can influence the person. So I think a woman can create her advantages. Taking care of how you look is very important. For example, I used to go to the hair salon in the mornings to get my hair done before work, three or four times a week. I was feeling a lot better about myself. And really, when you look good, you feel more confident. When you go to work without paying attention to what you wear, you feel down. That's why looking after yourself and choosing nice clothes are women's advantages, because, yes, a man could wear a nice shirt and a tie, but he can't put lipstick on. Could I explain it? Your hair color, your outfit, and your accessories, all of them are your advantage, [helping you] to feel good and influence the people around you.

Dilek's account suggests that women of Generation 1980, unlike the women of previous generations, are not concerned about losing their respectability, in fact, she instead insisted that sexuality and sex appeal are part of women's work identity. It is of course apparent that Dilek here speaks within the discourse that equates woman's confidence with her 'good' looks, which are put together with products she would purchase and apply on her body. The fact that Dilek perceives women's influence at work through their appearance is not surprising. Generation 1980 came of age during the emergence and rapid growth of a consumption society, in which a woman's beauty and sexuality became both capital and product. These women discovered—and contributed to the making of—a new, urban, popular culture in Istanbul in the 1990s, which was marked by malls, brand-name stores, billboards, television advertisements, and women's magazines. These all

promoted products packaged with the promise that being the most attractive and beautiful woman is the key to success both in professional and private life. Not unlike its Western counterpart, consumerism in Turkey has objectified women's bodies through the male gaze as a way to sell products tied to dreams of success, confidence, and intelligence. Growing up in this context, women of Generation 1980 have learned, too, to reproduce themselves as objects of the male gaze.

There is so little discourse around gender inequality at work that my inquiries about it often either misunderstood or not even noticed. For example, when I asked if there are differences between men and women at work, Nesrin (32, married, no children), who worked for several years as the head of the human resources department at a financial institution, answered my question with the assumption that I was implying the role of sexuality or sexual attraction at work:

No, not at all—on the contrary, I think that sexuality is very important even in the work context, even though we pretend that it doesn't exist. It influences everything, including work relations. Sometimes it's even better being a woman when you work with male executives. I even like it sometimes . . . I mean when I was a junior assistant in the HR [used the English letters, an abbreviation for “human resources”] department, I was giving presentations in front of all-male audiences—I mean, you feel like you are not only someone who makes their life easier [as an assistant] but also you are something that they admire, I feel that. I mean it's not entirely sexual but it is a little—in a way it's unavoidable, you are someone nice to look at from the opposite sex.

While making these comments, Nesrin seemed partly shy and embarrassed, but mostly confident and proud of herself for being explicitly comfortable with her body and sexuality in the presence of male colleagues. Her account suggests that women of Generation 1980, unlike the women of previous generations, do not try to “veil” their sexuality due to fear of losing their respectability. In fact some she seems to think that sexuality and sex appeal are a relevant part of work identity. Her narrative did not suggest any discomfort about being “looked at” by her male co-workers. Demet (lawyer, married, had no children) made a similar comment about the advantages of being a female lawyer at the courthouse:

There is not much difference between men and women in law. For example, there is no difference in the courthouse when you are interacting with the judges or the staff. I can say we are equals there. In fact, women sometimes take advantage of their sex appeal a little. [She laughs.]

Demet’s statement about women taking advantage of their sex appeal reminded me about a friend of mine, also a lawyer, who once told me that she didn’t mind showing a little cleavage at the courthouse so that her paperwork would be processed faster. My friend’s comment, and the words of Demet, Dilek and Nesrin, all point to their consciousness of the role of sexuality and women’s sexual power over men at work. In the interview narratives, as long as men “admire” women from a distance and without making overt comments, women seemed to perceive their objectification not as degrading or a loss of respectability, but as “inevitable” or even as an “advantage” for women.

Durakbaşa (1998) argues that, in the Kemalist era of modernization, presenting a “male body” was necessary in order for women to be able to work in predominantly male structures. While this led to the “transgression and transcendence of traditional feminine roles in certain instances, it still meant subjection to the almost ‘formal’ control of their bodies by men in other instances” (Durakbaşa 1998, pp. 147-148). Today, while women of Generation 1980 experience a sense of empowerment by claiming ownership over their sexuality, unlike older generations of women who had to suppress it, they ultimately still reproduce themselves through the male gaze.

Early Work Experience

Women’s confidence in their sexuality, and their construction of themselves as objects of the male gaze—without perceiving it as a form of subjugation—partly stem from their early work experiences. As women of Generation 1980 entered young adulthood, especially in their college years in the 1990s, they experienced something that older Turkish women have not typically had not had the opportunity to: they began working. For middle-class youth, and particularly for young women, having a job while being enrolled in school is a relatively recent phenomenon in Turkey. Jobs that are popular with and typically held by students in Western countries such as waiting tables, and working at coffee shops, music stores, and bookstores are, in Turkey, mainly full-time and salaried jobs, held by adult men. Furthermore, since waiting tables and retail sales (even in high-end stores) are seen as unskilled, working-class jobs, they are not deemed suitable for middle-class, educated women.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Durakbaşa and Cindoğlu (2002) for their research on the recent feminization and stigmatization of occupations such as shop assistants and salespersons in retail chains and high-end clothing stores. The

However, as the Turkish service sector boomed in the 1990s, particularly in urban centers (Keyder, 1999), emerging businesses—especially those with international clientele, such as five-star hotels, tourism agencies, art festivals and conference organizers, sports organizations, advertising and media firms, and film and TV production companies—began to hire educated part-timers who spoke foreign languages, and who were looking for experience in these new areas of work. These new part-time, temporary, quasi-international types of jobs are considered prestigious, often lucrative, and, most importantly, legitimate paths to building a resume and experience.

As I discuss briefly in Chapter Three, for my informants, having a job was not just about earning income but a way to gain social freedom, and life experience in general. Seda (35, small business owner, divorced, no children), recounted how she used her job as a cover, to prevent her family from knowing that she was frequenting nightclubs:

In college, I was working as a store-display decorator, and I used to frequently fly to other cities . . . that job was a godsend for me. I had the perfect excuse. My mother used to ask, “Are you coming home tonight?” And I’d say, “I can’t, we are flying to *Antalya* [for work] [a major city on the Mediterranean coast].” But really, I was hanging out at *Kemancı*. (*Halbuki ben Halbuki ben Kemancılarda sürtüyorum*.) [A popular rock bar in Istanbul]. My mother used say, “They’re making you work so hard, they pay you so little.” [She laughs.] Yeah, it was pretty funny. In those days, I used to go to my classes, then to work until

authors show that although these jobs provide young, high-school-educated women from modest backgrounds opportunities to work, they are discriminated against daily by upper- and middle-class female patrons.

midnight, and then to *Kemanca* until sunrise, then to school again sometimes without sleeping, or I used to manage with couple of hours of sleep three, four days like that in a row. Even then, at the end of the fourth day, I was dying of fatigue, sleep-deprived, but still when I saw my friends getting ready to go out, I didn't want to go home.

When Selin told me about moving out of her parents' apartment, her early work experience emerged as a significant life experience in her story:

Selin: I was 19, the year that I started college. I decided to move out of my parents' home because I had this long commute to college. And I wanted to live freer, by myself.

Esin: How did you finance yourself?

Selin: Back then, casinos were very popular in Turkey.⁴¹ My housemate and I received some training [to work as croupiers]. We were working at nights, and going to school during the day.

[...]

Esin: How was it when you were working at the casino? Did you have any problems?

Selin: You know, when you work nights at such a young age, like I did, men harass you. That was very annoying—you don't know how to reject them, how to say no, you don't know how a conversation [with a male customer] will end. His wife is at the casino gambling, he is at the bar chatting with me, and at the end of the night he says something inappropriate, and you go, "Oh my god, I listened to

⁴¹ Casinos were banned in Turkey in 1998.

him all night, and he just wanted to go to bed with me,” and you hate your life. Those sorts of things of course happened, but eventually you learn how to deal with them. I worked as a “barmaid” [said in English] for awhile. But I had a very close circle of friends, we used to have a lot of fun, we used to see each other a lot.

I argue that these women’s accounts of their early experiences as working women show that they began to enjoy their work and urban life simultaneously, with close friends, and without repressing their sexuality. As a cohort, they enjoyed the freedom that came with being financially independent and living on their own, or at least spending an extensive amount of time away from their childhood home. In their narratives, work and social life were intertwined. In fact, for many of them, living independently and be able to participate in the nightlife were major motivations to begin working. In contrast to the Turkish woman of previous generations, who, as Durakbaşa (1998) argues, “could be a respectable participant of the public sphere only by being assertive and professionally ambitious in her occupational life” (p. 149), for women of Generation 1980, repressing their sexuality and being professionally ambitious have never been a precondition for participation in public space. As the previous chapters have shown, this cohort of women attended co-ed secular schools, discovered their sexuality at an early age, and were raised in family environments that were not segregated by sex. This generational cohort began working because they saw an opportunity to expand their financial and social independence, building on a level of participation in public space they already took for granted.

In their narratives, work appears as part of their social life, shared with people they like and trust—a continuation of their friendships. Women often talked about having a “really tight group” of mixed-gender friends who went to school together, socialized together, and, often, worked together. As both Selin’s and Seda’s accounts suggest, women learned, along with their friends, to “deal with” “annoying” incidents with men. Sharing their experiences, laughing about them, and learning from each other, as they did when they first began dating and having sex, appeared to be the most important source of information and support in women’s lives.

Their narratives of their early work experiences are also full of stories of working hard, working long hours, going to new places, and meeting new people of different ages almost daily. From their mistakes they learned how to deal with unwelcome situations and to juggle multiple responsibilities. They also learned to be assertive and confident in their work relationships. Women are proud of these experiences. By the time they graduated from college, women of Generation 1980 believed that they had all the knowledge they needed to work and live in a modern society. This distinct, early initiation to work, I argue, has profoundly shaped these women’s subjectivity and their sense of self, not only at work but also in how they conduct themselves in urban life.

Suitable Work For Men and Women

Gender inequality and discrimination at work never came up during the interviews unless I posed a direct question. Even when I asked, as I show above, some women responded by explaining the advantages of being a woman at work. When I specifically asked if they ever felt discriminated against, or if they had observed discrimination at work based

on gender, women often were taken aback and began answering in a defensive tone. They insisted that there was no difference between men and women in terms of treatment, income, or advancement at work.

Women usually justified their claim by telling me that “there are a lot of women working” either in their sector or in their firm/office, depending on the informant’s personal experience. Demet said, “There are so many women lawyers, so the courthouse is used to working with women.” Dilek said the banking sector is so full of women that even the bank managers now are women, referring to the fact that bank managers were typically men in the past. She said jokingly, “Remember those days? A bank manager’s office was always at the back corner of the branch where a serious guy (*kelli felli*) sits and you enter by buttoning up your jacket [to show respect]. Those positions are all filled with women now.” Similarly, both Nesrin and Berrin told me that women are the majority of staff in their respective human resources and client relationships departments. In all these narratives, women offer the high number of women workers as evidence of a lack of discrimination based on gender.

In her now-classic article “Why so many?”, Turkish sociologist Öncü (1982) called attention to the high rate of women in the Turkish professional world, especially in the fields of law and medicine,⁴² professions typically dominated by men in Western countries. Öncü (1982) argues that this phenomenon, in the Turkish case, is primarily a function of elite recruitment strategies and class inequalities; it prevents men who belong to more modest backgrounds of society from entering these prestigious professions. However, the unintended consequence of this phenomenon, as suggested by Kandiyoti

⁴² In 1978, 28.5% of the members listed in the Istanbul Bar Association were women; in 1970 the estimated proportion of female physicians on the labor market was 21% (Öncü, 1982).

(1982) is that “[it] has created a momentum of its own and avoided the sex-typing of jobs” (p. 112).

In a changing, newly privatized business culture, women of Generation 1980 were encouraged and expected to pursue careers in line with the transition to the open market and service economy, for example in finance, banking, media, marketing, and public relations, or to become private entrepreneurs. Empowered by a continuing pattern of elite recruitment in the business world, my informants did not report any hesitation to apply for jobs in popular sectors, or for relatively new positions in departments focusing on consumption, communications, and customer and interpersonal relations. Neither were my informants discouraged from entering into these middle-class white-collar professions.

Significantly, while my informants resisted talking about any gender discrimination at work they might have experienced or witnessed, they were quick to share hypothetical scenarios that highlighted the “cultural” gap between professional/urban women and rural or old-fashioned men in conducting business. Demet stated:

The difference between what men and women do at work also has to do with your customer profile. Old-fashioned, small-business-minded men wouldn’t work with a female lawyer, because they want to have a certain relationship with their lawyer outside the professional environment. For example, they want to discuss work at the dinner table while drinking *rakı* [traditional Turkish liquor]. This relationship sometimes could go all the way to arranging an escort for the client (*bu müşteriye karı-kız ayarlamaya kadar gidebilir*). Female lawyers work best

with professional firms whose staff, both men and women, are already used to working with women. Relationships remain more professional.

Similarly, Nesrin spoke about work situations that might require a man, and others that might require a woman:

The main difference might appear in public relations, in cases like, say you need to send somebody to manage an office at Haramidere [a working-class neighborhood at the outskirts of Istanbul] to sell a product, or you need a supervisor in charge of marketing, then, it is thought that it would be difficult for a woman to communicate with the people over there. Instead, a man, a fatherly (*babacan*) figure, or a man who could speak the local, colloquial language, somebody who looks like them is preferred. But again if they need somebody to work, say, on Bagdat Avenue [an upper middle-class area] then they send somebody who looks like the people there. This is not really about gender, but mainly about being able to do the job.

In my interview with Dilek, she talked about the utility of “macho” behavior in certain kinds of sales:

Dilek: Sales managers not the ones who interact face-to-face with the customers [in branches] but the ones who manage the local sales [door to door or on the streets] are mostly men.

Esin: Why is that?

Dilek: It could be because they can run the business in a more macho (*maço*) fashion, because when you sell a product door-to-door, or when you sell credit cards to the people on the street, men could be better in keeping everybody under control.

It is quite striking that these three women, working in three different sectors, made such similar statements and justifications about why some positions are more suitable for men than women. Each used a common cultural stereotype of men (“old fashioned,” “small-business-minded,” “fatherly,” and “macho”) to describe a man that represents the opposite of men they usually work with: modern, urban, comfortable working with women, and open-minded. Both Demet and Dilek associated corporate business with professionalism, and claimed women were more accepted as workers in that context. In their narratives, they positioned working with ‘old-fashioned men’ or with ‘men on the streets’ as the opposite of corporate professionalism. They both assumed that it would difficult for women to work in those contexts, as they could not conduct business in the ‘macho’ or ‘fatherly’ way that men do.

Finally, it is quite telling that Nesrin picked two neighborhoods of Istanbul to make her point: Haramidere and Bagdat Avenue. Both are well-known neighborhoods and cultural icons of what they represent: Haramidere, a working-class, part-industrial, part- shantytown neighborhood, and Bagdat Avenue, not only a wealthy neighborhood but a symbol of conspicuous consumption and luxurious living. Keyder (1999) calls Istanbul’s growth “alternative globalization,” and argues that it led to an “exceedingly uneven” development. He argues that “This unevenness seems to parallel and aliment a cultural conflict, revolving around the definition of locality and identity, between the

globalizers and localizers—somewhat akin to the modern-traditional clash that an earlier literature described” (p. 23). Keyder further suggests “it might be more realistic to think of Istanbul, in terms of its economic transformation and employment structure, as not a “dual city” but a “divided city” (p. 25). These accounts also indicate that women recognize this “division” in Istanbul, yet they perceive it and talk about it in terms of a ‘culture’ or ‘mindset’ that is ‘modern’ or ‘traditional,’ rather than class difference.

In my informants’ narratives, one of the most salient indications of this division appears in talk about gender roles and women’s presence in public place. Paradoxically, women do not see this as gender inequality or sexism that would affect them at work; instead, they see it as one of Turkey’s hard-to-change realities. Gender inequality is perceived as a consequence of traditionalism, the result of lack of modern education. In this sense, women of Generation 1980 share the first generation of Kemalist women’s understanding of the source of gender inequality in Turkey.

While recognizing the persistence of traditionalism, my informants appeared to enjoy their power as urban, educated, middle-class professional women in the context of a long-established class and geographical hierarchy in Turkey. They explained why women could not work in small towns, rural areas, or with men from rough neighborhoods, but they also inferred that they would not want to work in small towns or in working-class neighborhoods. In a scenario that illustrates this hierarchy, Demet’s words nicely demonstrate the existing power relations between classes and geographies in Turkey, which sometimes override gender hierarchy:

Sometimes it is advantageous to be a female lawyer from Istanbul when you have a case in a small city or a town. First of all, they treat women very differently,

very respectfully, like a sister [*bacı muhabbeti*]. And sometimes your presence changes the dynamics—for example once they sent me to a small town, and during the negotiations, I cornered the opposition’s lawyer and things got so heated that he got up, and said “If you weren’t a woman, I would have busted your face right now” (*tekme tokat girmiştım sana*).

Demet’s words show that women cannot regularly work in small towns, because the interactions are not professional, but rather operate within the codes of traditional family/kinship relations where women are respected and protected as long as they accept their limits and not challenge male authority.

On the other hand, these accounts also indicate that women perceive bourgeois business culture as a protector of gender equality at work. For example, later in the interview, Demet said, “In the private sector, there is nothing to stop women if they want to move up, if you are working at a law firm and your clients are corporations. I’m talking about commercial law though. I don’t know how it works in other areas of law.” In fact, private institutions and corporations, especially multinational corporations, are perceived as the opposite of the small local businesses and state-owned companies that are seen as old-fashioned, bureaucratic, and even corrupt in their hiring and promoting processes. Dilek, for example, told me that at the multinational bank where she works, a foreign director who is located in a different county is charged with deciding who will receive all the major promotions. She said, “He doesn’t know who is who, so he can’t promote somebody’s cousin.” Nesrin dismissively responded to my question about whether there is a difference between men’s and women’s salaries: “There is no such

thing in the corporate world. Maybe at the very top level, there could be salary difference between men and women. I don't know, but I heard about it.”

Reproducing Female Stereotypes

When I asked Nesrin and Demet if there was a support system or a camaraderie (*dayanışma*) among women coworkers, and if they connect with each other based on gender, they laughed at my question, suggesting that I was being ridiculous. Demet said:

What camaraderie? (*Ne dayanışması?*) Are you kidding me? But in our office it is different. I help Arzu [a younger female colleague] a lot, but we have known each other a long time, since high school. I've never understood how making things harder for somebody at work would benefit me anyway. But I really experienced that at my first job. I was very new in the business. There was this senior lawyer, a woman. She made my life a living hell. She kept me out of loop. One day, things got pretty intense between us, and she started crying and finally spilled what her problem was with me. When I was working there, I was also taking master's classes. Apparently she wanted to go to the classes too, but they didn't let her. It wasn't my fault; I negotiated my deal to include it. But she took it out on me instead of fighting her battle with the bosses. After this we got along well. But it's really hard working with women; I believe that. Arzu tells me the same thing. She is very appreciative of me for helping her a lot. Why wouldn't I?

Demet does two things with her story: In her narrative, she rises above the senior female lawyer who refused to help her by portraying herself as smarter (she negotiated a good

deal) and as professional (she didn't break down and cry, even though she was the inexperienced one), but she also separates herself from that that kind of behavior by helping her younger female colleague, while still claiming that is harder to work with women.

Nesrin also asserts that working with women is difficult, and in so doing, repeats negative stereotypes about women:

I've also witnessed that female executives can be more capricious and selfish. I don't know if it bothered me more because I am a woman too, but this is for sure: there is no female support at workplaces. I've never seen it. When I look back, though, most of my friends in high school were men. So with women at work, I might not have shared things about my boyfriends or sex, maybe that's why.

Nesrin's description of women as being selfish and capricious draws upon common negative portrayals of women. Nesrin, like Demet, takes pains to separate herself from these women (and those so-called qualities) by telling me that most of her friends at school were men, thereby indirectly associating herself with so-called male qualities. She speculated that she did not connect with other women at work because she did not carry on typical woman-to-woman conversations about men and sex. Dilek's comments invoke further stereotypes: "There are a lot of women in banking, but for our department I try to hire 60% women and 40% men because in places where there are only women, you see hysteria and jealousy, so I believe that a balance is needed."

Admittedly, during these conversations I was sometimes disturbed and disappointed. I wanted to hear from these women that they were aware of the ongoing

masked forms of gender inequality and sexism at work. I wanted to hear stories of resistance against sexism at work, fought alongside their fellow female colleagues. Instead women reproduced existing negative stereotypes of gender, portraying women as jealous, selfish, and superficial, and men as strong, active, team-oriented workers, who were concentrated on getting the job done, rather than, say, gossiping.

Ambition and Satisfaction

I also expected to hear more stories of ambition, of striving to move up the ladder at work, in line with the neoliberal ethos of individual success within which they came of age and attended school. Women repeatedly told me that they worked very hard to get where they were and that they still work hard. They said that they cared about doing their job well and about being good at what they did. However, a frequent theme emerged within these narratives of hard work: most women called themselves ambitious and perfectionist, but insisted that they were not ‘the competitive kind,’ hurting others to get ahead, or being driven by material rewards. Seda, for example, said:

Maybe I don't come across like it but I work a lot. I am a hard worker. I accept that, but I've never been too ambitious. I've never said “I want this and that, do this and that, I need two cars, a house and a yacht” (*yatım katım olsun hiç bir zaman demedim*), but one should be able to live without depending on anybody. I mean my family, thank God, they are doing fine. Yes, they own a few things, but I would never ask them to take care of me. I have that much respect for myself. Don't you think the same way? I mean I won't ask anything from them unless there is an emergency.

Seda connected being a hard worker and being able to live independently. An important motivation for her is be able to live independently from her family, a motivation which makes more sense in the larger context of her past. Seda told me (see Chapter 3) that the reason she began working in the first place was to stop being dependent on the allowance that she was receiving from her father. In the same interview, she also talked about how her mother's financial dependence put her in a weaker position in her marriage. Overall, for Seda who grew up in a financially comfortable yet patriarchal home, her social independence appears to be one of the most important motivations for her financial independence.

Dilek was similarly concerned with portraying her ambition as harmless to others:

We'd never had any serious financial problems when I was growing up, thank God. We were comfortable, but we'd never lived lavishly. Our parents never spoiled us [she has two sisters]. I'd never had dreams of becoming very wealthy. My father has always told me to finish school and learn a profession (*altın bileziğini, yani çok amiyane tabirle, koluna takacaksın*). We really grew up like that. I never spent lavishly. I always worked hard; I was a very studious student. I am a very ambitious person, but mine is an ambition that would not hurt anybody else. I compete with myself. It's about being successful in what I do, proving myself in what I do. . . . My father once said that he would come visit me at work when I had my own office. That was my goal. And now I have had my own office since 2006.

Throughout the interview, Dilek spoke about her father very lovingly and respectfully. A devoted Kemalist and a politician at the local level, Dilek told me, her father valued his daughters' academic and professional success. Dilek grew up in a small city and she said that because her father was a politician, she and her sisters had to be very careful with their behavior at all times and be exemplary students at school. Making her father proud was a quite salient motive in Dilek's youth and it still seems like a significant motivation for her to work hard.

Berrin repeated this pattern of emphasizing her successfulness while distancing herself from excessive ambition:

I am generally well liked at work. The reason for this is that I am an ambitious person but I don't create a stressful work environment. I like what I do. Of course now, I know it so well. There are two important things: one is to know the client and two is to know the staff. I have six people working for me. I need to make them happy as well. And I am successful in this. I am good at human relations and communication. I share what's going on in their private lives as well. Clients trust me. And they see me as someone who is protecting their rights.

Throughout her interview, Berrin presented herself as someone who is a hard worker and in charge, but who is liked and respected by others. Doing her job well and pleasing others at the same time is important for her. Even in her marriage and in her two previous long-term relationships, she said it was always she who had the upper hand, but without being unfair or hurtful. She emphasized that both her ex-boyfriends and her husband were in love with her. In her interview, when she was describing her parents' marriage, she

said that her mother was the dominant character at home and her father was a very mellow guy who left every decision to his wife. However, Berrin said her mother lately complained to her that her husband (Berrin's father) had taken her for granted all these years; she worked too hard and never enjoyed life as a woman whose husband praises her. What I observed in Berrin's narrative of herself, both as a professional and a married woman, is that she represents her self both as a dominant, hard-working woman, like her mother, but also as a woman who is liked and respected both at work and in her domestic life, unlike her mother.

Here I do not mean to assert causal relationships between women's earlier experiences at home in terms of the way they value work, independence, or being liked, but I do see some connections, often brought up by the women themselves. My informants constantly compared their lives to their mothers' and referred to their upbringing to explain their current values and behaviors. These early experiences and memories appeared as a major influence on how women understand themselves today. Although there are differences based on their personal life experiences, I find one main commonality in women's self-understanding: they see themselves more accomplished than their parents, both financially and socially independent, but also part of a team of mixed-gender colleagues (or friends) who respect them. For women, I argue, achieving and maintaining this goal is their major motivation at work, and for working hard. Cognitive anthropologist Claudia Strauss (1992) in "The motivational force of self-understanding" argues that:

Self-understandings are prone to acquire motivational force and they do so in interaction with experience, particularly early experience. . . . The motivational

force that self-understandings acquire depends critically upon the seeming naturalness and rightness that these understandings are granted in the course of socialization. Motivational or “directive force,” D’Andrade comments, “is experienced by the person as needs or obligations to do something” (p. 92).

According to Roy D’Andrade (1984, 1990, 1992) cognitive schemas are not only function as a tool for interpretation individual’s experiences, but also serve as a goal that determines one’s action. In this “goal embedded schema model of motivation” (Strauss, 1992, p. 198), there is a hierarchy among the goals and cultural schemas motivating individuals towards these goals. High-level goals like achievement, love, or marriage are possible through individuals’ accomplishments in their low-level goals such being ‘a good student’ or “a good housewife.”

Strauss (1992) building on D’Andrade’s model, however, argues that “cognitive representations can differ in the kind of motivational force they provide” (1992, p. 197) shows that even though individuals believe in certain values, ideals, and models that are widely shared in society, they tend to be more motivated by models that they observe and learn in their daily lives. As she states, while “high-level cultural schemas” (p. 199) are uttered in conversations, “lower-scale bounded cultural models” (218) are seen as facts of life and hence provide a stronger source of motivation.

I find this model useful to understand my informants’ motivation to be career women, but not too aggressive in reaching to top positions where they work. My informants are proud of doing the job at hand perfectly, yet they do not seem to be motivated by climbing up the ladder as high as they can. They seemed to be satisfied by their accomplishments thus far. They measure their success through their satisfaction in

work relationships, being part of a team, and having an opportunity to prove themselves. Rather than career advancement, being honest, fair, being well-liked, and respected appear more important to them. Drawing on Strauss, I argue that although all my informants believe in the higher goal of ‘gender equality’ and ‘women’s independence,’ what motivates them is not the ideological power of these ideals, but their early socialization at home where they learned the significance of ‘having a respectful career’ and ‘being financially independent’ lest to be “like their mothers,” associated with being financially dependent and socially and emotionally restricted. Growing up, they observed their mothers’ limited options—professionally, in their marriages, and in their lives revolving around home—and been told in many direct and subliminal ways that they should have more success and status in society compared to their mothers. Women of Generation 1980 are not motivated by a vision of being a modern Kemalist woman or an emancipated feminist. Rather, they wish, on the one hand, to prove to their parents, that they have accomplished what they were asked to do, and, on the other hand, to avoid having their mother’s lives, as perceived as socially irrelevant and dependent.

In this context, however, since women of Generation 1980 perceive themselves as already having surpassed their mothers, their focus at work is more on maintaining good work relationships, being respected and liked at work, and being good at what they do, rather than competing for higher rank or fighting for gender equality. I do not mean to ignore the huge accomplishments these women have had and continue to have. On the contrary, I aim to understand their lives and their professional and social experiences not only in the context of the changing social dynamics and relationships that opened up more avenues for women (or at least urban and middle-class women), but also to

understand what drives them to take up these new roles. As women's motivations as well as their desires and concerns are revealed, so are the possibilities as well as the limitations of their self-assured subjectivity.

With the combination of the parental encouragement that they received to get a good education and pursue careers, their early experiences enjoying the city in mixed-gender groups, and their early experiences of work, women of Generation 1980 were motivated in their twenties to increase their social mobility and to choose their careers together with their friends. Now in their early- to mid-thirties, most of them believed that they accomplished almost all the things that they aimed for, and that were expected of them, in terms of social status. This sense of accomplishment, self assurance, and social satisfaction, on the other hand, seemed to stop them from aiming for greater professional success and work-based competition, and even from considering the possibility of the existence of gender inequality at work.

Chapter 6

The Domestication of the Women of Generation 1980

A strong sense of pride and accomplishment is central in women's accounts of their youth (roughly the period from their early teens until college graduation), particularly when they talked about their constant negotiations with their parents to increase their social freedom and mobility (Chapter 3), their early dating and sexual experiences (Chapter 4) and their professional accomplishments in their contemporary lives (Chapter 5). However, there is a striking change of tone in their narratives when my informants discuss their current lives as women in their early to mid-thirties, particularly regarding their intimate relationships and marriages. A general sense of disappointment about themselves, a sense of betrayal, and a feeling of frustration are prominent in their personal accounts. When I asked Aylin for example a question to elicit more about her career choice and its development, her disappointment with herself became clear.

Esin: What would you say if I ask you what brought you here today? What or who influenced you more

Aylin: Well I don't like to say it but my boyfriends brought me here today. For instance, if I try to remember something in the past, I think of who was I dating that year, instead, say, in which grade I was. Honestly I am not very happy about it. But it started changing slowly. But still, that's how I find my way in my memories. I was very unhappy to be like this when I was in college. How denigrating, belittling to be like this, I mean that you have nothing noteworthy in your life other than the boyfriend you are with, and that is what you constantly

discuss with your girlfriends. There is nothing worse than this for a woman in life. It's very boring, isn't it? I don't know what else to say, I think it wasn't the model woman that I'd like to be, [how] I'd like to see myself. I want to reject the life that my mother had, the predetermined, man-centered life.

As I show in Chapter 5, women constantly and often unconsciously measure their professional and social accomplishments by comparing their lives to their mothers', just as Aylin does in this response. The measure of their *desired* identity is "not like their mothers." Nowhere is this comparison more salient than in their understanding and expectations of their marriages.

In this chapter I turn my attention to professional and married women, and ask: How does women's active participation in the workforce and their increasing presence in the professional world affect their lives at home, particularly their relationships with their husbands? I examine their narratives of emerging conflicts between them and their husbands as well as their inner dilemmas as a result of these conflicts, and if and how they solve these conflicts. Focusing on these women's narratives, I argue that the main source of their frustration is not so much the daily problems and disappointments as such, but the lack of correspondence they perceive between the identity of "modern and independent woman" that they felt they were supposed to inhabit and their current experiences in their marriages that consistently undermine this identity.

Among my informants, married women's experiences of disappointments and frustrations about their current lives and relationships appear to be in great contradiction with their desired/assumed identity. Initially I was surprised by how much time and energy my informants spent during the interviews eagerly telling me their daily problems

in their marriages and their disappointment with their husbands. They shared detailed accounts of who said and did what at home. They talked about disagreements at home including over the division of labor, financial decisions, relationships with friends, family, in-laws, and decisions related to parenting (or becoming parents). At the end of these interviews, I was often overwhelmed (and at times admittedly bored) listening to their long and exhaustive accounts of their daily interactions at home. However, as I heard so many similar frustrations and disappointments, I realized there is more to these narratives of seemingly mundane struggles between husbands and wives.

As I mention above, women often talked about their parents' marriage and evaluated their marriages by comparing them to their parents'. For example, this is how Nesrin described her parents' marriage:

My parents are completely different from each other. Only now, after forty years of marriage, they have developed similarities. Theirs is a marriage full of rules, jealousies, restrictions and control. My mother is a woman who has to be back home by 5 [pm]. [That is, Nesrin's father controls his wife's mobility in and out of the house. She is not allowed to be on streets after 5 pm.] I don't know if it would have been better, if they had split. Maybe my mother would have been more assertive (*kendini ortaya daha iyi koyardı*). You know, you see her oppressed; you see her accepting some unfair conditions. I think, in this regard, economic independence is crucial.

And this is how she described her marriage:

I see people [married couples] around me, they set rules for each other, you can't do this, you can't do that. I think that's absurd. That's not even remotely close to how we live our marriage. Ours is simply about two people who love each other.

Nesrin describes her father as very authoritarian and strict when it comes to gender roles and relationships. Berrin, on the other hand, describes her father as very mellow, and a man who leaves every decision to his wife. Interestingly, however, her description of her parents' marriage is quite different than Nesrin's parents'.

Actually, I don't think they had any time to enjoy their marriage. (*Ama zaten çok da bir evlilik yaşayacak halleri de olmamış.*) For instance, since I can remember, they don't go on vacation, ok, they go to our summer house, but they wouldn't do anything else other than that, because they wouldn't spend money on such extra things, because there is always something else to pay for, something to fix or to save money for us kids, those sort of things. Especially because my father leaves the organization of everything to my mother...now my mother regrets the time and the effort she put into managing everything at home, dealing with the contractors, repairmen et cetera. Now she says that she's never gotten to enjoy being treated as a woman (*kadınlığımı yaşamadım*), you know. Like for example, they never go out for dinner or anything.

Berrin's perception is that her parents had spent most of their married lives trying to make ends meet and sacrificing everything for their children's education and future investments. Like Nesrin, she talked about the lack of compatibility and emotional connection between her father and her mother. And both women, Nesrin more directly,

expressed that their mothers were not very happy in their marriages because of their husbands' lack of engagement. In their narratives, both women described their mothers as socially, emotionally and sexually constrained women who had to follow a culturally expected life-course, which, according to them, resulted in marrying incompatible husbands and thus not attending to their own desires and needs. Both Nesrin and Berrin described their parents' marriage as a functioning unit, not a companionship based on compatibility, companionship or love between couples. They told me their mothers did all the housework and took care of everybody. They described their fathers, authoritarian or not, as men who do not do much in the house. However, neither woman talked about their mothers' lives in the context of patriarchy and sexism. Instead they blamed the parents' incompatibility and their mothers' financial dependence. In contrast, both Nesrin and Berrin described their own marriages as based on compatibility, and mutual love and care.

Interestingly, in the interview, Berrin began to describe her marriage saying that it is not like a marriage at all. When I asked what she meant by that she gave me a long account of how she and her husband were good friends first. She said they were even talking about their boyfriends and girlfriends before they began dating. Berrin described her expectations of marriage:

My personal expectation has always been to have a good relationship and then get married. I wanted to get married. That was my expectation. I mean this was not a pressure coming from my parents or anything. I wanted to have somebody who was going to be with me, to share our lives. And he seemed to be a perfect candidate ... He is very comfortable with himself. Everybody likes him. And, he

is smart, he has all the qualities from the music he listens to...I mean I didn't have anything to worry about. Funny...what else could I ask? Married life...we both are very domestic, so it is like playing house.

Still, both Berrin and Nesrin seemed to have gone through a period of adjustment in terms of the division of labor at home. Berrin continued:

At first I had this crisis: we got married, went to our honeymoon and all... I like to cook, so I began cooking regularly. But we would leave the house together in the morning, go to the office, we both would work all day, and return home together. After awhile I realized that we had this routine: we come home, change, Burak sits in front of the television and I go to the kitchen! We had this for a few days. One day I found myself crying in the living room doorway [nervous chuckle]. I said, "What is this? Why do you get to have the pleasure of watching the evening news when I'm in the kitchen chopping onions." I just cried; we didn't fight. He said that I was right and then he gave me a hug. Ever since, he sets the table, asks if I need any help, comes and sits in the kitchen with me, empties the dishwasher, and hangs the laundry, these are his responsibilities at home.

Berrin portrayed the relationship between her and her husband as a very compatible and a peaceful one. She described her husband as a very agreeable man who does not object what she says, and she did not mention any other conflict between the two beside the above excerpt. In fact she told several stories of them getting along well and agreeing about almost everything.

Nesrin describes her marriage in similar terms as well. She emphasized that there is a very loving and mutually considerate relationship.

Esin: You said you like to cook the things he likes? Do you do all the housework? Is there a division of labor at home?

Nesrin: Division of labor...it is expected more from a woman; I mean women have the authority in the organization of the house. I used to think that we would have equally contributed to house chores, but, I don't know, maybe it is something that our mothers taught us or you actually enjoy doing this and it is really something womanly. For instance, Ahmet [her husband] used to cook more, but I slowly kicked him out of the kitchen. I never directly asked him to leave but I think I made it clear with my behaviors. I think we claim ownership of the kitchen, and once you begin that way, the rest follows but because it's my choice to cook, I don't take it as a burden but sometimes. Of course he helps...he helps in the kitchen when I ask, or vacuums the apartment. But I don't know, maybe in my mind I think that things are supposed to be more egalitarian, but even though I say this, I couldn't put that into practice in real life through my behavior. I think that I am partly responsible for this.

Esin: Do you think that now he expects you to do it? What if you don't cook one night?

Nesrin: No, not really, I mean, if I come home at 5 and if he's coming at 9, I do feel bad...at least a salad or something. But he never demands or says, "Why didn't you do it?" Or he never makes me feel bad.... I won't allow such a thing

(*izin vermem öyle bir şeye*). [She laughs knowingly, as she understands what I am insinuating.]

My aim, here, is not to decide whether or not this is an egalitarian marriage, or to show that housework still falls on women's shoulders, but to show that to establish a balanced division of labor at home is a new and important battle for women of Generation 1980. For these women the severity of this battle depends on various factors, mainly, the working hours of the couple, whether or not they have hired help, and more importantly both parties' expectations of each other. Both Berrin's and Nesrin's cases demonstrate that they observed and assessed their roles and responsibilities at home and negotiated, directly or indirectly, how much they could or should do at home with their husbands. Their answers to my questions reveal that there is a self-reflective history behind those answers.

Yet another important point that emerged in my interviews with women, including the cases of Nesrin and Berrin, is that all women one way or another appeared to be responsible for the housework. As Berrin says above, she finds herself in the kitchen cooking every night. She says she "likes cooking" but it does not appear that this was something she and her husband discussed; it was simply taken for granted until she thought that this was an unfair arrangement. Even afterwards, she continues to cook and be in charge of the housework, but comforts herself that her husband is helpful and considerate. Nesrin presents a similar story. She too says she likes to cook and her husband helps if she asks him. However, Nesrin has a more observant and critical approach to her behaviors at home. First of all, she makes a general observation stating, "it is expected more from a woman" and, reflecting on the topic, asks: Is it because

mothers taught their daughters, or because it is a “womanly” thing to do, or because women enjoy doing housework? Nesrin did not or could not provide an answer to her questions, but she still criticizes herself by not being able to implement a more egalitarian division of labor at home between her and her husband.

Here my intention is not to argue that women internalized the normative gender roles that they learned at home, because as I demonstrate earlier, mainly in Chapter 3, for the women of Generation 1980 the cultural model of the obedient wife, which they mainly associated with their mothers, has been simultaneously overridden by alternative models acquired through socialization at home and fostered by their participation in public life at a young age, economic independence and higher education. In this context, the already eclectic and conflicting image of a ‘modern Turkish woman,’ constructed by the Turkish modernization (Durakbaşa 1997) as a devoted wife and mother, and a professional woman who is comfortable in mixed gender public space as long as she suppresses her sexuality, has become even more eclectic and conflicting. The women of Generation 1980 learned about the role of the obedient wife and at the same time they learned to denounce it. My main observation from these interviews is that these women are in distress because they are afraid that they might have internalized these submissive gender roles despite all the contrary socialization and expectations. Not only are they clearly conscious of these roles but also they have been resisting playing these roles. However, a married life creates its own unexpected dynamics and now these women find themselves having to figure out how to talk about and deal with these unexpected experiences within their unique conditions.

In the cases of Berrin and Nesrin, factors like their economic independence, their husbands' similar conceptions of the division of labor, and their workload at home seem to diminish these women's distress, and their experiences as housewives have not seemed to challenge their self-assured subjectivity and the identity of the modern and independent woman. Next, on the other hand, I present the stories of two other women, Selin and Demet who each shared their ongoing struggles with me regarding their relatively recent married lives.

Selin (33, married with no children, artist)

Selin is a ceramic artist working independently, and her husband Kutlu is an architect. Selin told me that after dating Kutlu for about a year, they lived together for another year, despite the disapproval of her parents. The couple got married in 2002, and she described her wedding as a very festive event, "It was like a prom; everybody came." At the time of the interview, she and Kutlu had been married for about two and a half years. I had several opportunities to observe Selin and Kutlu at friends' gatherings during my fieldwork. They appeared to get along well in these social gatherings, and expressed common interests in art and design. Both were quite social and pleasant to be around.

I met Selin for the first time during my fieldwork through a common friend. At the beginning of our interview, we spent quite some time talking about her life in general and her work. She told me that she enjoyed everything about Istanbul, including its crowd, noise, and even its pollution, alluding to and differentiating herself from the growing public complaint about these issues, for they are seen as Istanbul's major problems. She added that she absolutely did not have any "dreams" of moving to the

countryside, this time poking fun at another popular trend of writers and artists professing their wish to move to a small town in the countryside to get away from the chaos and degeneration of Istanbul. On the contrary, Selin said that Istanbul inspired her work. She said she loved going out at night, and emphasized that she loved “smoking [cigarettes] and drinking,” deliberately portraying herself going against the newly emerging trends of healthy living. She liked to “flow” wherever life would take her.

When I asked about her social life and friends, she said she mostly socialized with her friends from college and people she had met in Istanbul over the years through her work and from frequenting the same locales. She also said that she found socializing with her high school friends “boring” because “all they talk about is their children; I feel like they don’t like to have fun anymore.” She felt that her marriage was different from theirs because she and Kutlu were in agreement about not having children. And more importantly, according to her, married life did not stop them from going out and having fun. She added that even if Kutlu did not want to go out during the weekdays, she liked to stop by the local jazz bar and have a drink while listening to the music.

From the beginning of our interview, it was clear that Selin made an effort to portray herself as a happy and confident woman who knows who she is and what she wants. She described herself as an artist dedicated to her work, and a spontaneous urban woman who does not follow popular “trends.” She made it clear that she is not like the other married women “who cannot talk about anything but their children” and that her marriage differed considerably from other “boring” marriages that she knew.

After we talked at length about her work, I decided to change the direction of our conversation. As I reached for the tea kettle still steaming on the cast iron stove in the

middle of her studio to refill my traditional Turkish teacup made of glass for the third time, I asked: “So what else do you do other than your work? How do you spend your time outside of work?”

Outside of work [she takes her time, before she continues] hmm. I try to do some housework. Kutlu of course he is very demanding at home. Occasionally... I mean... all of our fights are about this. Otherwise we get along really well. I mean this is the main reason we fight. For example, I might be working on a project and I haven't slept for three nights, have an important deadline, but he goes and asks me to cook a ridiculously complicated meal (*abuk bi yemek istiyor*). One that is so difficult that I would have to give up my work for hours, so naturally I tell him I can't...then he stops talking to me (*küsüyor*), he does bizarre things like this (*böyle acayip şeyler yapıyor*).

I did not expect that my question would open up a whole new aspect of Selin's married life that I would have anticipated based on the happy marriage she described at the beginning of the interview and my observation of them in larger gatherings as a couple. After saying all this, Selin paused and looked at me for a reaction. Surprised by her answer and not sure how to respond, I asked:

Esin: Does he help in the kitchen at all?

Selin: He used to, before, but now, since we got married, he never steps in the kitchen. I do all the cooking; he used do things in the kitchen, but now never.

She again paused. These pauses clearly required me to respond. I felt like she was testing me. I was worried that if I gave a reaction that would make her think that I was perceiving her as ‘a typical Turkish wife’ – an image that she was clearly trying to avoid – then she might stop talking about this topic. Not quite knowing how to proceed without making it clear that I was quite taken aback by what she was telling me, I mumbled:

Esin: So you do have some set division of labor at home.

Selin: Of course! He determined our roles (*Tabi canım! O belirledi rollerimizi*).

Esin: So... how does it work exactly?

Selin: And I have to follow them. (*Benim de uymam gerekiyor.*) [It seemed like she didn’t hear or pay attention to my question, but I was glad that she stayed on the topic.]

She nervously chuckled, knowing that her description connotes a stereotypically hierarchical husband and wife relationship in which the husband is the head of the house and has much more authority. She must have detected my lack of reaction or a confused expression on my face; she volunteered the following explanation without me saying anything:

So... I mean...there are times... I can’t make enough money at my job, and so...since he provides for me, he feels he is entitled to everything...I have to make him comfortable...I mean...I don’t know...things like I have to make sure that all his black underwear is washed. He has many other nonsensical obsessions (*abuk subuk takıntıları var*). If he can’t find one pair of clean black underwear

when he opens his drawer, he gets very upset that day (*kıyamet kopuyor o gün*).

[Again she laughs nervously.]

Esin: Hmmm!!? [I am speechless here.]

As I was trying to think how to keep this conversation going without asking a question that might put her in a defensive position, I settled on the role of a sympathetic girlfriend who listens to her friend venting about her marriage. She continued:

He says “If you can’t wash it, then you’ll buy new ones.” He has bizarre (*acayip acayip*) demands like this. I think it’s funny...I mean when you’re in it, it doesn’t feel funny at all but... Sometimes, I really, really have no time and want to work until ten at night or whatever, and he keeps calling me asking, “What are we going to eat tonight? What are we going to eat tonight?” These are annoying, but other than this we have no problems.

Selin frequently used adjectives such as “weird,” “bizarre,” “odd,” or “funny” to describe some of her husband’s behaviors and demands from her. By describing his demands for home-cooked meals and clean clothes as “bizarre,” which sound like rather mainstream demands in the context of a typical sexual division of labor, she seeks to portray her husband as an eccentric character with odd obsessions, rather than a ‘typical Turkish man’ who expects his wife to take care of his needs and prioritize home over her career. In so doing, she also prevents herself from falling under the category of the ‘typical Turkish housewife’ who is responsible for all of the housework and has little power over her husband. Furthermore, she also carefully avoids bringing herself to the

point where she would have to admit that these problems could in fact be indications of more serious issues in her relationship with her husband.

Another, and perhaps a less conscious, strategy employed by Selin to trivialize these problems was laughter. During the entire interview she strived to present her problems as trivial and attempted to turn them into “funny” anecdotes. Selin laughed, giggled and chuckled whenever she revealed a conflict between her and her husband that put her in a less powerful position. In some cases, I noticed an acceptance or a realization on her part that she could no longer deny that some of these incidents were not funny at all, at which point she would quickly wrap up the topic by describing these incidents as “annoying,” and claim that they were not really major problems in her marriage but only isolated events that did not define her marriage in general.

Towards the end of our interview, I was quite irritated by what I heard as well as by her efforts to minimize her husband’s behaviors. At one point I decided to let her know that I did not think what she was telling me was as unimportant as she was trying to portray. I dropped my role as a sympathetic friend and wanted to make a more direct comment:

Esin: Well, his demands and expectations from you fit a certain type of relationship between husbands and wives, I’m sure you can see that too....

Selin: Yes, of course, it fits. [She abruptly stopped. At that moment I was not too sure if we were talking about the same thing, as my comment was not as direct as I wanted it to be, but I did not want to stop her by rephrasing my point.]

Esin: So how do you deal with this?

Selin: Well, I didn't realize this for years, didn't realize it before we got married. I mean I was sensing that he was different, but I didn't think that this would create so much agony (*eziyet*) in my life. But we love each other very much. We get along really well. We have common dreams. We spend wonderful times together. We help each other at work. I do not want to lose those [things]. I feel like what we have is really great, I feel like this is hard to find. So we try to talk through those issues. I cry and cry sometimes. We fight, then we talk, but it only lasts for a month. Then it goes back to usual, we fight again, we talk again. But we never stop talking. After one hour, he comes over, but he wants me [emphasizing "me"] to apologize. [She uneasily laughs.]

Although she seems to first admit that her husband's expectations of her might be seen as a culturally expected behavior, she still describes him as "different." She was clearly getting frustrated at this point trying to come up with a convincing explanation or a justification for her husband's behavior that would be acceptable within the context of a modern marriage. She went back and forth between how well they otherwise get along and how they have things in common, and the ongoing "agony" she experiences almost daily. Meanwhile, I began to think that this might actually be an abusive situation and I got frustrated by her resistance to see what was happening in her home. At this point I had enough, and asked:

Esin: Okay, but how does he explain this? I mean I don't want to ask crudely but is it because you are a woman, and those are women's responsibilities?

Selin: I'm waiting to see this...I don't know the answer to this question: If one day when I have a steady income, will this problem continue? Because he believes that he is the provider, and because he provides us a secure and comfortable life, and he does [she emphasizes that he does], he thinks that he is entitled to certain things. He thinks, "If I'm paying the rent for your studio, then you will do these things for me."

Here Selin's seemingly defeated admission of this 'exchange' as a fair trade should be understood in relation to the meanings attached to financial independence among the women of this cohort. As I show in the previous chapters, women of Generation 1980 grew up receiving the message that financial independence is the key to women's independence. Many women told me that working outside the home and having their own income is one of the major differences between them and their mothers. Most of them explained their mothers' "powerless" position at home through their financial dependency. Conversely, when their mothers had their own income, my informants acknowledged the importance of it. Selin told me that making her own money when she was in college helped her to move out her parents' place, resist her father's authority and gave her more freedom in her social life. In this context it becomes understandable why Selin sees her financial dependency as the source of her lack of power in relation to her husband and accordingly, why she anticipates that once she begins making money, her husband's expectations will change.

I continued pushing her a little more to find out how she perceives this situation and reminded her that she works hard too.

Esin: But you have similar work hours, right?

Selin: Of course! (*Tabi canım!*) But of course in the mornings we can't leave the house at the same time because I have chores to do like putting things away, cleaning the kitchen and making the bed [uttered in a cynical tone]. So I leave ten minutes after him. But I don't go home early; he does not have any objections to my working late. He encourages me to do good work. He is very proud of me; he loves what I do. But he also wants me to do the housework as well as I do my work.

I find it interesting that at this point her approach to describing these problems switched from being nervous about potentially being seen as a 'typical housewife' by me to being cynical. Perhaps, having revealed a part of herself that does not quite match with the ideal image of her that she portrayed earlier, she now had no other option but to embrace and come up with a different attitude to deal with what she had just admitted. Still, one could guess that the daily chores of a house would take longer than "ten minutes." Even though she adopted a cynical tone, she still tried to minimize the burden of the housework. Even in her cynicism, she was still protecting her desired identity.

Selin also strived to convince me (and perhaps herself) that she does not fall in the category of a 'typical housewife' because her husband does not "object" her coming home late and he is "proud" of her career. In the context of Turkish modernity, the measure of a modern man is the level of his disciplinary control over his wife's or daughter's mobility and visibility in public sphere (education and work); the more freedom she has, the more modern he is. Selin is woman who can go out at night by herself, come home late, and pursue a career. Her husband does not object to her working

late hours (although she also said he keeps calling her about dinner) and he wants her to be successful in what she does and he is proud of her. All of these aspects, in the eyes of Selin (and possibly in the eyes of her friends and family as well), make her husband a modern man who respects her and her career.

Even though I sensed that I could not push this topic much longer, I said this:

Esin: Still it seems to me that you are right here to complain...it seems like this has been going on...

Selin: But there is no solution to this, no solution!!! [Protesting to me and looking very frustrated, but this time more frustrated with me than the topic.] I mean you could say you had enough and leave, but I don't want that because there are so many positive things. But I don't know how long... (*ama nereye kadar...*) this should have a... (*bunun da bir şeyi vardır herhalde...*) but I hope it doesn't come to that... (*olmasın inşallah*).

Selin could not finish her sentence that began "*But I don't know how long...*" which might have continued with "I can take this," and the sentence that began "*This should have a...*" might have ended with "limit." She is aware of her contradictory position and seemed to be afraid that the only resolution would be 'separation/divorce' –a word that she could not bring herself to say and a topic she avoided by saying a little prayer instead "*olmasın inşallah.*" I felt compelled to stop pushing the subject.

Demet (32, lawyer, married with no children)

Demet is a friend from high school. Even though we were not very close friends, we had common friends and participated in various extracurricular activities throughout our high school years. Since graduating from high school, however, we have seen each other only occasionally at a few social events. During my fieldwork I sought an opportunity to get together with her and catch up. Our common friend, Zeynep, told me that Demet works at a small law firm, and they frequently meet for lunch. Knowing that Zeynep would never miss an opportunity to bring friends together, I asked her to invite me next time they met. As I hoped, Zeynep called me within a week to say the three of us were to have lunch.

On the day of our lunch, I exited Istanbul's new shiny subway system in Osmanbey, an old upper middle-class neighborhood on the European side of the city with plenty of high-end stores, cafés and office buildings. Zeynep was cheerful and dressed up as always, wearing a miniskirt, a blazer and, of course, her signature high heels. Together we walked to Demet's office in Nisantasi chatting and enjoying the beautiful autumn day. After about a ten-minute walk, we entered an Art Nouveau building, typical for this neighborhood, through a decorative heavy iron gate that opened up to a lobby with marble floors and high ceilings. As we climbed up the curved marble staircase to the second floor, Demet greeted us at the entrance of her office, wearing a formal black pantsuit. While I remember Demet from our school days in jeans, t-shirts, and white tennis shoes, with a short haircut and glasses, her current look was quite different, and took me a moment to adjust to. She still had short hair and glasses, a reminder of the old Demet, complete with the same intense expression on her face.

Demet gave me a quick tour of the office and introduced me to a couple of her colleagues. The office seemed pretty busy. When I commented on that, Demet said that they were understaffed because her boss is not easy to work with and one of the new hires recently quit without any warning. She said, “We are used to working in ER mode here,” using the English term “ER” to emphasize the constant rush and chaos they work in as a result of the high workload that they have, and being understaffed. She also explained to me that after her boss, who commutes between two offices in two different cities, Demet is the only senior attorney there, so she was on call all the time. This also meant our lunch had to be under an hour.

Over lunch at a local eatery of gyro wraps (*dürüm*) and yogurt drinks (*ayran*) (a typical and very popular local fast food), Demet told us that she and her husband were discussing having a baby. Even though her husband was not too eager to become a father Demet said, she was “working on it.” She said that they had serious problems in their marriage, but she thought that they were in a better place, and it was time to think about having a baby. As I realized how much I did not know about her, while also feeling that we had not lost the intimacy built almost twenty years ago, I asked if she would like to participate in my research. She said, “Of course!”

In a couple of days, when I called to schedule the interview, she asked me to come over to her office on the following Saturday afternoon. She worked on Saturday mornings, but she said the office was quiet in the afternoon. I offered to meet her at her place in case she did not want to stay in her office any longer than she needed to, but she suggested meeting at her office because her husband would be at home, and we could not talk comfortably while he is around.

I arrived at her office around two in the afternoon and the only other lawyer working that morning was about to leave. Demet made fresh coffee in a French press that she kept in the office kitchen. She said, “Good coffee is my obsession now. Of course you probably drink better coffee in America all the time.” We had our coffees in her small office furnished with a desk and two chairs and chatted about the upcoming Istanbul Film Festival, discussing our favorite entries. After we were done with our coffees, Demet suggested that we move to the now empty lobby so that we could comfortably sit on two luxurious leather sofas. As we settled in, Demet playfully asked, “What are we going to do now?” Thinking where we left off on our lunch date, I decided to follow up by asking about her desire to have a child.

Esin: Why don't we begin talking about the last thing we were talking about over lunch? You said you wanted to have a child...how serious are you?

Demet: I feel very attracted to the idea... Ali and I went through serious problems. It has only been six months since we finally figured out that our marriage could survive. Before we weren't in a position to think about having a child. It wasn't clear what was going to happen to us...

From here, Demet continued talking non-stop for about 5 or 6 minutes. During that time, she told me that she began to see a psychologist because the problems at home made her anger issue worse. “Of course,” she said, her husband did not go the therapist with her because “he is old fashioned.” However, a family member, a slightly older woman (*abla*/big sister) that her husband trusts, talked to him and made him understand that Demet's demands were not simple “*caprices*” but the requirements of a marriage.

Demet also repeated several times that “things are okay now,” because, she said, “when you begin to see that finally he is willing to compromise, you are willing to compromise as well.” Her delivery was fast, lengthy, wordy and sometimes confusing. She left her sentences unfinished and shifted from topic to topic. Meanwhile, I was puzzled and overwhelmed by her torrent of words, especially since I had no idea what she was talking about. She seemed to be avoiding telling me what exactly the problem was in her marriage. Then, finally, she tied her story to my initial question about her desire to have a child.

So the question of whether or not we will have a child has just become an issue that we can talk about. Ultimately it’s going to happen I guess...And I like children...and without having a child...I don’t know...Do I feel that something is missing? Not really...but I know this much: you don’t become a family without a child. You remain as two separate lives; that’s certain. And we are not a couple...you know... there are couples that share a lot, have a lot in common; they do everything together. We are not like that. Our interests are very different. We share different things. So I could say that we are not a typical couple, far from it. And I like it that way. I don’t force him to join my life, and I don’t force myself to try to enter his domain. So I think, a child is going to unite us. I feel like we would begin to have something in common. Of course, this should not be the reason to have a child but...on the other hand, I really want to have a daughter...[it’s] something I really want.

The above excerpt presents a good example of Demet's fast and fragmentary delivery where she quickly shifts back and forth between opposite ideas. She begins saying she likes children, but then she questioned herself admitting that she does not feel that a child is missing in her life. Here she clearly negotiated with the popular discourse on the so-called "biological clock," which asserts that childless women past a certain age feel a void in their lives.

She was equally conflicted about her relationship with her husband. She complained on the one hand that she and her husband had separate lives, and they were "not a typical couple." Here she engaged with another popular image of a modern marriage where a couple is expected to share everything, but then, rejecting that image, she said that she likes the fact that they have different interests. She, then, went back to say that a child would bring her and her husband's separate lives together, ignoring that she just said she likes to have separate lives. And she went back in with amazing speed to admit, "Of course, this should not be the reason to have a child." At the end, Demet seemed worried that she came across as too calculating or perhaps too desperate in her desire to bring her and her husband closer, a desire conflicting with the image of a modern, independent woman. But by stating that she obsessively wants to have a daughter, she quickly makes clear that her wanting to have a child is her own choice and wish, while also giving the message that she does not care about the traditional pattern of wanting to have a son.

Immediately following the above words, Demet began another lengthy speech on how her husband was a "trustworthy" person and that he would be "a good father." On the other hand, she said, when it comes to having a child, he has financial concerns and

does not want his comfortable routine to be disrupted. From there, she went on to discuss her career moves and told me that the next two years would be a good time for her to be pregnant. Before, she said, she was staying in the office until ten at night because she had no reason to go back home. It was during these times that her marriage was going really badly. Meanwhile, I sat on the edge of the couch, jaw locked, feeling like I was sitting in a racecar going full speed. I was desperate to find an order to our ‘conversation’ and was wishing she would stay on one topic more than few seconds. I managed to get in another question and asked her to tell me about what it was like when they were dating. She jumped right in:

Oh yes, I was going to come to that...so we got married...but we’ve never... We were together six or seven years before we got married. We’d never lived together though, because I was living with my parents. But he had his own apartment in Istanbul. We used to spend a lot of time at his place, sometimes up to a month when my parents were on trip or something.

And all of a sudden, she forcefully began saying:

But let me tell you Esin, I’d never done things like “let me iron your shirts.” I was watching television and he was ironing his shirts. I’d never become that traditional, domestic Turkish woman, who cleans her boyfriend’s house, cooks for him, no way (*yok abi*) [1980s youth slang]. I hadn’t done any of those things. This has to do with my personality too. I’m like this towards my friends or my [younger] sister too. I’m not a maternal or a caring person. I am egalitarian (*eşitlikçi*); I interact with everybody at an egalitarian level. I’m not a motherly,

caring person, but men expect that from you (*ama adamlar bunu bekliyorlar yani senden*).

At this point, I was beginning to get a grasp on what Demet was trying to tell me and avoid telling me at the same time. I realized that Demet was laying a foundation for us before she began describing the problem more concretely. She, first, sharply positioned herself against the existing stereotypical image of the “traditional domestic Turkish woman” who takes care of the house and her husband and whose identity is defined through her domesticity, and she made sure that I understood that her husband’s expectations of her to become a housewife was not her fault, as she had never acted like one.

Demet defines herself as “egalitarian,” an unusual choice of word in this context, for she both evokes the feminist discourse of ‘gender equality,’ and yet by defining her “personality” (not her political stance) as “egalitarian,” and by describing her egalitarian attitude towards her sister and her friends, she avoids using a more radical and feminist tone. She frames what she experiences at home not within the context of gender hierarchy but instead in terms of her personality. This is a common stance I noticed among all my informants. On the one hand, they firmly position themselves against the image of ‘the traditional/domestic woman,’ and through this position, they claim the identity of ‘modern/independent woman,’ but, on the other hand, they avoid making overtly feminist arguments.

While Demet differentiates herself from the “traditional domestic Turkish woman,” she places her husband in a homogenous category of ‘men,’ as she claims, “men expect that from you.” By shifting from her personal experiences to general claims

about men, she persists in her efforts to convince me (and herself) that it is not her fault that her husband thinks in a certain way, because, according to her narrative, this is how “all men” think. In this narrative, the emergence of ‘men’ as a general and a homogenous category also connotes another shared opinion of men among most of my informants: “men do not change.” This perception was also reflected in Demet’s definitive and inflexible portrayal of her husband throughout the entire interview, such as “Sinan does not want his life to change,” “Sinan has to go the gym twice a week,” “You cannot argue with Sinan, he does not listen.”

While both Selin and Demet tried to explain their husbands’ domestic demands of them, Selin portrayed her husband as a “different” man with “bizarre” expectations, whereas Demet described her husband as like “all men.” However, both women seemed to accept that their husbands would not change. Again while Selin chose to rely on personality issues, Demet chose to focus on men’s socialization at home:

We have this [notion]...in our generation: it won’t be like our mothers’ (*annelerimiz gibi olmayacak*). Housework is not my job. Or whoever has the time will do the dishes. Ok, this is all fine and right, but only to a certain extent. Because, men are not growing with this idea. (*Çünkü erkekler böyle yetişiyorlar.*) This is our biggest problem in Turkey. Take my husband; he has a very good education, he lived alone for a long time. But since we started living under the same roof, he simply expects me to do everything at home.

As I have previously shown, women of Generation 1980 grew up rejecting the identity of a housewife, associating it with being financially dependent, socially

irrelevant, and powerless. In their narratives, women connected this identity primarily with their own mothers. They grew up believing that their lives would be different than their mothers' and that their marriages would not be like their mothers' marriages. Significantly, both their fathers and mothers played an important role in leading them to think this way. Demet, along with my other informants, is aware of the effect of her socialization. Men, on the other hand, according to Demet, were raised to believe that their wives would fulfill the role of a housewife, as they saw their mothers perform this domestic role. She said, even educated men, like her husband, have these traditional expectations.

What is striking in Demet's narrative is the unexpectedness of the situation in which she found herself when she began living with her husband. Once she and her husband began living in the same house, she realized that "men" were not raised with these ideas. She said:

Well... at first I was thinking everything was going great, but then I realized that that while I was working my ass off (*kıçımdan ter damlarken*), that man (*herif*) [man; vulgar] wasn't doing shit at home (*herifin evde hiç bir bok yaptığı yok*). And he has endless demands, the more you do it, the more he wants. My mistake was that I thought this couldn't have gotten any worse. But it gets worse. I mean when we were dating, I would not have imagined that he could say, 'If you were going to pursue your career, why did you get married?'

In these women's narratives, the unexpectedness of this experience ("I would not have imagined that he could say") makes it even more difficult for them to make sense of

what is going on and how to respond. Unlike when they were younger, when they were prepared for their fathers' conservatism and ready to fight that, women did not expect to have similar fights with their husbands. They seemed to assume that they were all the raised the same way and believed in same values.

Hearing the above words from Demet, I could understand why she took her time to tell me the specifics of her problems. What she told me about her husband, particularly this sentence, "If you were going to pursue your career, why did you get married?", is strongly associated with a conservative mindset of the 'typical Turkish man' that symbolizes everything against the modernity of the Turkish secular, middle class culture. For Demet to admit to herself as well as to me that her husband had made the above comment was a very difficult and a risky decision, for it not only reveals what kind of a man her husband is, but also automatically puts her in the category of a powerless woman who is a victim of such a man.

This admission also suggests that Demet must negotiate her entire past and everything she believed about herself. A strong sense of betrayal, resulting from the failure of the long established conviction that education (Western, secular) and financial independence are the keys to overcoming traditional gender hierarchy, is dominant in Demet's narrative, as she now has to redefine almost everything about herself in struggling to make sense of her married life.

Throughout the interview, Demet went back and forth between being angry with her husband and presenting her reasons to stay in this marriage. When Demet told me incidents of her husband belittling and disrespecting her, she was angry and confident that she was right about being angry. She was sure that what her husband was doing was

wrong, unfair or simply a form of “torture.” She said, “Once, after a big fight, I told him that, ‘you know I don’t need you. I can perfectly live by myself. Why am I putting up with you?’ I’d never said anything like this before. He couldn’t say anything. You could tell he never thought about this possibility. I think he finally understood.” While Demet was telling this story, she was animated, alive, and clearly proud of presenting herself as an independent woman. Her delivery was confident; her thoughts were complete. She was clearly empowered by her financial independence, as evident in the statement: I can perfectly live by myself.

Demet’s narrative reveals another unexpected realization—this time, not about her husband or men in general, but about herself:

As much as we say housework is not my job, it is somehow embedded in us (*içimize işlemiş*) ...and especially if your husband expects that...even if you resist because of your pride, another voice in you keeps telling you, “He is right expecting that from you. You should cook and clean.” It takes a lot of time and effort to silence that voice. Because even if we say that we reject those responsibilities, emotionally we are not that detached from them ...

What Demet seems to experience here is a bitter realization of the collapse of her assumed identity that has been constructed in opposition to ‘being a housewife’ since her childhood. In this moment of her admission that her “inner voice” tells her that housework is indeed her responsibility, and that she feels that it is somehow inscribed in her, Demet realizes that she feels powerless against this experience. She resists through her intellect and her pride, which both say she is a modern, independent woman, but she

surrenders to her “inner voice” that keeps saying that housework is her job. She continued:

And...I am a woman who experiences this dilemma in a very minor way, because my mother has never been one of those self-effacing, sacrificing housewives (*hiç bir zaman için vefakar ve cefakar ev kadını olmadı*), she has always had her own life. She’s never become that Turkish woman who sacrifices herself for others (*kendini paralayın, fedakar, saçını süpürge eden Türk kadını olmadı*). When she needed a break from us, she didn’t mind saying “Go take care of it yourself” (*Yeri geldi ‘hadi len’ dedi*) [a somewhat coarse phrase]. I grew up seeing this...Despite this, when you enter your own house, you understand that those ideas are somehow embedded in you (*içine işlemiş*).

Demet attempts to relate her experience to other women of her generation, and differentiates herself from them at the same time, suggesting that she must be one of the few who experience this at a minor level because her mother has never been a traditional housewife. If she is experiencing distress at this level, imagine how it must be for other women whose mothers are “typical housewives”. As she explained how socialization shapes men’s expectations of their wives to be good housewives, she also tried to do the same for herself, to explain her unexpectedly emerging “inner voice” that tells her to be that woman. However, she cannot fully embrace this position either, because she has already said several times that she was not raised to be a housewife and that she was not a “motherly” person. So in her case she could only make sense of it by saying that it is “somehow” embedded in her.

The source of these women's frustrations and disappointments is the unexpectedness of the defensive position in which they find themselves, one which negates their (assumed/desired) identity as modern and independent working women, and 'reduces' them into 'housewives' at their husbands' whim. Their husbands' more traditional demands and expectations put these women in a position for which they simply were not prepared. Their narratives indicate that they did not expect to find themselves defending or protecting the sense of self-assurance and empowerment that have been in formulation since their childhood. Despite the Republic's promises of 'gender equality' and their own experiences of relative social and sexual freedom during their early youth, the women of Generation 1980 now find themselves feeling betrayed by society as well as by themselves for not living up to those promises.

The unexpectedness of these experiences causes a sense of disconnect with their assumed/desired identity as modern women. I argue that these women's current experiences of self present a discontinuity, a rupture, between the sense of self they have been crafting since their early years and their contemporary sense of self as adult women. This unexpected experience of discontinuity has put women in a position in which they have to constantly negotiate with themselves and others about what kind of women they are and are supposed to be. In analyzing the above personal accounts, I show that these women continuously reflect on their lives, decisions and choices. The question of being independent, free, and modern are constantly tested and negotiated by women in Turkey in relation to other—real or imagined—women. Turning into their mothers (the self-sacrificing mother) and/or into traditional domestic housewife remains their largest concern.

In these women's narratives of how they perceive themselves in their marriages, the two mutually exclusive images of 'Turkish women' —'submissive/traditional' and 'independent/modern'—appeared as dominant archetypes. My informants carefully differentiate themselves from the 'submissive and traditional Turkish woman' and forcefully associate themselves with the 'modern and independent Turkish woman.' However, during the interviews, while telling the complex stories of their marriages and husbands, these women realized that they often either do not fully inhabit 'the modern woman' identity or caught themselves displaying 'the traditional woman' characteristics. As these female stereotypes represent mutually exclusive ideologies among the secular urban middle class, and while women strive to maintain their identity as 'modern women,' they frequently shifted among various subject positions as well as bent or even altered their self-image in attempt to continue to maintain a coherent self-identity.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Can Dündar, a highly respected Turkish journalist and researcher, discussed the “unhappy marriages” of young educated Turkish women in a commentary entitled, “Why Are the Women Who Are Graduates of Elite High Schools Unhappy?” (1996). He writes that his attention to this topic was inspired by the remarks made by the equally respected Turkish poet Atilla İlhan, in an interview with a popular women’s magazine, *Harper’s Bazaar*, who asserted that women who graduate from elite high schools are not happy in their marriages because their ideas about “happiness,” “marriage,” and “love” do not originate in Turkish society. Instead, they are Western ideas, learned at the elite schools. Women become disappointed when the men they thought “modern” end up being “feudal,” everything these women know about love, marriage, and life is “wrong” [in the Turkish society], which leaves them little solid ground to stand on in Turkey—they are “too much” for Turkey, but “not enough” for the West.

Dündar (1996) aims to provide a larger context to İlhan’s comments, framing the issue as an “identity crisis.” He explains that since modernization in Turkey did not develop as in the West, that is, as a “natural” consequence of capitalist dynamics, for Turkish people everything modern always remains “foreign.” Since the Ottoman Empire’s modernization reforms in the late nineteenth century, according to Dündar, Turkish modernization has been pursued in a patchwork fashion, becoming worse in every subsequent generation. Dündar states that as the “native” (the Eastern), who is not able to adjust to the “foreign” (the Western), keeps pulling us towards the East, we are squeezed between the two and dispersed from place to place, unable to belong to either

the East or the West. Of course, he continues, during this process of push and pull, those who get closest to the West (the ‘foreign’) are also those who fall furthest away from the East (the ‘native’). And that is why, Dündar concludes, when educated women marry Western-looking educated Turkish men, their disappointment is unavoidable, for men will eventually reveal their long-established Eastern tastes, as they rise from their “unconsciousness.”

Both İlhan and Dündar belong to the modernist/Kemalist intelligentsia and represent a common perspective on the ‘homelessness’ of modern educated Turkish people, navigating between the West and the East. It is important to note that neither man explores why it is that women are ‘closer’ to the West than men, other than simply repeating taken-for-granted assumptions that men do not “digest” Western ideas regarding women’s rights and gender equality, and are guided by “Eastern tastes” submerged in their “unconsciousness.” Both men seem to be satisfied with their analyses’ despite essentializing differences between men and women in the context of West/East and modern/traditional dualities.

This perspective I found to be widely shared among my informants as well, expressed whenever they ran out of explanations for why their husbands or boyfriends, who were educated and seemed to be ‘modern,’ began showing the tendencies of a “typical Turkish man.” In 2003, seven years after İlhan’s and Dündar’s comments were published, a female journalist by the name of Esra Çapa—who belongs to Generation 1980 as defined in this dissertation, and is a graduate of an elite American high school—revisited İlhan’s interview in her column in *Hürriyet*, one of the largest Turkish daily

newspapers.⁴³ In her column, she recalls that when İlhan’s interview was published, *Esquire* magazine (a popular men’s magazine), where she then worked as a young reporter, sent her to interview İlhan. In her witty style of writing, Çapa describes how she was, at that time, opposed to İlhan’s comments, explaining that she naively used to believe in the possibility of compromise between the two genders. She now believes differently, and to make her point and to prove İlhan right, she shares a story about an ex-boyfriend who claimed he loved her but who tried to change her stubborn and assertive personality at every chance possible, and became increasingly frustrated when she did not put up with his demands. She recalls him saying, toward the end of their relationship, “What kind of a woman are you? Didn’t your mother teach you how to handle (*idare etmek*) a man?” She writes that her jaw dropped when she heard these words come out of his mouth, and describes feeling like she was seeing him—this person she thought she knew—as if for the first time. She tells the reader that she was unable to comprehend how an adult man, someone she liked and respected, was not only in need of being “handled” but also was able to say this out loud without any embarrassment.

Çapa’s disbelief upon hearing her ex-boyfriend’s comments and the unexpectedness of this exchange for her is very similar to stories shared by my informants Demet and Selin, and several other women I talked with during the research. Like my informants, Çapa does not (or cannot) offer an explanation as to why her ex-boyfriend expected her to be more agreeable, and to “handle” him, and why he could not accept her strong personality, other than alluding to İlhan’s comments that somehow men despite their education remain Eastern/patriarchal.

⁴³ Ebru Çapa, “Pantolonlu Muhalefet,” *Hürriyet*, September 21, 2003.

In this dissertation, I argue that during their youth, women of Generation 1980 were convinced that they were unquestionably ‘modern and independent’ by a combination of the Kemalist rhetoric of gender equality, as it continued to be reproduced by powerful agents of socialization (Arat 1997), the schools; their parents’ strong support for their education; and the rapid social changes of the 1980s that increased their sense of freedom (Tekeli 1991). The constellation of these social and familial contexts in which women of Generation 1980 grew up has led to the formation of a particular cohort of women with a distinct subjectivity, which I have called “self-assured.”

On the other hand, women’s narratives reveal that, as Çapa’s reflection on her exchange with her ex-boyfriend also indicates, when women find themselves in situations, relationships, and interactions that challenge or negate their assumed identity as ‘modern and independent’ women, they find themselves unprepared, lacking the emotional and practical tools to respond and adjust to these unexpected experiences. The only available tool for them, legitimated in the larger Turkish society, is to understand these unexpected experiences within a dualistic framework that associates women with ‘modern’ and men with ‘traditional.’

Modern/Traditional

In order to understand the response of women of Generation 1980 to the gender inequality and sexism they experience, it is important to consider the dominance and pervasiveness of the Kemalist binary representation of women as either ‘modern/emancipated’ or ‘traditional/oppressed.’ In the context of Turkish modernity, in contrast with ‘modern Turkish women,’ who are educated and secular, living a Western

lifestyle, rural (uneducated) and veiled (Islamic) women are constructed as ‘the Other,’ and are perceived as victims of backward traditions and religious misinterpretations. In other words, in the Turkish political context, being modern is constructed in opposition to being rural and publicly or visibly religious.

This dominant ideology, I argue, does not leave any room for educated, secular women to perceive their own struggles as consequences of the existing patriarchy and gender hierarchy in Turkish society at large and within its institutions. My informants, in their accounts of women’s status in Turkey, uncritically reproduced the Kemalist discourse of gender equality and women’s rights, in which secular education and Western modernity are accepted as the necessary and sufficient conditions to achieve gender equality.

Growing up in middle-class families who were devoted to Kemalist principles, and attending secular schools where they were exposed to the Kemalist construction of the ‘modern Turkish woman’ in high dosages, the women of Generation 1980 were raised to believe they were modern and independent women, and therefore could not be categorized as traditional or oppressed. In this context, their conflicts with men could not be explained through their oppression either. In fact, it is almost inconceivable for women of Generation 1980 to even imagine that they could ever be discriminated against without first categorizing themselves as ‘oppressed women.’ Only then could men’s traditionalism explain the cause of these conflicts between genders.

Depoliticization/Feminism

While, on the one hand, the Kemalist binary does not leave any room for educated secular women to understand their struggles in terms of an institutionalized gender hierarchy, as they do not or cannot perceive themselves as ‘oppressed women,’ on the other hand, the systematic depoliticization of the public sphere in the 1980s severely interrupted the ability of women of Generation 1980 to associate themselves with any form of collective movement and resistance, including the feminist movement. This depoliticized social atmosphere after the coup prevented the women of Generation 1980 from fully identifying with the emerging feminist movement in the 1980s in Turkey and embracing it as part of their modern identity.

At an early age, women of Generation 1980 learned that politics in Turkey is corrupt and politicians are only concerned with their own personal interests. Their experience has led them to believe that social projects led by political activism are doomed to fail. Having been raised by parents who went through at least two decades of violence, they learned, simply put, not to get involved and to look the other way. My informants’ avoidance of the feminist movement indicates the continuing strong stigma on political activism.

In the post-1980 era, as national identities and social movements largely lost their appeal for the younger generations, as Neyzi (2001) shows, youth groups in Turkey, like their counterparts in the rest of the world, turned to identity politics and grassroots movements that spoke to their unique issues. I argue that the combined effects of the depoliticization after the military coup, and the emerging of identity politics as an alternative have left the women of Generation 1980, who never saw themselves as

marginalized or discriminated against, with no motivation to become involved in feminist politics. For the women of Generation 1980, feminism was about rescuing ‘other’ women who, unlike them, live under oppressive conditions created by ‘backward’ men and ‘traditions.’

Resistance

One of my goals for this dissertation is to show that although women of Generation 1980 did not act as a homogenous group or claim a feminist mantle, as a generational cohort their individual fights at home and their strategies to resist gendered social expectations have pushed the rigid social boundaries of conventional gender and sexual norms. I argue that their private resistance to patriarchy as well as their imperfect strategies to construct themselves as ‘modern women’—which often reproduce the gendered power structure rather than reject it—need to be understood in the context of Turkey’s history of modernization and its recent history of political movements.

The cohort of women of Generation 1980 is not the first to receive parental support and encouragement for a good education. They are also not the first generation to attend secular schools with curriculum shaped by the dominant Kemalist discourse of modernity and gender equality. Nor are they the first to benefit from the legal recognition of women as equals to men, or the first to break into the professional world. The mothers’ and grandmothers’ generations had similar class privileges and opportunities (Kandiyoti 1977). What is distinctive about the women of Generation 1980 is that they constitute the first generational cohort that not only utilizes the rights and the privileges their social and class position has provided them, but also displays the emotional (psychological)

readiness to break away from gender and sexual norms and actually experience a sense of empowerment as modern women. These women's daily fights (whether subtle or overt) with their parents in their early youth to increase their social and sexual freedom have had a long-term influence on their perception of themselves as 'modern and independent women,' empowering them to strive to assert their equal status at home and at work, and to make their presence accepted on the streets of Istanbul.

Although most of my informants' resistance occurred in the form of individual acts and at home against their fathers, they should not be reduced to 'typical teen behavior,' rebelling against parents and society. I argue that their efforts challenged social expectations of an 'obedient daughter' and conservative sexual morality. In a different but comparable context, Kelsky (2001) argues that young educated Japanese women's resistance to patriarchy can be found in individual women's daily rejection of the "hostility and pressure of an uncomprehending community, family and friends," rather than in a Western-style collective movement aiming at larger social change (p. 224).

My informants' stories of coming of age and their memories of the social events and changes that have come to characterize the 1980s and the 1990s suggest that women of Generation 1980 resisted—mostly through intuition, improvisation, and emulation yet with conviction—the moral, social, and sexual restrictions on young unmarried women's 'appropriate behavior' and opened up a space for themselves by actively engaging in the changing urban culture in Istanbul with their friends and peers as a cohort.

This conviction, fostered by women's relatively successful and 'intentional' resistance to patriarchy, experienced in the form of their fathers' authority, their

conscious persistence in pushing the social norms restricting young women's sexuality, and their leisurely presence in urban space, I argue, has led to the cohort of women of Generation 1980 to be the first cohort of women who *actually* experience a sense of empowerment as modern Turkish women.

Agency, Identity and Self Experience

It is relatively easy to detect and depict my informants' agency, and to celebrate their active and conscious resistance to cultural norms that restrict them. They too claimed agency, as they were proud of their accomplishments. However, as I have shown, women also shied away from, if not actively refused to participate in, any form collective political act. More importantly, they often reproduced gender stereotypes and hierarchy both in work relationships and intimate relationships. Even though I was able to confirm through my interviews that women as a cohort participated in these acts of resistance, because they have not formulated a view that their individual struggles and resistance could be part of larger movement towards a structural change, the transformative power and empowering effect of their experiences remain precarious and unpredictable in the long run.

Women's narratives show that they faced the precarious nature of their empowerment as they began to find themselves living as young adults. In the interviews, the tone of women's narratives of self often switched from confidence and pride to hesitance and frustration, and were colored by contradictions. As I explain, women's frustration resulted from the *gap* they perceive between their previously constructed sense of selves and their contemporary experiences. Convinced that they are not

repeating their mothers' lives, and without a feminist point of view to look at their lives, women try to make sense of these experiences and sustain continuity in the formation of their sense of self. They do so by reproducing gender hierarchy, favoring so-called male qualities, and disparaging behaviors typically associated with women.

How then in these contexts is it possible to talk about women's agency without reducing their behaviors to strategic acts of to gain power? And how do we explain the varying responses among women; why, for example, do some women accept the gender hierarchy more readily, while others develop a firmer stand against it? Frank (2006) argues that a discussion of agency has to also examine individuals' motivations, and to ask: "what causes individuals to act in one way rather than another under similar conditions?" (p. 288).

Based on my analysis of women's narratives I argue that the central motivation for my informants during the course of building their professional careers and imagining their current and future married lives has been to *not to have the lives that their mothers had*. Women talked at length about how, since their childhood, their parents emphasized the importance of having a good education and achieving financial independence for their future as modern and independent women, and about how financial independence could have made their mothers happier in their marriages.

Although some of my informants told me that they were aware that women did not hold the key positions in corporations, and that there were only a few women owned their own businesses in certain sectors, they quickly dismissed these thoughts, and switched talking about their success at work. They all insisted that they were neither marginalized nor discriminated against based on gender. My observations and interviews

with women indicate that women feel invited into and embraced by the larger work culture, and do not feel that they have to behave in a way that would create a split in their persona between the professional and the private, as previous generations had reportedly experienced. I show that being part of a professional, respectful, and sociable work/office environment and being appreciated by their colleagues and bosses satisfies women's professional ambitions. Believing that they have surpassed their mothers' lives by having careers and achieving respect at work, women are able to maintain a coherent life narrative maintaining their self-assured subjectivity and hence do not pay attention to the potential larger structural inequalities based on gender that they themselves often reproduce.

On the other hand, in women's accounts of their contemporary relationships, particularly, when they talked about conflicts with boyfriends and husbands, women sounded ambiguous, indecisive, and resentful. They reported that, as I discussed in relation to the Turkish journalist Çapa's comments above, they could not believe when they found out that their boyfriends and husbands expected them to behave like 'typical housewives.' Women took these unexpected experiences, which negated their previously constructed selves, as attacks on the core of their identity.

As part of their response to these experiences, I argue, women referred to widely-shared, culturally-formed cognitive schemas such as "housewife," "modern woman," "oppressed woman," "typical Turkish man," or "egalitarian marriage" in their narratives, and linked them to salient memories in order to make sense of their contemporary experiences. During this process, each woman handled her frustration differently, in relation to her particular experiences, and presented solutions unique to her case. Yet as a

cohort, women of Generation 1980 share a common history through which they make sense of their experiences, and in the context of a society that is patriarchal at every level, including Turkey's urban, middle-class professional and educated circles.

I demonstrate in this dissertation that women of Generation 1980 are not yearning to have modern lives, which they have only been exposed to through education, media, or consumerism (Hirsch 2003; Kelsky 2001; Roefel 1999). Neither do they struggle with religious conservative morality, as is the case in much of the literature on gender and sexuality in Middle Eastern and other Islamic societies. They do not expressed any sense of alienation or desire to leave Turkey, unlike Kelsky's informants in Japan (2001). Women of Generation 1980 strive to live their lives in accordance with what they have been promised and taught, and, more importantly, as they began enjoying, that is, as modern and independent women. These women, today, are trying to figure out how to make sense of their new and unexpected experiences and maintain a coherent sense of self. I argue that to understand and analyze the agency of these women requires not only cultural and social explanations, but also an exploration of the inner conflicts and motivations that have formed and reconfigured throughout their lives, in the context of changing relationships between the self and the other.

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