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New Desires, New Selves: Love, Sex, and Piety Among Turkish Youth

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New Desires, New Selves

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Gul Ozyegin
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Introduction

During the last three decades, dramatic social and political changes in Turkey have introduced historical shifts in national, religious, and gender and sexual identities. The transformation from state-controlled capitalism to a privatized and liberalized market economy within the context of Islamization, neoliberal globalization, and Turkey's bid to join the European Union has altered the ways in which personal and collective identities are defined. These changes are perhaps most pronounced among young people. *New Desires, New Selves* examines the constitution of gender and sexual identities among upwardly mobile young adults born amid the societal changes of the 1980s. It links individual biographies with the "biography" of a nation, elaborating their interconnections in the creation of new selves in a country that has existed uneasily between West and East, modern and traditional, secular and Islamic.

At present, the driving force behind most projects of neoliberal globalization in virtually every country, including Europe and the United States, is the production of the presupposed neoliberal subject centered on the ideals of entrepreneurial freedom, self-invention, autonomy, and self-realization (Bourdieu 1998; Harvey 2005). The complex social, psychological, and material processes that collectively help form the neoliberal subject now occupy the research agendas of a growing number of scholars. In that framework, this book offers the voices of eighty-seven young Turks who represent diverse paths of social mobility and identity making. More than any prior generation in Turkish society, these educationally advantaged youth (between eighteen and twenty-four years old) see themselves as individuals with the ability to create and enact their own identities and relationships. They are not only intensely subjected to neoliberal images, ideologies, and institutions but also have the ability to appropriate, reject, or reshape the ethos of neoliberalism in many contexts. However, *New Desires, New Selves* also complicates the chal-
lenges of this theoretical moment. By shedding light on the intimate and complex—and at times contradictory—processes by which the neoliberal subject is produced, this book suggests that the apparent inevitability of neoliberal subjectivity, and indeed its global ubiquity, should not blind us to historicity and cultural specificity and its roots in social as well as gender and sexual relations.

Over the last two decades, virtually every debate on neoliberal globalization has centered on the same core question: Is neoliberal globalization, with its power to breach culturally specific sources of identity boundaries, securing global homogeneity or creating a world of hybridized/fused identities? The most recent literature on globalization has acknowledged and used rich empirical research to evidence how, in many different cultural contexts, globalization is actively constructed rather than passively received. As Carla Freeman (2010) has suggested, because "globalization itself is imbricated within cultural forms and meanings," we should examine how the global operates "in and through the stickiness and particularities of culture" rather than viewing globalization as a singular and homogenizing force that "operates outside the fabric of culture" (578). Conceptualizations such as Freeman's also invite us to historicize our studies of the local while paying attention to both the continuities of cultural ideas and the ruptures caused by globalization, urging us to see the deep structures of culture as capable of containing and exhibiting contradictions.

A pivotal cultural particularity in the production of the self in Turkey can be found in the notion of connectivity. Building on Suad Joseph's (1993, 1994, 1999) notion of connectivity—a model of selfhood rooted in fluidity that serves as an alternative to the (Western) model of the autonomous, bounded self—I argue that this cultural specificity assumes a special potency in Turkey. This setting supports the production of selves "who invite, require and initiate involvement with others in the shaping of the self" (Joseph 1993, 468). This paradigm of identity formation suggests that connective persons "[come] to see [themselves] as part of another" so concretely that their sense of completion and "security, identity, integrity, dignity, and self-worth . . . [are] tied to the actions of [that person]" (Joseph 1994, 55).

While connectivity does not exclude the possibility that individuals understand themselves through the language of autonomy, it is the con-
nective self that is most desired. In societies such as Turkey, the key component of selfhood is a relational experience with members of one’s family. How can we understand the formation of the neoliberal subject, who understands himself or herself on individual terms and as capable of and responsible for self-invention, in relation to this paradigm of the production of relational selves? Examination of this fundamental question through the critical lenses of gender and sexuality lies at the heart of New Desires, New Selves. I historicize my study of the national while paying attention to the specific social structural conditions and psychodynamic processes that continue to (re)cultivate connectivity, especially in view of the ruptures caused by Islamization and neoliberal globalization in Turkey. New Desires, New Selves thus invites unique readings of the production of neoliberal selves in a deeply patriarchal and paternalistic society.

At the center of this book lies an exploration of a “fractured desire.” Young Turks on the path toward upward mobility embody and hold profound tension—a fractured desire. On the one hand, there is the desire to surrender to the seduction of sexual modernity, to renounce the normative model of selfless femininity and protective masculinity, and to reject power and authority located external to the individual. On the other hand, there is the longing to remain loyal and organically connected to social relations, identities, and histories that underwrite the construction of identity through connectivity. The young men and women of this book experience these contradictions in different ways, depending on gender- and class-based affiliations of privilege and vulnerability as well as provincial and urban origins. This book foregrounds this central tension in the particular biographies of young women and men with different class, religious, and sexual-orientation identifications. Through their narratives, I examine the specific ways this tension is expressed, escaped, problematized, and resolved.

Positioned within the backdrop of larger national and global transformations, the narratives of these young women and men constitute a uniquely rich site for complicating our theorization of the self and its relations to others and society. Narratives of romance and sex serve as the primary source for this book. I view this realm as a primary context within which new ideals of love and management of emotion, affect, and sexual desire are negotiated and tested. Young men and women making
a place and identity for themselves participate in sexual communication and the market of "free emotions" (Luhmann 1986), where they orient, form, and manage their emotions, bodies, and desires and relate to others and themselves.

It is within the physical and discursive spaces of romance and sex that neoliberal subjectivity is actively cultivated, advanced, validated, or rejected. But it is not sexual selves alone that are in the process of being made, for the domain of romance and sexuality is also a space in which class aspirations are disciplined and regulated. These are the grounds upon which new gendered class aspirations operate, as a means of measuring, monitoring, and signaling one's social position to others and of differentiating and marking masculine and feminine identities. This domain and the relationships within it, often experienced as a realm of uncertainty and a source of anxiety, paradoxically offer a clear lens through which we can understand the forging of neoliberal selfhood and its intimate connections to gender, sexuality, and class. Within a societal context of rising neoliberal demands of self-regulation and realization, we see a shift in emphasis from external social controls to self-control.

I explore these theoretical questions empirically through the narratives of eighty-seven upwardly mobile young adults interviewed between 2002 and 2006 in Istanbul. Although they all share a strong sense of distinction through educational success, the young women and men in this book represent the most salient differences among this generation of upwardly mobile youth. They include those with provincial backgrounds who were raised in the sexually repressive rural communities of Anatolia as well as those who grew up in Istanbul and other metropolitan cities. They are also a diverse group along class lines. Class origin—along with religious devotion and sexual orientation—is a critical lens on gender and sexual transformation. In this book, I highlight both differences and commonality in order to escape the confines of a universalized understanding of neoliberal personhood.

I recruited my study's participants from Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Established in 1863 as an American college, Boğaziçi University is one of the most prestigious public universities in Turkey, with the most rigorous admissions requirements. An elite institution, it offers its students an avenue for upward social and economic mobility but also
brings together students with vastly different biographies. In addition to in-depth interviews, three other sources of field data—a representative survey, participant observation, and focus group research—form the empirical foundation of this study. Between September 2002 and June 2003, I surveyed a representative sample of 360 students and conducted five focus group discussions.

This book is about multiple façades in the pursuit of new desires, the way façades enter the process of self-making at crucial moments of liminality, and the moments of their creation and assembly. The concept of façades suggests convergences: they can be a form of deception, a barrier, a form of protection, and a liberating means by which to claim a new/different self/identity. The conjuncture of façades occurs in different domains: when secular young women forsake virgin identities but put on ambiguous identities; when pious women are compelled to enter the university with secular appearances, masquerading as secularly Muslim; when gay men’s same-sex desires become “open secrets” but they remain “secret subjects”; and when young heterosexual men carry the outward signs of escape from patriarchal constructions of masculinity as controlling and dominant while exercising gender domination. One of the key arguments of this book is that investing in façades is a collaborative and collective act; not only the subjects of this book but also previous generations and institutions are invested in it. As a theoretical construct, the façade’s capacity to elucidate lies in its illumination of the lived contradictions at the intersections/breaches that are opened between long-term cultural legacies and demands and individual desires in a complex and increasingly pluralistic society. This conception of façades is thus a common thread across the different chapters. In each chapter, façade articulates the challenges of constructing new selves. Façades provide resistance, and repudiation, and can offer access to feelings, identities, and experiences whose pursuits give individuals agency. They also permit enactments of rituals of conformity, connectivity, and continuity. Through façades, denied and prohibited desires are brought within the realm of the knowable and may be realized. Individuals are allowed to find pleasures even as the collective fiction of a prohibitive gender and sexual order is preserved, and the boundaries of permitted and prohibited are reiterated while simultaneously redrawn in the creation of a new gender and sexual order.
The four subgroups (heterosexually identified women, heterosexually identified men, pious women, and gay-identified men) who are subjects of the substantive chapters are embedded in a range of personal and familial histories and are located in—and speak from—different and overlapping experiences, each bringing different analytical dimensions to the book as well as serving as interacting frames. I should note that two other important subgroups are not covered in this book: pious young men (who refused to be interviewed due to my topic) and lesbians, except Alev, whose story forms one of the vignettes. (I interviewed six lesbians, but my interview tapes with four of them were damaged beyond repair while going through airport security.) A unique feature of *New Desires, New Selves* is the presentation of four vignettes offering biographical particularities, accompanying and enhancing the four chapters of the book. These short sections feature a young lesbian feminist who voices her self-transformation from an adolescent self “carrying a man’s soul stranded in a woman’s body” to a lesbian self as well as a key shift in her object of same-sex desire from a figure of the flamboyant femme to a figure of androgyny; a young man from a rural background who expresses an underrepresented class subjectivity by rejecting the exclusivity of urban middle-classness; a pious woman who possesses double cultural capital through her Islamic and secular education and contests the sanctioned boundary between private religion and public secularism; and a group interview with three gay men who transgress both the mainstream and the Western ways of imagining homosexual identity. In presenting these biographies, my aim is to reemphasize the emergence of a plurality of assertive self-definitions and their contradictory meanings and effects in a Muslim country as it continues to struggle to recraft its national identity.

Transformations: Turkish Identity in Question

Modern Turkish national identity has always been characterized by an uneasy in-betweenness of West and East, modern and traditional, secular and Islamic. But over the last twenty years, Turkey has reached a critical crossroads, and as Kasaba and Bozdogan (2000) succinctly note, “it is no longer possible to detect a consensus regarding modern Turkish identity” (12). A convergence of several forces has given rise to
major transformations in Turkish society: the declining power of the paternalistic Turkish state and its institutions in organizing and regulating economic and cultural life; the growing power of Islamic politics in defining the Turkish Republic and the increasing Islamization of the public sphere; the country’s relatively late but growing and intense participation in the neoglobal economic order that has created a vastly liberalized economy and culture in Turkey; and Turkey’s bid to join the European Union (EU). (Turkey became an EU candidate country in 1999, and the EU accession process involves bringing the country’s legal, political, and economic structures into alignment with EU standards.)

Within this general context of transformations, important societal shifts have taken place. These multilayered social and economic changes have opened new paths of social differentiation and diversity in Turkish society. In the following pages I trace key societal changes that have brought about many uncertainties in social and political life and fractured Turkish society along secular and Muslim lines. There is an overwhelming sense that the ground has shifted. The historical background of dynamic destabilization during the formative years of the subjects of this book is crucial for understanding the contestation of the monolithic, secularly Muslim Turkish identity and, particularly, for understanding the specific conditions for, and operations of, self-making in Turkey today.

De-Islamization

Secularism was the most important component of the founding of the modern Turkish state in 1923, a process that strove to create a modern, Westernized nation-state in a predominantly Muslim, rural country. The early Republicans implemented a series of secularizing measures that went beyond mere separation of religion and the state with the aim of controlling and regulating religion in the private realm. These reforms were meant to undermine the basic Islamic way of life that formed the legal basis of the Ottoman state (Tekeli 1981). The new regime annulled the religious legal framework that was based on the Shariat (Islamic law), and all religious schools were closed. Religious institutions and Islamic education were linked to the state bureaucracy through a Directorate of Religious Affairs. Later, the state opened vocational schools,
called "Imam-Hatip," in order to train religious personnel (Imams, prayer leaders). Thus, the state controlled the training of all religious officers and personnel, regulated the dissemination of religious norms, and controlled the production of theological knowledge. Religion was made subservient to the state.

Characterized by the state's active role in excluding religion from public areas and cultivating private religiosity, this form of secularism is referred to as "laicism" (national secularism) (White 2002) or "assertive secularism" (Kuru 2009). It is important to note that this form of radical secularism is quite different from the American form (Adrian 2006). Jefferson's "Wall of Separation between Church and State," which exemplifies "passive secularism" (Kuru 2009), was designed to protect the state from religious intrusion and to protect religion from government interference. In contrast, scholars note that Turkey's form of secularism is about "the sign of power and the authority" of the state (Yerginar 2000, 36) and "a particular production of religion that justifies the existence of secularism" (Cinar 2008, 896; also see Asad 2003). This concept of secularism in Turkey (and France) generates problems in the public expression of religiosity: it runs against state-sanctioned religious practice.

This understanding of the public sphere as secular and modern is critical to understanding the relationship between gender constructions and the nation-building process, allowing us to comprehend why the headscarves worn by university students are today considered a threat to Turkish notions of modernity and secularism. As a focus of the radical secularist and Westernist program, the new Turkish woman represented the ideals of the West and the rejection of an Ottoman past and Islam. It has been noted that in Turkey, "women's corporal visibility and citizenship rights constitute the political stakes around which the public sphere is defined" (Göle 1997a, 6). During the nation-building process in Turkey, the contours of the public sphere were drawn "in relation to norms of secularism and modernity by the forging and display of new gender identities, especially through regulations on clothing and the appearance of women" (Cinar 2008, 891). In particular, women participating in the public sphere by shedding their veils became symbolic of their liberation from the restrictive traditional religion and the backwardness of the private sphere. Public representations of new Turkish women as
representing the nation-state's modernity as well as secular identities through their modern, Westernized attire achieved the overriding goal of obliterating Islamic visibility.

However, this radical secularization of the public sphere was complex because “women are included in public if only as a subordinate to the state's rationale” (Kandiyoti 1991, 430) in a country where the overwhelming majority of women were rural. Indeed, the sweeping reforms of the early twentieth century generated a public sphere marked by a hegemonic secular trajectory and identity. Turkish interpretations of Western modernity were produced by a binary opposition to Islamic practices, which were deemed uncivilized, backward, rural, uneducated, obstructionist, and indicative of the lower classes. The Western definition of modernity was officially disseminated through state, educational, political, and economic institutions. It materialized in new civil laws and the adaptation of modern marriages, Western time and metric measurements, Western clothing, and the Western alphabet. The modernist elites imposed a regimen that would ideally result in “civilization,” defined as the emulation of Western (superior) practices and the elimination of their own “barbarians” (Muslims) (Göle 1997b). The infiltration of modernity superimposed a hierarchy in which European practices, like dancing, shaking hands, and writing left to right, were deemed superior to Turkish-Islamic practices.

Until the mid-1980s, the popular conception of the modern Turkish state as an authoritarian protector of the populace made this secularism and modernity a success. It also produced a form of religious identity among secularized Turks who defined themselves as sincere and good Muslims, even though they didn’t adhere rigidly to the rituals of Islam. After the military coup of 1980 and the inauguration of neoliberal market liberalization and global integration starting in 1984, Turkey came to a new opening, creating an active space for renegotiating the relationship among Islam, secularism, and modernity.

Islamization

The 1980 military coup was aimed at stopping the increasing violence between the Left and Right and curtailing the growing leftist movement of the 1970s. Defining its main objective as the creation of a new
national culture, the military regime (1980–1983) “utilized Islam not only as antidote to communist movements, but also a resource to mould a more obedient generation” (Yavuz and Esposito 2003, xxv; see also Atasoy 2005). For the first time in modern Turkish history, the military, the guardian of secularism in Turkey, actively encouraged religious education (Mardin 2006). The new 1982 constitution made religious courses compulsory in primary schools, middle-level high schools, and high schools (lise), except in military schools. A later law allowed graduates of religious high schools—the İmam-Hatip schools—to take the centralized university entrance examinations. This transformed vocational İmam-Hatip schools, originally established to train religious personnel, into alternative high schools and opened the path for their graduates to attend universities. Although the state continued to control the curriculum of these schools, their numbers increased tremendously. According to Atasoy (2005), “the ratio of İmam-Hatip school students to official general high school students increased from a ratio of one to 37 in the 1965–1966 academic year to one to ten in the 1985–1986 academic year” (144). This shift has resulted in an increased number of religiously educated students, often with rural and lower-class backgrounds, entering universities and studying to become professionals. Although there is no concept of female clergy in Islam, one-sixth of students in these schools were girls in that time period. The number of Koran Schools, another important source of Islamic education, also started mushrooming in the mid-1980s. The beginning of the expansion of Islamic activism and the resurfacing of Islam in public life also included the resurfacing of religious Sufi lodges and orders that had been outlawed during the early years of the Republic, some of which started financing the educations of underprivileged youngsters.

All of these developments in education, including the increased privatization of educational provisions at all levels, contributed centrally to the emergence of a new religiously conscious group within the professional middle classes (Arat 2001; Ozdalga 1998). The new educational system has changed class structures, particularly the trajectory of social mobility and the class reproduction of the religiously conscious segment of the population. During the 1990s, a strong Islamist movement among university students marked the political landscape, including female students protesting for the right to wear headcoverings. Sit-ins, demonstra-
tions, and hunger strikes placed covered women in the spotlight (Keskin 2002).

The reconfiguration of “national culture” and the new 1982 constitution under the military dictatorship were followed by other transformations. Turkey started its integration with the global economy and began the mass privatization of the state-centered economy, education, and media. Although the new constitution restricted civil liberties, the vast liberalization of the economy within the context of globalization and European integration and the subsequent market-generated cultural forms increased freedom of expression. New and old identity-based groups and organizations, such as feminists, LGBT groups, ethnic rights groups (chief among them the Kurdish), and human rights groups emerged and diversified, constituting a vibrant civil society (Neyzi 2001; Seckinelgin 2006). Pro-Islamic parties were established and won elections, giving the force of legitimacy to Islamic lifestyles, although the secularist courts closed these parties several times. A variety of other complex social and political dynamics contributed to this expansion of Islamic visibility, including the mass migration of rural dwellers to major cities, where they became the targets of pro-Islamic grass-roots efforts. These efforts, in turn, “became the locus of the struggle between political Islam and secular Kemalism” (Kadioglu 1998, 13).

The Islamic media has greatly contributed to this increasing Islamization of the public sphere. The relaxation of controls on the media and publishing has permitted the proliferation of Islamic TV stations, newspapers, journals, and publishing houses. Extensive access to Islamic media has constituted the main public discursive framework within which women and men have identified their own Islamic identities. The amount of Islamic youth-oriented literature has vastly increased, helping to integrate and authenticate young people’s religious identity. This, together with youth-oriented music and other forms of cultural expressions, has triggered the evolution of the modern Islamic youth: intellectual, well read, ambitious, and socially conscious, these young people are no longer burdened by an inferiority complex in relationship to the West and their secular peers (Saktanber 2002c).

In the late 1980s, the public sphere expanded to accommodate Islamic consumption and leisure and became a major locus of Islamic identities. Members of the rapidly growing Islamic middle class emerged as
modern consumers, and an Islamic service sector emerged to cater specifically to them. For example, “Islamicized” leisure time is characterized by segregated beaches, nonalcoholic bars, and respect for prayer hours (Göle 2000). An Islamic fashion culture has flourished, and the wardrobes of urban Islamic women are now full of variety (Kilicbay and Mutlu 2002). Islamic firms manufacture clothing (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Gökarslan and Secor 2010) on a continuum from the flamboyant styles adopted by well-to-do Islamic women, dubbed by some as “Islamic chic” (White 1999), to the restrained, simple (sade) styles adopted by pious women engaged in a critique of capitalist consumerism.

Consumer culture and class-based hierarchies among pious women have problematized Islamic self-expression as women manipulate their external appearance in their struggle with the paradox of being “new Muslim women.” Access to communication, media, fashion, and technologies allows the new middle-class, pious Islamist woman to “circulate among different publics with ease” (Göle 2003, 822). By integrating two cultural codes—Islam and modernity—these women occupy a very conspicuous position in public life. Furthermore, these covered women’s adoption of the symbols of modernity reduces the social distance between them and the secular elites (Göle 2003).

The increasing commodification of the Islamic way of life has given rise to a new Islamic individualism embodied by educated, headscarved women in the big cities. In contrast to the localized, confined, isolated Islamic identities of the 1970s and 1980s, this new Islamic individualism is blurring the distinction between religious/traditional and secular/modern. It breaks the headscarf’s association with ignorance and tradition while signaling its own distance from Islamic fundamentalism and anticonsumerism. Some scholars conclude that “being modern in Turkey is no longer associated with being ‘secular.’” And neither is it “restricted to the narrow definition of western” (Genel and Karaosmanoglu 2006, 478).

Post-Islamism?

Since the 1990s, Islamism in Turkey has proven to be divergent, multifaceted, and ever changing. Support for the establishment of an Islamic state in Turkey has declined. Indeed, it has been estimated that “the ratio
of people who said they want an Islamic state decreased from around 20 percent throughout the 1990s to 9 percent in 2009” (Carkoglu and Toprak 2006, qtd. in Tugal 2009).

While scholarship produced on Islamic revivalism and visibility during the 1990s was marked by the term “Islamist” (Islamci) to denote connection to political and revolutionary Islamic identities, the post-2000 literature has been devoid of such vocabulary. Instead, the term “post-Islamism” received significant scholarly and political attention. Cihan Tugal (2009) conceptualizes this transition from Islamism to post-Islamism in terms of Gramsci as a passive revolution “as a result of which erstwhile radicals and their followers are brought into the fold of neoliberalism, secularism, and Western domination” (4). Since they came to power with a landslide victory in the 2002 election and repeated similar victories in 2007 and 2011, the AKP (the Justice and Development Party, with links to a banned Islamist movement and political party) has pursued a liberal agenda with a pro-European Union and pro-human rights discourse. As the AKP consolidated its power, it drastically reduced the power of the military, seen in Turkey as the champion and guardian of secularism against religious fundamentalism, and a bulwark against Kurdish separatism.

Turkey today has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world (with an annualized growth rate of 12 percent in the first quarter of 2010), even in the face of global financial crises, as well as a growing regional influence. The last two decades have seen a dramatic turn from a state-centered economy to a neoliberal order. The massive privatization of key sectors has changed class structure and mobility; created new forms of employment demanding less fixed, more mobile, and more adaptable work; created new sources of wealth; expanded suburbanization; and opened up new public spaces for leisure consumption. The discrepancies in access to the material benefits of neoliberal globalization have given rise to “unprecedented fragmentation and polarization within the middle classes” (Kandiyoti 2002, 7). This fragmentation has created a new poor among the salaried classes, while members of multinational firms, the private sector, and corporate elites have become increasingly affluent.

A recent edited volume (Dedeoğlu and Elveren 2012) presents an empirical assessment of the effects on women and gender relations of the
intersections of neoliberal economic and social policies, the conservative agenda of political Islam, and the EU accession process. The emerging broader picture is bleak: the effects of the AKP’s reform of the welfare system, social security, health insurance, and the pension system, which entailed a high degree of marketization and privatization, have created new vulnerabilities and disadvantages for women. The dismantling of the paternalistic welfare state theoretically results in the recognition of women as independent individuals and citizens, yet the patriarchal constructions of women as dependents are reproduced on the ground in complex ways with different implications for different classes of women.

Historically, the Turkish welfare system has been structured around a patriarchal male-breadwinner family norm in which women’s dependence on male protection formed a vital source of security for them. For instance, most women benefited from social security on the basis of their dependent relationship with men, as fathers or husbands. This has traditionally created a system of social transfers positively discriminatory to women without male protection: widowed women had access to lifelong social security benefits through deceased husbands, and unmarried daughters had this access as orphans. Similarly, women were entitled to lifelong health benefits through their insured fathers and husbands. Such access structurally discourages women’s formal labor force participation as well as reinforces traditional gender roles, particularly the valorization of motherhood and caregiving as women’s central roles and identities in society. It is striking that today the vast majority (62.5 percent) of working-age women in Turkey do not have any personal income as opposed to only a minority (5.4 percent) of men (Dayıoğlu and Başlevent 2012).

The AKP’s reform of the welfare system was instigated by gender-neutral neoliberal policies, with an emphasis on the privatization of the benefits systems. The reforms eliminated women’s privileged access to social transfers. However, the care provision for children and the elderly has not been addressed, leaving care arrangements in the private sphere as women’s responsibility. This dismantling is increasing women’s vulnerability to economic and social risks precisely because there is another dynamic at play: women’s decreasing participation in the formal sector of the labor force and their growing concentration in the informal sector, which more than ever is making women dependent on their fathers’
or husbands’ social security. Furthermore, neoliberal policies replaced state-based modes of social aid and services with Islamic traditions of charity (Buğra 2012), “making religious communities key actors at the grass-roots level in the provision of poverty relief and new forms of social solidarity” (Kandiyoti 2011; also see Buğra 2012).

The specific macroeconomic policies of neoliberalism in Turkey are characterized by economists as “growth without employment” and male predominance in new jobs. Between 1988 and 2007, “the number of people of working age increased by 19 million while the increase in employment remained at 5 million. Of this total figure, 4.5 million are males” (Toksoz 2012, 55). These figures alone powerfully testify to the gendered implications of the Turkish brand of neoliberalism and its inability (by design) to pull women into the formal labor market. Not only does a substantial sex gap remain between men’s and women’s labor force participation, but women’s labor force participation has declined between 1988 and 2007 from 34.3 percent to 24.4 percent. Furthermore, the employment rate of women fell from 30.6 percent to 21.7 percent in the same period (Toksoz 2012, 55). While the number of women employed in manufacturing showed a meager increase, their employment in the rapidly growing service sector (wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels) grew about threefold in the last two decades. Researchers point out a key structuring force in these trends: the absence of direct foreign capital investment in industry in Turkey, which has translated into limited demand for female labor in labor-intensive manufacturing.

In Turkey, rather than foreign capital being used in direct, new investments, a considerable part of foreign capital has gone to the purchase of newly privatized public enterprises and banks. This is accompanied by the government’s mass construction projects aimed at creating and renovating the country’s infrastructure and converting previously public land for the purpose of building shopping malls that sell international brand names. This injection of foreign capital into the economy has created job opportunities for the well-educated middle classes in finance and business services, product design, retail management, the professions, and creative industries. A growing service economy with less well-paid and less secure jobs supports this emerging well-paid middle class. Informal economic activities in Turkey, the lower echelons of which are dominated by women, have gained further importance as the public
sector has withdrawn from the economy and subcontracting and outsourcing have become the norm in both public and private enterprises. Employment in the informal sector means work without social security and a lack of protective legislation for working conditions. Governmental support for the further feminization of the informal sector can be also found in the most recent plan for the 2007–2013 period, designed by the present AKP government. This plan aims to promote and encourage flexible forms of employment for women, including part-time and temporary work and female entrepreneurship, types of work accorded the least protection, remuneration, and stability, but supposedly also enabling women to attend to their duties as mothers and wives at home.

Turkish Feminism

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey was the first Islamic country to transition to a secular state and was one of the first countries in the world where the political rights of women as citizens were recognized. During the early years of the Republic, as I explained above, women represented the crux of modernity as a focus of the radical Westernist and secularizing program of reform. The most important social reforms centered on women, sexuality, and family (Göle 1997a; Kandiyoti 1987). The new ideal woman embodied gender in a dual manner: as an “enlightened” mother in the private sphere and as a “masculinized” public actor (Kandiyoti 1995). The envisioned modern woman was joined with traditional essentialist conceptualizations of womanhood to create a virtuous, asexual, nationalistic mother. Turkish modernization did not eliminate the transcription of traditional virtues onto female bodies; it merely transfigured these bodies as both modern and chaste—the paradoxical performance of modern yet modest, publicly visible yet virtuous. Patriarchy, strongly fused with state and individual forms of paternalism, helped to solidify this gender consensus, despite its many lived contradictions. The emerging strong feminist movement in the 1980s, however, when the country was under the military dictatorship, questioned this normative gender and sexual order.

Modern Turkish feminism is characterized by a complex and complicated engagement with state feminism. Until the 1980s, the Republican consensus that the reforms of the founding fathers had emancipated
women and that there was no need for an independent women's move­ment remained uncontested. While attempting to carve out an inde­pendent political space vis-à-vis leftist political movements, the feminist activists of the 1980s based their politics on a rejection of the conceptu­alization of women as objects of paternalistic Republican reforms that “granted them their rights” and instead claimed subjecthood in their own lives (Sirman 1989; Arat 1997). The feminist movement initiated important changes in the civil and penal codes.

During the early 2000s, a strong feminist campaign within the con­text of the EU accession process resulted in gender-egalitarian legal and policy reforms that have granted women equal citizenship rights. The new civil code of 2001 equalized the status of husband and wife in the conjugal union by abolishing the concept of the head of family, establishing full equality with respect to rights over the family abode, marital property, divorce, child custody, and rights to work and travel. By di­viding property acquired during marriage equally, the new divorce law now recognizes women's unpaid labor contributions at home. The new penal code of 2005 recognized a woman's right to be the sole controller of her body. It reclassifies sexual crimes like rape as crimes against the individual rather than crimes against “public morality” or “community order.” And the discrimination between virgins and nonvirgins, married and unmarried women in sexual crimes was abolished. The new labor law of 2003 prohibited discriminatory practices based on a woman's marital status or family responsibilities, such as prohibiting dismissal on grounds of pregnancy, and included provisions prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace. The equalization of retirement ages at sixty-five (implementation planned for 2048) was another policy aimed at gender equality. These feminist legal victories are based on a particu­lar alignment of external and internal factors, chiefly EU conditions and women's groups. However, the disconnect between Turkey's progres­sive legislation and realities on the ground is glaringly enormous. Tur­key ranked 124th among 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap index generated by the World Economic Forum in 2009. Only Saudi Arabia, Benin, Pakistan, Chad, and Yemen ranked lower.

In Turkey, feminists have opened women's shelters and established significant institutions such as women's research centers, introduced women's/gender studies into university curricula, and called for a quota
system in Parliament. Building these institutions has allowed feminists to articulate and disseminate feminist discourses and enabled them to reach beyond their immediate circles. Issues such as virginity, honor killings, and domestic violence have been the main focus of feminist discourses and activism. In addition to mass demonstrations and public marches, the proliferation of feminist journals and magazines in the post-1980 period has not only ushered feminist issues, including women’s sexuality, into the public realm and consciousness but has also helped to develop multiple feminist lenses through which to interpret and interrogate popular culture and divisions among feminists on Islam (Arat 2004). However, feminists also have separated along two sharply defined principles: the reconciliation of feminism with Islam to promote a civil society that strengthens liberal democracy and the defense of secularism against Islamists (Arat 2001), an issue that I will discuss in detail in chapter 4.

A New Twist

Turkey’s profound transformation continues to unfold. The secularist section of Turkish society continues to be highly skeptical of the AKP’s post-Islamism. They strongly believe that the AKP’s hidden goal is the eradication of secularism and ultimately the imposition of Islamic law. Feminists meanwhile underscore the irony that post-Islamist men might have discarded the idea of creating an Islamic social order in Turkey but still have an undeclared Islamist agenda for women (Saktanber 2006). Given the AKP’s current determination to overhaul the constitution and the deterioration of the desire for EU membership within the Turkish public,² the reconfiguration of Turkey will be affected by multiple forces.

Indeed, in recent years, with the power conferred by its electoral mandate, the AKP has begun a more concerted, aggressive program of Islamization. The AKP’s decade-long, uncontested rule has cemented its control over state institutions and brought the infiltration of Islamist perspectives and personnel with religious identities into the state’s actions and decision-making processes, as well as the expansion of the capital accumulation power of religious businessmen (Narlı 1999; Göle 1997b; Öniş 1997).

The AKP’s radical revisioning of Turkey pivots around a central desire and mission expressed by Tayyip Erdoğan as “raising a pious genera-
This vision centers unblinkingly on gender and sexuality: “I do not believe in equal opportunities. Men and women are different and complementary.” As noted by Kandiyoti, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan’s view of the nature of gender expresses fitrat, “a tenet of Islam that attributes distinct and divinely ordained natures to men and women” (Kandiyoti 2011). Framed in distinctly gendered terms, the prime minister’s key emphasis is on the significance of maternal roles for women and the strengthening of traditional family structures and roles. The specific policy aspirations highlighted in his speeches are pro-natalist policies and schemes: restricting abortion rights; stress on the importance of mothers breast-feeding their babies for one and a half years; and women giving birth to at least three children. The project of injecting piousness into the public sphere targets girls’ and women’s bodies and includes some recent legislative attempts such as changing the dress code in schools to replace school uniforms with individually chosen outfits, thus allowing religiously conservative families to send their daughters to school in conservative outfits, including head coverings.

The prime minister considers drinking alcohol to be the mark of a “sick society,” and very recently the AKP government reregulated the distribution and sale of alcohol with the aim of limiting alcohol consumption in the public sphere. Regarded as a powerful leader with authoritarian tendencies by his foreign and local commentators,3 Tayyip Erdoğan has been canonized as a hero of the Turkish conservative classes—his name has been given to a newly opened university and stadium. The liberal opposition, with its pluralistic vision of Turkey, has condemned particular instances of the AKP’s policies of replacing the old “authoritarian” Republican order—which produced monolithic secular identities and suppressed (with force and integration) differences based on religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities—with another order, which is socially and culturally Islamic, economically neoliberal.

As I was engaged with the final revisions of this book at the end of May 2013, a massive resistance movement started. The initial protest was organized to save one of the last green areas in Istanbul, a public park, from demolishment to make space for yet another shopping mall complex modeled after Ottoman barracks. This protest quickly morphed into a country-wide protest against the AKP’s rule and the ravages of neoliberal capitalism. What is unique about this political upheaval,
which set in motion resistance and defiance amidst police brutality and violence, was the way it has been embraced by the different sectors of society: old and young, men and women, straight and LGBT, feminists, nationalists, staunch Kemalists, anticapitalist Muslims, trade and professional unions, and Kurdish groups—a unity of loosely defined purpose and action demanding a liberal democracy that has never been seen in Turkish history. Now responding to the immensely changing circumstances of their lives within the context of a rapidly Islamicized Turkey and economic neoliberalization, different sectors of society, it seems, will engage in struggle and contestation that will parallel the continuing reshaping of Turkey. This resistance movement features a creative combativeness amidst state violence and the unlawful detention of protesters and a commitment to intervene in any attempt to control their lives. The backlash against the neoliberal policies and the curtailment of individual liberties by the Islamic government provides the latest twist in the remaking of the nation.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundations: Key Concepts and Analytical Perspective

The young women and men in this book came of age in the midst of changes that are transforming notions of the self and collective identity. Not only are they subjects of these profound changes, but they are situated at this strategic crossroads as upwardly mobile members of the future elite classes who will inhabit positions of power. They articulate and give substance to the changing gender and sexual order of Turkish society and will shape and inhabit the new forms of gender identities and sexualities.

In focusing my study on young Turks, I am following the theoretical lead of researchers who emphasize the importance of one's formative years (youth) to the project of self-making. Karl Mannheim (1972) privileged the formative years in the development of a person's identity because he believed that individuals carry their identity with them as they grow older. Because of their potential to become "generative of the conditions of thinking and action of subsequent cohorts" (Turner 2002, 19), Turner also stresses the importance of studying young adults. Similarly, feminist sociologist Gerson (2009) emphasizes young adults’
"fulcrum" role in forging social change, especially in an era of unprecedented social-economic transformations: "Poised between the dependency of childhood and the irrevocable investments of later adulthood, this life stage represents both a time of individual transition and a potential engine for social change" (737).

In order to analyze the new desires pursued and produced by the young Turks I studied, I draw upon concepts developed in several distinct theoretical analyses of gender, sexuality, love, social class, mobility, and self-making. In the narratives of these young Turks, a key expression of desire takes the form of an escape from the normative patriarchal conceptions of gender—the selfless feminine and protective masculine. The deep aspiration towards building individualized selves is related to another significant desire for sexual modernity and rejection of dominant virginity norms as traditional and backward. My investigation of the paradoxes and contradictions of these new desires particularly highlights several concepts within my analytical and interpretive frame. Below I juxtapose two broad models of self-making—autonomous self-formation and connective selving—and introduce a feminist psychoanalytical formulation of the intersubjective construction of gender and the intertwined relationship among love, recognition, and domination. I also elaborate my approach to class as a cultural practice rather than purely an economic designation.

Two Approaches to Self-Making

The Detraditionalized Self and "Choice Biographies"

Theorizing large-scale social and historical trends, a number of contemporary thinkers across different disciplines have highlighted self-making in reflexive modernity (or late modernity, postmodernity, the neoliberal age) as a key field for research to investigate its genealogy, constitution, and transformations. Embodied in a host of investigations of subjectivity, self, the body, desire, and identity, such scholars indicate that our present ways of perceiving the formation of selfhood have moved from fixity to uncertainty and contingency, from habit to reflexivity across all domains of existence and experience as individuals have become increasingly disembedded from local, place-based orientations and released from traditional bonds and status relations that integrated them
in groups, including family, class, and the nation. The pivotal concept for such a reflexive modernity is "the self as a project in the making" (McLeod 2002, 211). This project is identified and underscored as the detraditionalization of the self, the formation of the self as a reflexive and self-conscious biography (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1991). Giddens, the most prominent sociologist of modernity and detraditionalization, for example, claims that "self-identity has to be created" rather than being "given" and "discovered" (1991, 186). Replacing once inherited and prescribed roles and futures, the "enterprising self" (Freeman 2014) or "choice biographies"—constructed, worked upon, and resulting from choices—increase self-monitoring, internal regulation, and reflexivity (Beck 1992, 135; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). Writing within the paradigm of neoliberal subject formation, Nikolas Rose (1991) suggests that an individual bears the burden of "render[ing] his or her life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization" (240).

How does this broad, universalizing theory of modernity and the self translate to the particular settings of upwardly mobile young Turks? Is detraditionalized selfhood culturally significant in a deeply patriarchal and paternalistic society at once modern and traditional and at once Western and non-Western? Do young Turks pursue detraditionalized pathways? In order to understand how young Turks negotiate relationships with others and themselves in an era marked by neoliberalism, we need to bring into focus another theory of self-making that more centrally integrates patriarchy into the analysis.

**Connective Selving**

Suad Joseph offers connectivity as an alternative to the (Western) model of the bounded self (i.e., the self who is completely autonomous and separate from others). Although Joseph theorizes connectivity as a non-culturally specific concept, writing about Arab families in Lebanon, she applies it directly to societies in which the key component of selfhood is not autonomy or individuality, as it is in many Western contexts, but rather a relational experience with members of one's family. Western models of selfhood traditionally emphasize the role of liberal,
market-based economies in creating a subject whose preparedness for a career path has pushed him or her toward complete autonomy. In other words, according to Joseph, such models take the flexibility of the modern worker as the greatest factor influencing self-construction and perfect individuation as the most important component of that self. But Joseph suggests that this model fails to explain how people understand themselves in cultures in which the family is valued over society and the individual. In such contexts, she argues, individuals “are open to and require the involvement of others in shaping their emotions, desires, attitudes and identities” (Joseph 1993, 468). The actions and opinions of family members do not simply influence an individual’s selfhood—they are instrumental to its completion. Their “security, identity, integrity, dignity, and self-worth . . . [are] tied to the actions of [that person]” (Joseph 1993, 467).

Joseph also challenges the Western-centeredness of feminist object relations theory on sexual difference—the idea that feminine personality is defined relationally and masculine personality is defined as a denial of relation. She expands the concept of object relations and connectivity beyond the strictly gendered, arguing that relationality is a masculine as well as a feminine prerogative. However, patriarchal structures prioritize the needs and desires of the men, producing different feminine and masculine experiences of connectivity. Joseph argues that the merging of connectivity with patriarchy shapes “relationality into a system of domination” (468). In Joseph’s model, familial relationships become significant forces in socializing individuals and (re)producing patriarchal systems.

I suggest that Joseph’s overall conceptualization of connectivity applies to the Turkish case, in which connectivity is produced and pursued in interrelated institutional, affective, and psychological domains. Connectivity also functions as an important site for constructions of sexual selves. I use this notion of connectivity to explore upwardly mobile young Turks’ negotiations of tensions and ambivalences in gender dynamics and enactments of their sexual selves. The widespread Turkish recognition and reification of mother-daughter connectivity (and identification) is nowhere more strongly portrayed than in the proverb “anasina bak kizim al.” The English equivalent of this idiom, “like mother, like daughter,” does not do justice to the deeper meaning at-
tached to this proverb, which expresses the view that a young girl (or a bride) will eventually look and behave exactly like her mother. Mother-daughter connectivity in Turkey plays a crucial role in the formation of young women's sexual selves. Particularly, as we will see in the next chapter, deviance from the virginity norm is often experienced as a rupture and denial of connectivity with the mother. Connectivity also forms an important analytical category in elucidating the meanings and practices attached to coming out in the gay men's narratives.

In contemporary Turkey, patriarchal kinship continues to link sex and age groups in patterns of hierarchy and dependence, conferring particular statuses and identities. Kinship is thus deeply implicated in the process of self-production. Turkish legal institutions are key to maintaining patriarchal kinship networks. In addition to traditional marriage, which remains central to Turkish individuals' social identities (White 1994), kinship in Turkey also operates institutionally through a civil and penal code that is organized “to protect the social and familial order rather than the rights of the individual” (Sirman 2004, 51). It was only recently that the penal code was changed to prioritize the rights of victims as individuals in cases of rape and female abduction over the preservation of family honor and public decency. Despite amendments to the code brought about by feminist and human rights organizations and an effort by the Turkish government to align the code with EU standards, it continues to preserve the family “as the foundation of Turkish society” while defining marriage as an entity “based on equality between spouses” (WWHR 2005).

The domain of kinship also overlaps with the public sphere, where relationships and social interaction are couched in elaborate kinship language, morality, and imagery. As Joseph argues, connectivity is particularly enacted and crystallized through bodily and linguistic practices. As Joseph observed among the Arab families in Lebanon she studied, the use of idioms that merge body imagery with phrases of love and affection, such as “you are my heart,” “you are my soul,” and “you are my eyes” in kin and significant non-kin relations evidences how the imaginary continuity between individuals is also expressed through the symbolic realm of language. Enactment of kinship morality in the public sphere is achieved through deployment of kinship terms when unrelated men and women address each other as “aunt,” “brother,” “sister,” and “uncle” (for example, in a store), thereby desexualizing the encounter.
Within middle-class and upwardly mobile households, connectivity and relatedness are also built through mothers’ cultivation of their children’s potential, particularly with regard to education. Because academic excellence facilitates individuals’ successful placement in the nation’s elite universities and provides social connections for their adult lives, education is seen as the most important vehicle to upper-middle-class status. Within Turkey’s competitive educational system, mothers play a pivotal role in fostering their children’s high performance by offering their children “a measure of emotional security and intimacy with which to survive these demands” (Allison 2000, 108). As mothers merge practices of monitoring and overseeing the educational regimens of their children with practices of maternal nurturance, indulgence, ego boosting, and love, a high degree of practical and emotional dependency is built in the construction of both masculinity and femininity. These long-term emotional and physical investments and sacrifices cultivate a strong sense of loyalty and emotional indebtedness to one’s parents, producing significant psychological obstacles for the formation of sexually liberated selves.

Since the 1980s, the consolidation of neoliberal social and economic reforms and global consumer culture has brought about important changes in Turkish society and introduced new modes of social integration that have created alternative notions of self and new social ties. For example, the liberalized market economy and extensive access to the media and Internet have granted Turkish youth more freedom in self-expression, sociability, and sexual communication. Increased suburbanization has led to increased privatization of the nuclear family and ruptured some connective tissues embedded in the domain of extended family and kinship (Ayata 2002). Yet some of the traditional forms of connectivity have not been profoundly displaced. Moreover, because they frame individuals by their wider social networks, these new integrative social practices also have a collective orientation, albeit differently produced and realized. Maintenance of connectedness and sociability are clearly reflected, for example, in the modern summer vacationing patterns of the middle classes, in which nuclear families connected with one another own summer houses next to or near one another, creating fluid and permeable boundaries between households and each other’s lives. Thus, despite large-scale changes to Turkey’s cultural and political
landscape, the middle-class families continue to promote personal en-
richment and maturity through connection with members of different
generations, kin and non-kin alike.

The generic story of the neoliberal subject centered on self-invention,
autonomy, and self-realization under neoliberal globalization dimin-
ishes the importance of traditional frames of reference for identity de-
velopment, thus missing this strong presence of connectedness. Further,
autonomy or connectivity in self-making does not interpolate in all
young Turks in the same way. Such orientations are mediated by class,
gender differences, and religious identity. I make this point not to sug-
gest that we ignore evidence of individualizing forces or ideologies of
the autonomous self emerging in Turkey. Rather, I make it to refocus
our attention on the negotiations and tensions between the desire for
relatedness and the desire for untied autonomy.

The upwardly mobile young Turks I studied, whose new desires for
autonomy in self-making and sexuality threaten familial identification,
bring out the conundrums of emancipation from connective selfing.
Their rejection of selfless-femininity and protective-masculinity con-
structions imply a denial of connection, a decoupling of connectivity
and patriarchy. In their eyes, the affirmation of connectivity can cost one
the knowledge and appreciation of one’s own desires. They would like to
stop seeing themselves through the eyes of the other. Thus, they suggest
that the focus of moral and sexual agency should be relocated to the in-
dividual and separated from the individual’s roles and status as daughter
and son—roles that cast their actions as representative of the respect-
ability, reputation, and honor of the group, the family, and the nation.

However, for women and men inhabiting new sexual and gender ter-
rains, attempting to escape from patriarchal masculinity and the con-
straints of normative femininity and exploring new sexual subjectivities
are sources of both opportunity and anxiety and guilt. And in order to
understand and analyze these inner struggles, we need additional con-
ceptual tools to accompany Joseph’s notion of connective selfing. This
entails making fuller use of Benjamin’s psychoanalytical feminist per-
spective, which has long been concerned with the “unconscious struc-
ture of patriarchy.”
Gender, the Bonds of Love, Recognition, and Domination

Although integration of psychoanalysis with feminist theory has been challenged on many fronts, feminist revisions of psychoanalytically informed theories remain a significant method and theory. As Madelon Sprengnether (1990) succinctly puts it, psychoanalysis “offers a means of comprehending the unconscious structure of patriarchy” (8). Joseph’s deconstruction of the binary personality development of femininity and masculinity challenges the unilateral alignment of femininity with relationality and of masculinity with containment and individuality. Jessica Benjamin (1988) further advances our understanding of the patriarchal constructions of gender with her argument about the deep intertwining of love, recognition, and domination. She problematizes and revises the gendered division between sex = masculine and love = feminine. As this book will attempt to show, the desire for recognition is much more important than the desire for sex in some male narratives of romance and sex. Desire for recognition is a powerful formative force in structuring masculinities in a cultural context that steeps desire in a patriarchal tradition, a tradition of motherly devotion and of the privileging and adulation of sons’ desires and needs. Benjamin’s notion of recognition also becomes essential for understanding male domination, particularly from the perspective of those who attempt to escape the patriarchal construction of masculinity as dominant, controlling, and protective. Finally, Benjamin’s construction of intersubjectivity is relevant to research on intimate relationships that highlight the dialogical construction of gender. I emphasize the intersubjective articulation of gender by the subjects of this book: young women are not passive recipients of masculine ideals, but coproducers and active participants in its construction, and, equally, young men emerge as significant co-creators of feminine ideals.

Although Benjamin agrees with Freud that patriarchal relations are supported by deep psychological mechanisms and that these mechanisms are shaped by anatomy, she denies the genital primacy for which Freud argued. Instead she suggests that because “the psychological integration of biological reality is largely the work of culture,” the psychic roots of patriarchy and female submission are “social arrangements that we can change or direct” (1988, 90). For Benjamin, unwriting the patri-
archal script requires uncovering the unconscious processes by which desire comes to ratify male power.

Benjamin suggests that to better understand the unconscious roots of female desire, or lack of desire, we should look not at the oedipal stage, as Freud does, but at preoedipal life. For Freud, the key to a young girl’s sexual development was her realization that like her mother she lacked a penis and her subsequent identification with her father, the bearer of power she could only achieve vicariously. But in Benjamin’s account, the father achieves his symbolic power “because he (with his phallus) represents freedom from dependency on the powerful mother of early infancy” (95). In this formulation, the penis becomes a symbol of separation not from maternal lack, but instead from an engulfing maternal presence. In Benjamin’s estimation, this model of maternal power and paternal freedom is rooted in the different ways in which mothers and fathers interact with their children.

The problem of female desire, then, is rooted in the problem of paternal identification for the young girl. While little boys are able to be like the father, the symbol of the outside world, little girls can only wish to have him. Little girls’ early attempts to identify with their fathers are often thwarted, either by his unwillingness to recognize her sameness to him or by her own perception of anatomical difference. Ultimately, it is this inability to fully identify with the outside that prevents women from making desire and agency their own and leads them into relationships of submission and passivity.

If the root of female submission is the girl’s failed identification with her father, then any vision of female desire and agency must begin with the dismantling of the symbolic structures that join power and desire to fatherhood exclusively. For Benjamin, the key to disrupting the patriarchal script lies in the potential for intersubjectivity, the experience of one’s selfhood as something that exists both within oneself and between that self and others. An intersubjective construction of selfhood would not only grant women desire and subjectivity, in Benjamin’s account, but would also lead to a fuller experience of the erotic, one in which two subjects meet in mutual recognition and get pleasure both in and with the other. However, according to Benjamin, this mutual recognition can only be achieved when children of either sex receive full recognition
from both parents and when mothers and fathers equally share as figures of independence and agency.

The narratives I collected call for a complex understanding of masculinity/femininity and power—one that would account, for example, for some young men’s strong desire not to be dominant, controlling, and protective. Gender scholars often approach this question with various theoretical tools gleaned from Raewyn Connell (1987, 2002), particularly her concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. But, as her critics point out (Demetriou 2001; Hearn 2004; Moller 2007; Coles 2009), her model encourages a kind of disciplinary tunnel vision that overdetermines and oversimplifies male behavior. Connell’s paradigm directs us to see masculine power in domination, subordination, and oppression, but often to overlook the more mundane ways in which power and privilege are exercised and felt. Furthermore, she encourages us to see power as only domination and tells us to read every such practice as an attempt to increase male power. One of the central projects of Benjamin’s Bonds of Love (1988) is to account for the way or ways in which “domination [is] anchored in the hearts of those who submit to it” (52). For Freud, all manifestations of domination were rooted in the child’s initial dependency on his mother and his attempt to deny that dependency and differentiate himself as an independent subject. Benjamin suggests that the desire to dominate is born out of the infantile fantasy of omnipotence, the desire to be recognized as an individual subject but not to return that recognition—that is, the desire to assert one’s selfhood without acknowledging the selfhood of others. Benjamin suggests that domination is configured as masculine because the original differentiation of the infant from the mother is more extreme for boys than it is for girls, who can retain some continuity with the mother because of their shared gender. However, because separation from the mother can never be complete, omnipotence never gained, and tension never relieved, “the repudiated maternal body persists as the object to be done to and violated” (77). Likewise, female submission can be traced to the unique relationship between girls and their mothers, which, according to Benjamin, “emphasiz[es] merging and continuity at the expense of individuality and independence” and thus “provides fertile ground for submission” (78–79). Ultimately, Benjamin argues that erotic domi-
nation, like other practices of love, should be understood primarily as the desire for recognition. Although this desire might manifest itself in relations of power, control, and submission, they are in their essence “desires for freedom and communion,” the very desires from which, she concludes, “the bonds of love are forged” (84). Thus it is that love, romance, and courtship figure significantly in the crystallization of new masculine and feminine subjectivities.

Varieties of Love: Passion, Romantic Love, and Pure Love

In the last decade of the twentieth century, two influential books, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) by Anthony Giddens and *Consuming the Romantic Utopia* (1997) by Eva Illouz, provoked new insights into conceptualizations of love, intimacy, and romance. Giddens’s historical account of changes in intimate relationships forms a narrative that begins with a premodern understanding of love as passion, an all-encompassing sexual attraction for another regarded by premodern people as “disruptive” and “dangerous” due to its power in “generating a break with routine and duty” (38); moves through a modern conception in the second half of the twentieth century of the ideal of romantic love as a basis for heterosexual marriage; and concludes with a shift, in the latter half of the twentieth century, to a postmodern, gender-egalitarian confluent or pure love entered into for its own sake and defined by the ideal of intimacy—the sharing of emotional selves through mutual disclosure. Illouz’s work explores the intimate link forged between romance and capitalism. Although like Giddens, Illouz emphasizes the potential of postmodern love in producing a genderless ideal, her analysis highlights the centrality of a romantic utopia enacted through practices of consumption and leisure.

Giddens’s historical account identifies an important transformation in intimate sexual relationships, a shift from the ideal of “romantic” love to that of “pure” or “confluent” love. Under the ideal of romantic love, individuals who strive to embody the idealized qualities of their genders find another who “by being who he or she is, answers a lack which the individual does not even necessarily recognise” (45). Through romantic love, “the flawed individual is made whole” (45). Its accomplishment has been based on a projective identification; the desire for the other has
been the desire for what one is missing (61). According to Giddens, this view of love generates a particular life trajectory for individuals by interconnecting mutual responsibilities and duties with desire—a lifelong heterosexual marriage and parenthood (41). Historically, romantic love and lifelong heterosexual marriage seeped into religious and moral traditions as well as legal and institutional spheres, powerfully constraining different and alternative life trajectories.

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the romantic love ideal began to be displaced by what Giddens calls “pure” or “confluent” love. While in the past, kinship groups and communities had the capacity to ground intimate relationships—to provide the framework of moral obligation and trust—in the pure relationship contexts, the connection between romantic partners as two individuals takes precedence in the absence of a deep embeddedness of the relationship within familial structures. Giddens defines a “pure” relationship as one in which “a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another, and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it” (58). Whereas romantic love relationships revolved around idealized visions of masculinity and femininity, the pure relationship is an effort to achieve, through constant communication, an intimate knowledge of the other’s unique and authentic self. Intimacy is sought as a means to self-development; if the relationship loses its reason for being, it becomes subject to dissolution. An individual committed to a pure love relationship—even through marriage—is therefore committed only contingently. Confluent love “introduces the ars erotica into the core of the conjugal relationship” (629). In this model, “a person’s sexuality is but one factor that has to be negotiated as part of a relationship” (63).

Giddens proposes that pure love relationships are more egalitarian because romantic love rested on essentialist conceptions about natural gender differences. Women’s subscription to romantic love often was translated into obligations and dependencies and “domestic subjection” (62). Embedded in the values of autonomy and equality, pure relationships, Giddens believes, are fundamentally democratic. Therefore, a shift to a society full of pure relationships would represent nothing less than the democratization of private life. He also suggests a connection
between the diffusion of pure love relationships and the solidification of democratic ideals in the larger society. For this reason, he suggests, “the transformation of intimacy might be a subversive influence upon modern institutions as a whole” (3).

Although Giddens’s thesis of the detraditionalization of gender under the ideal of pure love is considered by many scholars to be optimistic, utopian, and overstated,6 the narratives of young Turks, especially the young women’s narratives of relationship and marriage ideals (both pious and secular) accentuate the desire for Giddens’s confluent or pure love. Those narratives reflect these women’s identities as high achievers whose aspirations for their futures are not centrally tied to marriage and motherhood. Their ideal of romantic love and marriage is not about longing for unity with a different person who “can make one’s life . . . complete” (Giddens 1992, 61) but about relating to and melding together two autonomous and equal life projects, hers and his.

Giddens sees variations in the transformation of intimate spheres “according to context and differential socioeconomic position.” Illouz (1997) explains this variation by examining the incorporation of romantic love into the culture of capitalism. Indeed, according to Illouz, “the inequalities constitutive of the market have been transferred to the romantic bond itself” (22). Illouz argues that love is a privileged site for the experience of utopia. With secularization in Western societies, “love began to be represented not only as a value in itself but as an important motive in the pursuit of happiness, now defined increasingly in individualistic and private terms” (29–30). For Illouz, “Utopias make us dream a better world, about alternative arrangements, and even if those dreams often degenerate into control and manipulation, we still must account for the hope and creativity they contain and often generate. Utopias inspire change” (197). These utopian meanings (and yearnings) are experienced through the “cyclical performance of rituals of consumption” (8) of such commodities as travel, dining out, the exchange of gifts, cultural events, and the use of special artifacts.

In Illouz’s account, the merging of capitalism and romance registers at other levels as well. The promotion and dissemination of a “therapeutic discourse” about romance (especially in women’s magazines), in which it is presented as an emotional sphere subject to analytical examination, description, and, ultimately, rational management, also reg-
isters romance as a product of work and calculation. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Illouz's account concerns the relationship between gender and the ideal of intimacy. Pointing out a paradox, she argues that the romantic utopia “reproduces ideals of masculinity and femininity, yet is simultaneously a genderless ideal” (197). By drawing men inside the domain of private selves and emotions, “the sole repository of authenticity, meaning and commitment” (196), and by offering to “merge men and women in a genderless model of intimacy” (197), the romantic utopia “feminizes” men. In other words, the ideal of intimacy enjoins women and men to create selves that are similar. Illouz's argument about the relationship between men and romantic utopia both points to and is part of a new body of research addressing intimacy and the affective dimensions of masculinity. Romance is no longer anathema to masculine selfhood, but is increasingly becoming an important component of masculinity (Allen 2003; Korobov 2009; Maxwell 2007; Redman 2001).

Rituals of romance are much affected by socioeconomic class. The romantic utopia is more readily available to members of the privileged and upwardly mobile classes, because they possess the economic resources necessary for more frequent and varied access to its self-renewing liminal space. The effects of class on young Turks’ aspirations and practices of romance and sex are complex and multiple. Illuminating the links among class, gender, romance, and sex is central to my interpretive frame, and these linkages require me to widen the framework of analysis beyond the relationship between consumption practices and romance.

Class, Habitus, and Upward Mobility

Both as an economic location and as an (embodied) identity of individuals, class figures as a prominent category of analysis in this book. My analysis demonstrates the processes by which class is experienced in and through gender and sexuality in complex and specific ways. As Bourdieu (1984) wrote in his oft-quoted passage, “sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions” (107). I want to outline broadly what I see as Bourdieu's two main concerns relevant to the construction of my interpretive frame: his notion of habitus
and its link to class structure, and his conceptualization of exclusion and inclusion as boundary making in the romantic and sexual landscape. A multidimensional approach to class enables us to take account of the contradictions and complexities in relation to other intersectional categories that tend to disappear in less nuanced accounts.

The complexity and ambivalences of class identification in contemporary Turkey reflect the way class-based distinctions are thought of in Turkish society. Multiple and layered distinctions—such as whether one is from Istanbul or Anatolia; whether one's income derives from trade, commerce, agriculture, or professions; what types of schooling (private or public) one receives; and whether one grows up in a modern or traditional patriarchal family—enter into people's calculations and inform the way they judge and are judged in class terms. Class distinctions and differences are always articulated with reference to the powerful binaries of rural-urban, modern-traditional, civilized-uncivilized. Historically, the process of urbanization, which since the early 1970s has been drawing the rural population into the big cities in massive waves, has underlined these intersections. These rural-to-urban migrants' integration and their aspirations for economic and social mobility have been important sources of anxiety about the threat of "mixing" among the established urban, educated, and modern middle classes (Öncü 2002; Ozyegin 2001). Even though some people with rural origins achieve economic mobility and become well-do-to over time, they are still not considered people "with class" (as in "he/she doesn’t have class," referencing a lack of modern, middle-class dispositions and manners). In short, there is no easy and close correspondence between one's economic status and one's claim to middle-class status and identity.  

I suggest that the way people in Turkey—especially young Turks in between different class identifications—view and understand "class" can be conceptualized as a folk understanding using Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Bourdieu (1977) argues that "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g.: the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, i.e., a system of lasting transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (83). That is, one's socioeconomic position determines one's
tastes, predispositions, and values affiliated with that structural position. Thus Bourdieu’s habitus defines a set of “structuring dispositions” that the individual brings to day-to-day life and that orient the individual to act and react in certain taken-for-granted ways. While an individual’s habitus is not governed by strict rules, it nevertheless conforms to general social boundaries. Thus, individuals take for granted most dispositions and practices that they enact, despite the profound significance these strategies have for the way individuals acquire capital and position themselves within a given field.

By reconceptualizing “the socialized self” through his concept of habitus, Bourdieu positions the body at the center of the negotiation of structure and agency, the society and the individual. He claims that “to speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, even the person, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 126). Bourdieu conceptualizes the key resources in this development of the “socialized self” in the social field as “capitals”: economic, social, and cultural. A social field is a domain of social life, like gender or the family, in which individuals struggle over and are positioned according to their relative economic, social, and cultural capital. The child is socialized in the capital holdings of the family, which determine the child’s initial capital holdings as his/her habitus is formed. For Bourdieu, the social in the habitus, the structured and structuring dispositions, frame bodily conduct, skills and competence, speech habits, vocabulary, accent, and so on. This implies that the means of emotional competencies, masculine or feminine, and their expressive displays are acquired and internalized through the techniques of the body learned in childhood in the context of communication and identification within class-specific family and either homosocial or mixed-gender communities.

Although some of Bourdieu’s feminist critics point out a systematic exclusion of gender in his theory, I think his concept of “structured” and “structuring dispositions” lends itself to a gendered analysis. Some feminist scholars are utilizing Bourdieu. To take one example, Beverley Skeggs’s (1997) study of working-class women’s experiences and negotiation of this intersection has powerfully illustrated performative gender and embodied notions of class. The women Skeggs studied lacked the economic and social capital to inhabit the norms of middle-class
femininity, but they invested heavily in their bodies and consumption practices to create “respectful femininity” while simultaneously identifying and dis-identifying with their structural class position. Similarly, Tony Coles (2009) urges that studies of hegemonic masculinity should be informed by Bourdieu’s theoretical models in order to illuminate “the more subtle interplay of masculinities that exists in men’s lives” (30).

Bourdieu’s theory is especially relevant for understanding class as an embodied identity and subjectivity, not just an economic location in a class hierarchy. This understanding is particularly trenchant in the stories of young Turks from nonurban family backgrounds who are in a dialogical relationship with both their parental class culture and their middle-class culture/class destination, who experience the dynamic interconnection between identification and distantiation. Using a Bourdeusian account to focus on the dispositions and emotional competencies that young Turks bring to their intimate and sexual relationships is essential in studying societies such as Turkey, where the practices of boundary making are accentuated by the threat of blurring class/urban-rural/Muslim-secular boundaries. Bourdieu’s habitus comes sharply into view in considerations of how the young men and women in this book mobilized habitus-based qualities and dispositions in constructing the ideal, desirable femininity/masculinity.

As we will see in the chapters to come, habitus is embodied and exemplified partly through durable ways of standing, speaking, walking, and other other aspects of deportment, what Bourdieu calls “hexis.” Taste in things and people plays a crucial signaling role in conveying either affinity or difference—the absence or presence of confidence and familiarity with class-based resources, relationships, and practices. Locating young Turks’ constructions of desirable femininity and masculinity within the wider class habitus, configured as instances of boundary making, also helps to explain young Turks’ contributions to and investments in the maintenance of existing class boundaries and other divisions. The notion of habitus is also pertinent for understanding the inclusion and exclusion that occur when people belonging to different habituses share the same social space, like the pious young woman in this book who carries her Muslim habitus to the secular public environment of the university.
The economics of class—“the haves and the have-nots”—are also present in the way romantic and sexual relationships are lived. Romance and sex are important sites for exercising class privileges and disadvantages. Glaring differences in young Turks’ financial situations are reflected in their on-/off-campus housing patterns and consumption choices as well as their leisure and entertainment activities. Affluent students spend hundreds of dollars for a pair of designer shoes, while their poorer counterparts try to get by with the same amount of money for a month. In the absence of places of their own, those with class disadvantages experience intimate moments of sexual expression literally in public places. The street, parks, vacated, unlit campus offices and hallways, and other public places become vital sites for exploring sexual intimacy for those who have no personal space that is not controlled by parents and/or live in crowded single-sex dorm rooms, producing distinctions such as “clothed” and “naked” sex. Those with class advantages draw strong boundaries and evaluate their class-disadvantaged peers by referring to their sexual behavior on the basis of how they conduct themselves in intimate, sexual relations. As perceived by the privileged classes, the Anatolians (lower classes), because they come from repressive family backgrounds, are unable to exercise control over the new freedom and liberty at their disposal now. Therefore they transgress boundaries by engaging in “sex”/sexual behavior in public places, indulging in sexual displays (see also Erdur 2002).

For Bourdieu, the embodied dispositions formed during childhood as part of one’s primary socialization are further developed throughout life. But as many critics point out, Bourdieu’s “social actor” is overly social or overly determined: “lasting transposable dispositions” are obstinate and rigid (though he posits that “there exist dispositions to resist”) and may be so intractable precisely because Bourdieu links habitus to the reproduction of class structure (81). How does one’s habitus change as one subsequently moves across the “social field,” as is the case for people who experience mobility? What happens when, in upward mobility, an individual becomes dislocated from his/her habitus’s moorings that once carried his/her capital holdings? Does the movement from class origins to new class destinations mean complete escape from the original habitus?
Valerie Walkerdine (2003) suggests that upward mobility has to be analyzed in terms of the deep ambivalence and emotional turmoil produced by individuals’ relationships to their upwardly mobile identities. Her central thesis is that upward mobility must be understood as invested with both desire and defense. Lived through a constant psychic and material reinvention, upward mobility becomes a site of fantasy and invested with desire. Yet this mobility also represents a threat—the threat of inevitable failure, but also the threat of losing all material and emotional connections to one’s past or, conversely, of not being able to distance oneself enough from that past. For Walkerdine, the process of fully embodying a new class identity and “the complete displacement of what one was” (247), cutting all psychic and material ties with one’s other self, can never be seamless. Rather, it necessarily becomes a site of contradiction, what Zygmunt Bauman calls “ambivalence”—as Walkerdine explains it, “the discursive place where there [is] a slipping or sliding, an ambiguity between classifications.” Ultimately this ambivalence, according to Walkerdine, is “experienced as great pain and anxiety for the subject,” a pain that is balanced by the promise of eventual pleasure from a self-realized identity that will never be achieved (247).

In considering how young Turks produce their upward mobility in the cultural context of connective selves, I find Walkerdine’s notion of upward mobility as a site of ambivalence evocative precisely because of her attention to psychic struggles. As we shall see, one of the key benefits of drawing from Walkerdine’s formulation is that it illuminates the tension and liminality between identification and dis-identification. Some young Turks negotiate discrepancies and dis-identification between the dispositions, values, and lifestyles rooted in their class and habitus origins and competing efforts to define themselves in relation to upward mobility. Their efforts foreground a complex terrain of intimate transformations predicated upon gender relations and sex.

Research Setting and Empirical Foundation

Established in 1863 as the oldest American college outside of the United States, Boğaziçi (Bosphorus) University became a public university in 1971 as a successor to the Robert College. Considered one of the most beautiful campuses in the world, the university is located on the
European side of the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul with a view of the strait and the fortress Rumelihisarı, dating back to 1453. Boğaziçi is one of the most prestigious and coveted universities in Turkey. It requires the highest scores on the competitive centralized entrance examinations (taken by nearly 1.5 million students each year) and accepts students from among the top-ranking high school graduates (the upper 5 percent) (Baslanti and McCoach 2006). Because of its selectivity, students at the university have a strong sense of distinction as gifted and high achievers and identify themselves as a select crowd. The teaching medium throughout the university is English, and there is a vibrant cultural and intellectual student life. Extracurricular activities are organized around more than fifty different student clubs, ranging from dance and theater to mountain climbing and scuba diving to chess and engineering. There are several culturally well-defined cliques and groups as well as politically based student organizations. Student profiles exhibit social-class and regional diversity: children from affluent families, modestly salaried classes, and poor backgrounds are almost equally represented in the student body. The gender composition of the student body was 43 percent women and 55 percent men in 2001, when I surveyed the Boğaziçi students’ experiences and ideologies of gender and sexuality.

I chose this university as my research setting because it reflects, articulates, and actively constructs the culture of globalization, urbanism, and modernity, countering regional, local, or rural specificity with the cosmopolitanism and sophistication of the city. As an elite institution, it offers its students one of the major avenues for upward social and economic mobility but also brings together students with vastly different biographies, shaped by family backgrounds and regional and urban-rural distinctions, thereby providing me with a rich site for developing culturally specific examples of gender, sexuality, and self-making among upwardly mobile young Turks. Three sources of field data—a survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group research—provide the foundation of this book.
Surveying Sexual and Gender Ideologies of Boğaziçi Women and Men

Boğaziçi students (n = 360) who responded to the written survey were likely to express general views on sexuality that reflected both sexually inhibitive mores and the effect of sexual modernity, and the conflict between old and new values was apparent in their responses. A sizable majority, 74 percent of women and 63 percent of men, disagreed with the statement that “premarital sexuality is not acceptable because it is against our traditions” (appendix 1, table 1.1), although roughly 45 percent of men and women claimed that they didn’t express/experience their sexuality at all (table 1.2). The majority of both women and men endorsed the idea that “it is important to establish emotional intimacy before engaging in sex”—88 percent and 62 percent of women and men, respectively (table 1.2). Thirty percent of men and 7 percent of women responded that they didn’t need intimacy in order to have sexual relations, while 60 percent of men and 18 percent of women—double the number in each case—said they would consider having sex with an attractive person despite a lack of an intimate relationship.

There was a gender divergence in the way these young Turks believed sexuality should be expressed by men and by women, as well as in the actual level of sexual activity they reported (table 1.1). Men showed a stronger preference for sexual purity than women, though they were essentially divided on its importance. Forty-two percent of men placed significant import on marrying a virgin, and 51 percent agreed with the statement, “I want to marry a virgin,” while a third of men wanted a sexually experienced partner. Slightly more than half of the women wanted their future partner to have had some sexual experience but not to have had sexual intercourse (table 1.2). Only a small minority (15 percent) preferred a spouse who was a virgin. Women’s and men’s virginity status did not show a great divergence: 64 percent of women and 49 percent of men claimed that they were virgins.

Between 80 percent and 90 percent of all Boğaziçi students believed that young Turkish men were “sexually hungry” (table 1.2). This belief may be behind most respondents’ assertion that masturbation is normal for men (83 percent of men and 74 percent of women). Only a very tiny
minority of women disapproved of female masturbation, and this disapproval was higher in men’s responses (11 percent).

Notable was the large number of Boğaziçi men and women who responded with “no opinion” to questions about specific sex acts (table 1.2). Nearly 25 percent of women claimed they had no opinion about whether or not women should masturbate or whether their future spouse should have sexual experience outside of intercourse. Nearly 34 percent of women responded “no opinion” on whether it was acceptable for them to perform or receive oral sex. On the same topics, roughly one in five men also had no opinion. Whether these topics are an afterthought to most students, are truly neutral, or are taboo to the point of causing survey respondents to withhold their true feelings is difficult to ascertain.

When asked about their relationships, eight in ten students reported having had a boyfriend or girlfriend, and roughly half were in a relationship at the time of the survey (table 1.3). About half of those students in relationships said that they were having intercourse with their current partner. The number of men reporting sex was slightly higher than the number of women, at 53 percent of male versus 47 percent of female respondents.

The survey also addressed the experience of “hookups,” or casual encounters of a sexual nature, among students (table 1.4). Women and men reported similar rates of hook-ups, with 26 percent of women and 32 percent of men stating that they had had such an experience; those who had had hook-ups claimed roughly two experiences within the previous year. Just over a third of students said their hook-up partner was already a friend, and another third met their hook-up at a party, at a bar, or on the Internet. (Only men, and rather few, at 4 percent, met their hook-up partner on the Internet. Presumably, women met men on the Internet, but none of these were surveyed.) Eighteen percent of women and 34 percent of men said they met their hook-up partner in some other location, indicating a creative dating culture. Most were sober or relatively sober at the time of the experience.

After the basics of frequency and fact, men and women’s accounts of hook-ups diverged wildly. Only 7 percent of women thought they had initiated the encounter, while 22 percent of men reported that the
woman had initiated their hookups. Roughly half of each gender said it “just happened.” Women mainly claimed that the experience extended only to sex above the waist (44 percent), while only 15 percent of men claimed such an encounter. Twice as many men as women (60 percent versus 30 percent) reported having had sexual intercourse. The survey did ask if birth control had been used, and roughly half of respondents reported that they had not used any method of birth control. Still, if half or more of the women did not engage in intercourse, then it seems the other half were taking some sort of precaution. Across the board, more men than women seemed to believe that birth control had been used. Twice as many men reported believing their partner was on hormonal birth control (6 percent) as women reported being on birth control (3 percent). Men were far more satisfied with their hook-ups, with two-thirds claiming sexual and/or emotional satisfaction. Only one-third of women expressed such satisfaction, and only one in five thought the event, which was ostensibly caused by sexual drive, was actually sexually satisfying.

Boğaziçi men and women expressed similar views on gender roles as they relate to career, children, and domestic duties, with most men and women leaning toward an egalitarian approach (table 1.5). Women were more inclined than men to support progressive roles for women in the home and workforce, but the college men surveyed were also overwhelmingly in favor of women having roles outside of the domestic sphere. In a full divergence from the domestic lives of their mothers, Boğaziçi men and women expected that men would contribute to the household maintenance and that women would contribute financially. Although twice as many men as women thought that being a housewife was as satisfying as having a career, only 16 percent of men and 8 percent of women expressed that view. When asked about the statement, “what women really want is a home and children,” only 7 percent of women and 14 percent of men agreed. Three-quarters of the women and two-thirds of the men thought that men were able and willing to do household chores, and nearly all women and three-quarters of men agreed that a man could raise children as well as a woman could.

As upwardly mobile college students, the respondents were focused on their future careers. Nearly all women (97 percent) and 85 percent
of men expected that the female partner in a marriage would contribute financially to the family income. Most women and over half of men agreed that a working woman could properly care for her children, but when presented with the question in another light ("preschool children can be negatively affected from a working mother"), women were half as confident, and about half of men and women agreed.

In-Depth Interviews

What lies behind all these figures and regularities showing both gender divergences and convergences? A survey based on a representative sample (for the sampling procedures, see appendix 2) provides a significant amount of reliable information about the people we study and is an efficient tool for discovering and accounting for certain patterns and trends, but it cannot account easily for the processes and feelings behind stated opinions, and, by imposing preconceived categories that may have no meaning to the individual, it disregards the individual's definition of a situation. For instance, the survey results indicated that the level of educational attainment of the respondents' mothers directly and consistently affected their sexual views (table 1.6). The more education a mother had, the more likely her child was to hold liberated ideas about his or her sexuality and sexual expectations. Sixty-one percent of students whose mothers had only an elementary-level education reported that they wanted to marry a virgin, while only 18 percent of those whose mothers had gone to college held such a preference. One in two children of lower-education mothers also claimed that premarital sex was unacceptable because it went against their traditions. Only 15 percent of respondents whose mothers had a high-school-level education or higher agreed with the same statement. Children of high school- and college-educated women were also more likely to act on these views, with roughly one in two reporting having had intercourse. Only about one in four students of lower-education mothers reported having had sex. How should we understand and theorize this seemingly intimate interaction and intersection between social class, indexed by mothers' education, and sexuality? Why is there such a connection? What happens to those who transgress the maternal boundaries of sexual prohibition? How is the virginity norm negotiated between men and women in intimate
relationships? These and similar important questions and goals of the study required collecting intimate accounts of young Turks through in-depth interviews.

Although I employed a uniform interview guide, my interview design enabled me to do extensive probing on questions that revealed self-reflections on conflicts and contradictions: How do young Turks position themselves within dominant cultural norms (coexisting and contradictory) that guide them in their emotional and sexual lives? How do they negotiate competing global and local cultural constructions of their roles, identities, and sexual selves? How and in what manner do they perceive, evaluate, and import the various models of gender identities and relations into their biographies? How do they balance their own individuality against the interests of their families and social class? Moreover, my interview design allowed for the incorporation of participants’ own understandings of these processes into the analysis. This strategy proved to be successful in bringing into focus their points of view and their active participation in constructing their worlds.

In the interviews, I asked these young women and men to tell me about their families and the values of the people around them (family, school, neighbors, friends) during their childhoods and in the present. I asked how their upbringing may have played out in their romantic and sexual lives—whether it was enabling or inhibiting. I asked them how their romantic and sexual lives developed over time and how each significant relationship they engaged in evolved and was experienced emotionally and sexually. There were also specific questions regarding virginity and what the social/collective investment in the hymen signifies to them. My questions about their parents elicited descriptions of the ways in which they are similar to and different from their mothers and fathers, as well as how they viewed their parents’ marriages. I wanted to know how they saw their futures professionally and with regard to building marriages and families. I asked them to describe how they imagined the kinds of mothers and fathers they would become. Some specific questions also elicited their views of feminism and whether they were involved in feminist activism. In addition to these and similar general questions, the interviews diverged in accordance with the participants’ unique biographies and identities. For instance, in the interviews with the gay men, I asked questions about coming out,
and when I interviewed the pious women, there were questions about exploring religiosity in their families of origin as well as questions relating to how they conceptualized their identity and about the social distance and difference as well as closeness and interaction they felt in relation to secular Muslim peers and older generations.

The interpretation of in-depth narrative-based interviews involves a number of difficult methodological and epistemological questions. We cannot simply treat “the complex architecture of narration about oneself” (Passerini 1989, 196–97) as documenting facts and events. We must ask: What are the rules and “routines” governing their interpretation? “All autobiographic memory is true. It is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose,” writes Luisa Passerini (1989, 197).

I aimed to understand the narratives I collected as “a way of selectively organizing experience to produce and explain one’s self” (Scott 1996, xii), and in my interpretations, I sought to understand my participants’ purposes for telling me their biographies and about their romantic and sexual lives, the dialogical conditions that generated or undermined particular narratives, and the narrative resources (cognitive and emotional) that guided their vocabulary. For instance, in relation to the interviews I conducted with the pious young women, I was very aware that some of the narrative resources and vocabularies informed by their Islamic knowledge were constrained because they, correctly, assumed that they were explaining themselves to someone who was not steeped in Islamic knowledge. In situations when these women appropriated a narrative resource or a quotation from an Islamic text, their vocabulary was restrained in that it involved a “secular translation” for me.

In “Lost in Translation” A. Ka Tat Tsang and P. Sik Ying Ho (2007) brilliantly examine how academic language and the “everyday language” of people “interact and affect” each other (624). Although the authors believe that academic language and theories can enrich our understanding of people’s experiences and behaviors, they “caution against its unquestioned privileging” (640). They remind us that all narratives, those related directly in everyday language by the people who lived them and those related indirectly by academics, are mere representations (626). However, the authors are particularly critical of theoretical discourses that seek totality at the expense of “elements that might threaten their cohesiveness or unity” (629). People can provide more subtle or nuanced
understandings of their own experiences than theoretical systems often admit because “fragmentation, incoherence, and even contradiction are better tolerated in everyday speech” than in theoretical discourses (638). In such instances, they write, referring to research about sexuality, the “ambivalent nature of desire” defies categorization (636). This, they suggest, helps everyday language remain “inclusive and embracing” while “professional discourse . . . seeks to define and defend its discrete territory” (638). Yet they are careful to clarify that everyday language by itself is neither a superior nor an entirely sufficient form of representation and that theoretical discourse has a place in unraveling and illuminating people’s lived experiences.

Throughout the book, I attempt in different ways to render my interpretative lenses visible to the reader. In analyzing the narratives, I focus on the deeply felt tensions and disjunctions my respondents face between self and other, sex and love, societal responsibility and autonomy, and identification and dis-identification. Also central to my analytical strategy is to probe whether individual meanings attached to tensions and contradictions are internally consistent and whether they are shared by others. Equally important, I have tried to analyze the narratives with the goal of empowering the reader by making clear not only how the theoretical/analytical perspectives I adopted or developed actually relate to the words and vocabularies participants chose and mobilized themselves but also how my theoretical interpretations of their lives as a feminist social scientist relates to my subjects’ personal understandings and assertions about their behaviors, experiences, and aspirations. I hope this method, as an attempt “to ‘represent’ the ‘voices’ of the participants and let them interact with the theoretical articulations of professional discourse” (Tsang and Ho 2007, 630), enables alternative readings of the narratives for the reader.
Virginal Façades

Sonay’s mother raised her to believe that “sex is something men want and that good girls don’t give.” Although Sonay thinks that in the past her sexual assertiveness was repressed, she no longer has difficulty defining or initiating what she wants sexually. Yet, she cannot get rid of her mother’s views on virginity. A “technical” virgin, she has been in an exclusive relationship with a man for three and half years, but she hasn’t had sexual intercourse:

People would do it after such a long relationship, and they do. People around me are very comfortable in this regard. I am certainly not against it; I have many friends who are not virgins, and I never changed my mind about them because of it. I do think it is something to be experienced, but I cannot practice it myself. Directly, I think of my mother, as if staying virgin is my responsibility to her.

Charged with personal, societal, and legal significance, the hymen, a fold of flesh, has the power to rule the sexual selves of unmarried women in Turkey. The classification of women into two categories of “kadın” and “kız” on the basis of the status of their hymen is still pervasive in Turkish culture and clearly reflected in Turkish vernacular. When an unmarried woman is described or addressed, the word “kız” (girl, intact hymen) is used. The kız becomes a kadın (woman, nonvirgin) when she is married and her hymen is broken. Explicit in the notion of kız is not only sexual purity and innocence but also, particularly importantly, the desexualization of unmarried women and the normative expectation that the transition from girlhood/nonsexual to womanhood/sexual should occur within the institution of marriage. In short, a nonvirgin unmarried woman has no place in the societal classification.

It is important to emphasize here that it would be wrong to assume that virginity norms remained an unquestioned conundrum or were not
violated—openly or clandestinely—by the earlier generations of women in Turkey. I examine the strategic responses the young, upwardly mobile women I studied have to the tensions and disjunctures they face when their quest for sexual autonomy and freedom conflicts with the expectations of significant others. In probing the significance of virginity as a charged site of control over women's sexuality, I aim to illuminate the violation or preservation of virginity norms within the context of the multilayered societal transformations of the recent two decades, marked by the emergence of public discursivity—the proliferation of the production of “knowledge” and “talk”—about and on women's sexuality and virginity. Indeed, in recent years, the term “bayan” (“Ms.” or “lady” in English) has gained currency as a form of address for women in both professional and social contexts in Turkey, a reflection of the increasing presence of professional young women in the public sphere and business circles. Although American feminists claimed “Ms.” in the early 1970s against the sexist terms “Miss” and “Mrs.,” which identify and divide women in relation to men and their marital status, the adoption of the title “bayan” in the Turkish context is quite different. In fact, there has been an ongoing feminist campaign against “bayan.” As Turkish feminists maintain, this polite term, devoid of any sexual connotation, is deployed to avoid using “woman” and is thus a form of societal refusal to recognize the existence of women who are sexual but unmarried.

In considering the violation or preservation of virginity norms in the contemporary context, I draw upon the narratives of a particular group of young women who, more than any other group of women in Turkish society, are likely to denounce virginity norms and forsake virgin identities. They are the upwardly mobile young women whose investment in an elite education and a professional identity stands in stark contrast with virginity norms dictating chastity throughout schooling, including postgraduate education (thus considerably extending “girlhood”). The study of these young women thus sheds light on the degree, effect, and meanings of women’s challenges to the dominant norms of virginity and patriarchal constructions of women’s sexuality in Turkey. In forsaking virgin identities, women reveal the capacity to destabilize the resilient societal classification of two distinct categories based on hymen status.

This chapter draws upon interview data from thirty-seven young women between the ages of nineteen and twenty-three born amid the
social transformations of the 1980s. The young women whose narratives are the focus of this chapter are homogenous in terms of their identities as secular Turks and share a commonality in their general embrace of feminist ideas, although they vary in claiming or refuting the feminist label. Class is a major source of difference among this group of young women, which includes privileged young women who come from well-to-do families with a range of resources and cultural capital as well as disadvantaged women with limited parental economic and cultural resources. This diversity allows us to explore the role of class-based permissive and prohibitive family environments in the formation of sexual subjectivities.

Do these educationally advantaged women emerge as active violators of the virginity norm? What are some of contradictions and tensions they face when their sexual autonomy and freedom conflicts with the expectations of significant others, such as parents? To what extent is resistance or conformity to virginity codes shaped by other sources of identity, such as family class origins?

Conceptualizing the Hymen

How can we conceptualize the hymen sociologically, this fold of flesh that rules the sexual lives of unmarried women? What does this social/collective investment in the hymen signify? As Mary Douglas (1989) formulated and analyzed with great clarity, “what is carved in human flesh is the image of society.” Douglas conceptualizes that what delineates the confines of the body, its surface and skin, is systematically used to signify the other boundaries informed by social taboos and anticipated transgression. Indeed, within her analysis, the boundaries of the body parallel the confines of the social world. From Douglas’s perspective, the hymen as a part of the body becomes a medium for societal classification. The hymen represents the line that demarcates women (kadın) from girls (kız), dividing two social statuses. The law, which codifies the image of a society, exposes these demarcations. Notably, while an attack on the male body is conceptualized as a violation of individual rights, an attack on a female body constitutes a violation of the family order. The virgin or nonvirgin status of a woman, combined with her marital status, frequently defines the nature of crime and its punishment. In
Turkey, up until recent changes in the penal code, the preservation of the family’s honor and public decency took precedence at the expense of the victim. For example, a rapist was not held accountable if he consented to marry the woman he raped. Also, a man who abducted an unmarried woman would receive only three years in prison, as opposed to seven if the woman was married. Virginity examinations performed on “political detainees, women suspected of prostitution, and on girls in state orphanages, dormitories, and high schools” (Parla 2001, 168) were state sanctioned in Turkey until 1999. Because of extensive campaigns by feminist and human rights organizations and in order to harmonize the Turkish civil and penal law with those of the European Union, Turkey reformed its civil and penal codes in 2001 and 2004, including the ones pertaining to sexuality and gender relations.

The cultural significance of virginity in societies like Turkey has been explained in terms of the Mediterranean honor and shame complex (Goddard 1987; Lindisfarne 1994). Preoccupation with women’s chastity/sexual purity appears in the code of honor. In its classical conceptualization, the code of honor refers to the honor or moral purity of a group—that is, the group defined as family, lineage, caste, class, region, and nation—and this honor is determined by the behavior of its women-folk. Honor is lost as a result of female misconduct. Women thus carry the burden of safeguarding group identity and group honor. The female body symbolizes the social boundaries of cultural identities, and virginity ultimately represents the demarcation between in-group and out-group mores. Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, for example, attempt to strategically assert moral superiority by controlling female sexuality, actively enforcing the moral order of their own marginalized community in relation to the dominant majority group (Buitelaar 2002).

Feminist activism in Turkey today continues to pivot around the question of so-called honor crimes in southeastern Turkey—the murder by family or kin members of women suspected of having transgressed the limits of sexual behavior as imposed by traditions, for example, engaging in premarital relationships, flirting, or dressing “inappropriately.” While many human-rights and feminist interventions depend on a misguided vision of a modern nation-state and polity composed of sovereign, ungendered, autonomous subjects conceived of as explicitly transcendent of kinship, linked by the shared values embedded in the
honor code, new feminist scholarship refuses to frame these “honor crimes” within the singular and narrow paradigm of an honor code. Instead, scholars suggest that we must turn our focus from solely examining particular “cultures” or “traditions” to an examination of the institutional, juridical, and legislative practices of the state, arguing that “what are defined as honor crimes and the ways of dealing with them are produced in relation to these institutional practices and discourses” (Kocacioglu 2004, 119). Outlining how the concept of honor is crucial to “the power regime of the modern nation-state in Turkey,” Sirman (2004) argues that delegating honor to the realm of tradition as simply a cultural relation is “to render invisible the modes through which it still regulates the identity and the life of all women” (53). Moreover, “the legal institution recognizes the key role played by kinship and the family in the political order and organizes the clauses of the Civil and Penal codes so as to protect the social and familial order rather than the rights of the individual” (51).

Similarly, Ayse Parla (2001) challenges the framing of virginity exams as an appalling and reactionary expression of lingering traditions constructed in diametrical opposition to the nationalist sacred policy of modernization in the making of the modern Turkish nation-state. By locating virginity exams in a very specific historical and political context, Parla elucidates how they function as a disciplinary tool of the modern state, which continues to inscribe the paradoxical nationalist ideologies of both “traditional” virginity and new modernity onto female bodies (modest yet publicly visible yet virtuous). In the post-1980s period, when women began reclaiming identities not endorsed by official ideology, the state increased the implementation of virginity exams to correct and to discipline female bodies in the name of the nation. Legal ambiguity and systematic gender discrimination continue to enable the state’s routinized intrusion into women’s bodies. Furthermore, the police are literally entrusted with protecting honor and chastity. Anyone who violates “public morality and the rules of modesty” may be detained. Such ambiguity has allowed police to threaten or force women to undergo virginity examinations, particularly in state institutions like orphanages and prisons. The threat strategically produces disciplined desexualized citizens, while the exam, as a corrective penalty, differentiates, classifies, and punishes deviants. This systematic regulation of fe-
male bodies in the name of the nation is most visible in the treatment of political detainees and prostitutes because their sexual behavior is perceived as an act against the state.

The increasing demand for artificial, surgically reconstructed virginity sheds intriguing light on the relationship between virginity and women's own attempts to gain control over their sexualities as well as the powerful hold virginity retains in the social milieu. It is argued that this demand among unmarried women for fake virginity is a sign of the weakening of traditional patriarchal control over women's bodies (Cindoglu 1997; Mernissi 1982). Cindoruk calls artificial virginity in Turkey a survival strategy for women, arguing that "a woman's utilization of medicine for her own needs, that is, repairs, may be conceptualized as the manifestation of women's demands for control over their own bodies" (260). Hymen repair, on the one hand, might be a helpful intervention for women in a climate that still values virginity. But, on the other hand, it also reifies virginity itself.

Despite the unquestionable significance virginity holds for the control and regulation of women's sexuality in Turkey, the meanings girls and women attribute to virginity remains an understudied topic. During the early 1990s, the question of virginity acquired a prominent place in public discourses and became a focus of feminist activism. Extensive media attention around virginity in the 1990s emerged because of a tragic event: the suicide of two teenage girls. Suspected of having engaged in sexual misconduct, these girls were asked to undergo "virginity tests" to determine if their hymens were intact. The supposed "shame" of their "sexual misconduct," or perhaps merely being subjects of such suspicions, drove them to suicide. As a result of national and international feminist activism to make this practice illegal, in 1999 a decree passed making it illegal for state officials to initiate/request virginity tests without the consent of the woman/girl in question.

Feminist scholars studying specific interpretations of virginity in other cultural contexts have applied Bourdieu's notion of capital to virginity, conceptualizing virginity as a form of sexual capital that can be traded for social and economic advantage (Gonzalez-Lopez 2005). In the United States, Laura Carpenter (2002) discerned three distinct frames in her study of the experience of virginity lost: virginity as a gift to be reciprocated for love and commitment, as a shameful stigma to be
gotten rid of, and as a process of gaining sexual experience and knowledge. The author found that the virginity-as-a-gift metaphor is used by and affects the sexual behavior of women, while the stigma metaphor is more commonly used by men. Although these studies raise important questions, my interest and approach to the study of virginity in Turkey requires me to deviate from a strict application of Bourdieu’s notion of capital. My intervention in this chapter has relevance to the premise of Bourdieu’s theory: whether virginity is regarded as a legitimate (perceived and recognized) form of symbolic capital to be capitalized upon.

“Virginity Is Not between the Legs; It Resides in the Brain”: The Making of “Modern” Sexualities

In addition to the thirty-seven women whose narratives make up the exploration of virginity attitudes in this chapter, I spoke to twenty-two men about their experiences and attitudes on sexuality, which is the subject of the next chapter. The narratives I collected reveal an overall strong gender convergence on ideas of sexuality in general, and virginity in particular.

First, both the women and the men viewed societal insistence on female virginity as a mark of traditionalism. They strongly rejected the idealization of female chastity and the symbolic value of virginity, its equation with honor and female purity. The intact hymen is not seen as the property of “others,” family, parents, nation, culture.

Second, the women and men shared a common narrative in rejecting what they called “societal sexual restraint and repression.” They promoted heterosexual desire experienced in premarital relations as a positive force—something important to individual happiness and successful future marriages. They also emphasized that the greatest obstacles to the sexual liberation of young Turks are anachronistic notions of virginity and sexual honor.

Third, both the women and men subscribed to an emerging code of sexual ethics that promotes premarital sex within the context of emotionality (duygusalilik) and love.

Fourth, a vocabulary of gender equality dominated both the women’s and the men’s narratives. Four of the men I interviewed agreed with a conservative single standard that supports the concept of virginity for
both men and women; sixteen of the men embraced a liberal single standard of virginity for neither; and one man I interviewed supported a blatantly sexist double standard of virginity for only women. None of the women I interviewed supported the traditional norm of virginity until marriage.

Fifth, the lived experiences of the tension between embracing a liberal sexual ideology and one’s actual sexual practices brought to light another important gender commonality. The representation of “technical virgins” (those who engage in various sexual activities but avoid penile-vaginal intercourse) as a large middle category (nine) between virgins (ten) and nonvirgins (eighteen) among the young women I interviewed highlights this tension.

Finally, but not surprisingly, the men and women both drew contrasts between their own values concerning virginity and sexuality and those of their parents’ generation. This contrast is sharpest among those participants who were raised in sexually restrictive small towns where mixed-gender interaction among youth and dating practices were limited.

In short, the values held by this group of young Turks mark an important transition to what they consider sexual modernity. As tradition-free agents, they subscribe to the principle that losing or preserving one’s virginity should be a personal matter or choice. The concept of personal responsibility and ownership of the hymen is the key to this shift from external to internal authority. Power located external to the individual (a mark of tradition) is rejected and restraint from within is emphasized (a mark of modernity) (Adam 1996, 138). The changing emphasis from the physical reality of virginity to the morality of virginity is central to this sexual modernity: “virginity is not between the legs; it resides in the brain” is the way this idea was expressed colloquially by some young women and men I interviewed.

Irrespective of their actual sexual experiences and privately held views, both the men and the women stated that expressing a desire for a virgin bride or wanting to be a virgin bride was no longer an acceptable public narrative. This ideological resistance to the preservation of virginity is a prerequisite to the making of modern femininities and masculinities among the educated young secular Turks I studied. For young men, it is neither entirely advantageous nor practical to desire a virgin,
because the status of virgin by definition signals inaccessibility and unavailability, a situation that is at odds with new definitions of masculinity aligned with the values of sexual modernity. Engaging in premarital sex is not only a means of expressing modern, liberated masculinity but also a strategy of social distinction from other "traditional," sexually repressed men. Similarly, for young women, a man who wants a virgin as his bride is seen as backward and therefore not a desirable partner.

It is important to note that these young men's and women's shifting notions of sexuality are couched in the language of the tradition/modernity opposition, revealing the centrality of this dualism to the constitution of their subjectivities. The tradition/modernity opposition exercises a special potency in organizing experience and consciousness, giving rise to a self-reflexivity in which the conduct and feelings of the self are continuously assessed for their modernity or traditionality. I concur with those who argue for the abandonment of the tradition/modernity opposition. However, I believe the centrality of this dualism in people's understanding poses a serious challenge to theoretical attempts to abandon it. Failure to acknowledge the tradition/modernity opposition in interpretation risks a misconstruing of the terms most central to the self-understanding and worldview of its subjects. I preserve the language of my subjects while critically analyzing the binary with regard to virginal façades to explain the complexity of negotiations and resignifications attached to virginity and sexual honor.

In Search of a Self: Home Is Not Where the Heart Is

The overwhelming majority of both the women and the men in my study agreed with the idea that their parents' generation was defined by the ideals of selfless femininity and protective masculinity. Renouncing these gender ideals, they expressed a desire for individualized, liberated selves—for autonomy and self-realization in work, marriage, and leisure. The ideology of individualism, constructed against the selfless feminine and protective masculine of the parental generation, is pivotal in fashioning new gender and sexual identities for these young Turks. This includes claims for sexual freedom and autonomy and antipathy toward marriage and parenthood, forming a strong critique of the patriarchal construction of womanhood among their mothers' generation.
Because they believe exclusively maternal identities vacate a subjective experience of having an independent self, they all see the model of womanhood represented by their mothers as problematic.

The antagonism against marriage and the position of housewifery among these young women highlights the rejection of the selfless feminine embodied by their mothers. The following fragments from two interviews capture how these women’s antimaternal narratives are constructed against the backdrop of their mothers’ lives:

I am so different from my mother. She has devoted herself to her children. I can say that she has no private life of her own. . . . She doesn’t have any hobbies, nothing she does is for herself, she devoted her entire life to constructing a future for us. I don’t think I would construct a life like hers, and I don’t want her to do so either. I am warning her but with no avail. As a result, she is putting happiness aside and seeing herself only as a mother, and she has built her life on the basis of this duty. . . . I wouldn’t design a life for myself over children. . . . Even my mother herself started saying that when she looks back now she didn’t live a life. When I go back to look at my life in the future I don’t want to say, “I didn’t live a life.” (Ekin, 21)

This is what is never going to happen [to me]: my mother is university educated, an economist—she even has a master’s degree . . . but since my father was required to go different places because of his job, he is a civil engineer, and in that same juncture my brother had problems in the daycare center, my mother quit her job. . . . I never imagine I would do such a thing, leaving aside all my labor for my education since I was seven years old—considering I have been receiving education since that age—for someone who enters my life later. I mean a husband here, and marriage and a child. Would I leave my job? . . . I hope I won’t. (Canan, 23)

In Ekin’s and Canan’s narratives, we see that their adverse feelings toward mothering hinge on a construction of motherhood and the self as coterminous, with no permission for the mothers to develop any independent desires and self-interests outside of motherhood. These young women are equally negative about marriage and especially about the dangers of the “housewifely” role affiliated with it. Beril (21) and
Sena (21) below articulate this association and their objections to marriage and even cohabitation.

I don’t want to get married because I don’t want to end up thinking, unconsciously, ok we got married, now it is going to be difficult to divorce. Living together in the same house and being married are really two different things. For example, now I spend a lot of time with Beymen [her boyfriend] at his place and I have my stuff at his place but we are lovers. I don’t pay attention to cleaning etc. . . . but had this place been our home, that might have been an issue. Knowing that your partner can just walk away any moment I think may cause you to show better behavior. I can live together but I don’t think I can manage marriage. This year one time for the first time I set the table and called him “let’s eat” but then I felt like a housewife, and for two days I tried to convince myself that “it is normal, no big deal I just put a dish and forks in front of him, there is nothing to exaggerate and get worked up about.” (Beril)

I don’t look at marriage warmly. . . . I prefer living alone; [my lover and I] might have different friends, and one of us sometimes wants to be alone. These things could be difficult when you are married or living with someone. You start intervening in each other’s life too much, and in my opinion spending too much time with the same person alienates you from each other. Instead of living together, each one should have his/her own place and they should come together only when they desire. This sounds more logical to me. (Sena)

While there are no empirical studies of Turkish young women from a generational perspective, one recent study conducted by Ayca Alemdaroglu (2007) articulates the emergence of a shared common identity among young women who, despite their economic and educational differences, seek an escape from femininity and negotiate respectability on their own terms. However, the escape from traditional femininity and respectability to individual selfhood is fraught with tensions and contradictions because it occurs amidst a continued societal emphasis on virginity. This insistence on virginity forms and regulates the sexual behavior of young women and figures centrally in the ways in which they enter, experience, negotiate, or exit romantic and sexual relationships.
Rewriting Romance: Construction of the Desired Man and Relationship Ideals

These young women's romantic energies and longings are not centered on finding and securing a mate for making a good marriage. In seeking relationships to expand and enrich their selves, they chart a new, non-patriarchal romantic/intimate relationship trajectory. This relationship ideal is expressed succinctly by Canan: “A relationship is about what you add to each other. When a relationship is over, the important question is this: What did I gain from it? What did the relationship and he add to myself?” This ideal of intimate relationships is also key to understanding how desirable masculinity is constructed by these women. As Talbot and Quayle (2010) note, women are not “passive consumers or recipients of masculinity.” They are active participants in the construction and maintenance of (potentially counterfeminist) masculine ideals, helping to “coproduce, normalize, and even fetishize masculinities” (256). Among my research participants, a trope of emancipation from patriarchal romance—the merging or loss of the self in another—organizes the imagery of the desired relationships and the desired man. Particularly, female desire for masculine ideals is negotiated through problematizing a patriarchal male identity predicated on conceptions of dominance, control, and intrusion upon female identity. Rewriting romance as a sphere of self-assertion and a site for the expression of agency and autonomy rather than a sphere of self-sacrifice and female subservience to accommodate men and their desires represents a very significant shift in the construction of ideal masculinity.

The Ideal Man: Conformism and Transgression

The narratives of the ideal man in these women's accounts are marked by a dominant storyline about escaping from the possessive, protectionist, and restrictive masculinity of patriarchal romance. However diverse the representations of the desired man are—variously inflected, multiply defined—they are notable for their emphasis on a repudiation of a model of masculinity that is only experienced as restrictive and limiting by women. Therefore, the figure of the ideal man emerges as a reaction or alternative to patriarchal masculinity. To put it differently, patriarchal male identity
in Turkish society is subjected to extensive interrogation by these young women as a way of negotiating and then refiguring the ideal man.

The portrayal of the desired man is constructed around the dual demands of gender egalitarianism and possession of power, a highly specific blend of conformism and transgression. By “conformism” here, I refer to the young women's embrace of high ambition in men to become socially, culturally, and economically dominant—vital for upward mobility. By “transgression,” I mean the dislodging of men's gender-based traditional privileges and their traditional superiority feelings and displays. Ayşe’s narrative captures this dual desire:

He should be extremely intelligent with ambitions and accumulation to achieve his goals. When I look at him, I should be able to see confidence and power in his personality. Of course I don’t mean power over me or other women in his life. On the contrary, I cannot imagine myself being with a man who treats women as second-class citizens and tries to dominate them. (Ayşe, 22)

As Ayşe’s description makes clear, desiring a man who holds gender-egalitarian views and is capable of acting on them does not mean that the dominating agency of men is rejected. These women's descriptions of the desired man do not articulate what is commonly referred to as “nonhegemonic masculinities” (emotionality, a desire to nurture, and rejection of power and dominance assigned to them by the dominant culture) (Talbot and Quayle 2010), nor do they celebrate the relinquishment of mastery and control in men. On the contrary, the pervasive emphasis is on the image of a powerful man as a source of admiration, attraction, and desire. However, there is a very significant underlying uniformity in the ways the desired man is made to relate to power: he should be able to possess and exude power, not simply because he is a male but by virtue of his earned power as a result of his accomplishments, cultural accumulations, and high-level aspirations for himself. As expressed by Yelda, “When I mean power, I mean power emanating from achieving something... only that kind of male power creates admiration and desire in me.”

The construction of the desired man is imbricated with the imagery of an ambitious, self-directed man who has long-term goals for develop-
ing his potential to its maximum, who cares about improving himself, and who is interested in self-enrichment through participating in activities that provide intellectual stimulation and opportunities for unique and creative accomplishments. This desired man—who is invariably depicted in terms of his capacity to create intellectual and cultural stimulation and awakening—is multidimensional, possessing varying interests. Having intellectual, cultural, and artistic interests outside academic work is seen as reflective of a masculine desire for self-expansion. For these women, this multidimensionality offers the potential for engagement with a wider realm of social and cultural worlds with renewable sources of excitement. In other words, the idealized embodied masculinity is more expansive than middle-class cerebral masculinity that privileges intellect and academic success (McDowell 2003).

It is important to note that these women do not cherish ambition that is overpowering. Those men who are overly ambitious to achieve what they want are offered as examples of undesired men because they are inauthentic, egotistical, and deceitful. In the service of their ambitions, they develop false and insincere relationships, manipulating their environments and people to advance themselves. The women reject this trait because sensitivity toward others, male altruism (doing good for others even against one's own rational interests or desires), and social responsibility also form the contours of the desired man. Men who behave indifferently toward others do not appeal to these women. As Didem (22) observes, “every lover can make his lover feel special, but if he cannot approach a woman who is falling down in the street, this does not have any meaning for me.”

In addition to well-regulated ambition, the image of the desired man is also grounded in the physical language of the body: modes of self-presentation, bodily habitus, and external appearance play a significant role in attraction and desirability. While the body features prominently, what is referred to as having potential attractiveness, seductiveness, or pleasure is not necessarily male beauty or handsomeness. Rather, the stress is on continuities between the body, the psyche, and internal selfhood—the body that represents the self. Hale's (22) description of this association between the body and internal selfhood is quite typical: "Inner qualities that appeal to me are reflected in physical characteristics—his walk, his posture, and his tone—self-confident or not. If he is not self-
assured, weak, and doesn't know his own self-worth, this is reflected in his walk, his talk, his overall demeanor and gestures.” In other words, the ideal man carries power in his body. Body language also embodies the tastes and norms of the urban middle-class habitus. In this regard, Feray (22) refers to eating habits: “I shouldn't be disturbed while watching him eat; he should know the rules about how to eat.” Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1984) is very relevant here as he stresses that class-based dispositions are embodied and internalized in particular ways.

Not surprisingly, images of desirable masculinity are constituted in large part through the exclusion of men who are considered to be unsophisticated, one-dimensional, unambitious, overly cerebral and lifeless, and meek—men without any cultural accumulation, who carry themselves with signs of a certain helplessness. Additionally, men who enact macho stereotypes are regarded as vulgar, rude, sexist and overbearing, and dominating. In short, men who are actively devalued, rendered peripheral and marginal in the urban, middle-class social and cultural realms, are deemed undesirable by these women. It goes without saying that desiring particular men and not others is a class-based phenomenon and learned in one’s class habitus (Bourdieu 1984). Reading enactments of different forms of masculinity through class, these women intimately connect differences in men with differences in class locations and urban/rural origins. As Iris Marion Young (1989) writes, boundaries are key to the construction of any identity category: “Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure .... The logic of identity seeks to keep those borders firmly drawn” (303). The construction of desired masculinity, then, is also about a policing of borders and serves to prohibit cross-class romantic and sexual relationships, while also actually serving to produce and consolidate class identities. Indeed, almost all the relationships these young women engage in carry class convergences in terms of similarity in family socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicity, and family class cultures. In this regard, breakup narratives significantly revealed instances in which relationships that were otherwise going well were ended upon the discovery of the presence of pious religious identities or Kurdish ethnic origin in boyfriends' family biographies.

It is important to underscore that the young women who give form and content to the articulations of desired masculinity reflect their own
high statuses. They are concerned that forming romantic liaisons with educationally low-status men will trigger male insecurity and resentment in their partners about being in a disadvantaged position due to their lesser human and cultural capital. They even find it difficult to contemplate romantically attaching with men outside elite universi­ties like Boğaziçi, or even consider it out of the question to do so. This desire—finding men who are able to share their successes and not be threatened by them—serves to make class boundaries nonpermeable.

Indeed, in romantic relationships that reflect their own status as high achievers and their own cultural capital, they claim respect and recognition for their intellectual capabilities. Nonrecognition of what they consider “their value” by their romantic partners is one of the most important reasons for breakups. Selda (21) claimed that while her friends always valued the force of her ideas, conveying to her that “your ideas are very important for us because they orient us,” her former boyfriend was making her feel “lacking” (yetersiz) and cultivating a sense of deficiency in her: “He was not valuing me, in fact he was valuing me, but not my thoughts and ideas. On the contrary, he would look at me by making funny faces: ‘look at the things you know. You know everything blah blah’—kind of look.”

In their study of young, upwardly mobile South African women’s constructions of acceptable masculinity, sociologists Kirsten Talbot and Michael Quayle (2010) found that women’s attitudes toward displays of hegemonic masculinity are heavily context dependent. As a rule, the researchers found that when discussing masculinities in social or work-based contexts, the women tended to appeal to “nice guy” traits coded traditionally as unmasculine, such as romantic passivity, emotionality, and a desire to nurture. On the other hand, when discussing masculinities in romantic or familial settings, the women used more traditional, hegemonic masculine traits such as being assertive, active, and protective, to describe ideal masculinities. In contrast, young Turkish women’s constructions of the idealized embodied masculinity do not neatly divide masculinities by such contexts but rather emphasize merging of constitutive traits of conservative and transgressive. What appeals to the young women I studied is male versatility (as opposed to rigidity) in modulating conduct to practice imaginative engagement with contexts and women, articulated with the expression “knowing
how to behave depending on the context/situation” (duruma göre nasil davranacağımı bilmek). Indeed, the deployment of flexibility in men’s subjectivities is considered a core disposition of middle-classness and nonpatriarchalness.

**Relationship Ideals: “Without Restricting Each Other’s Freedom”**

The powerful longing of young women for equal relationships in which their intellectual power is cherished is accompanied by another central longing: the creation and maintenance of autonomy and independence in a relationship such that there is no “merging or loss of the self in another.” Among this group of young women, Ekin deployed highly conventionalized language that offered imagery of an ideal relationship based on a balance between sharing intimacy and maintaining independence:

This idea of two people becoming one disturbs me; two different people in fact means two different lives. There should be an independence through which you can lead your own life to do things you want to do. But at the same time, along with this independence, sharing should also be at the maximum level.

Similarly, Meltem (21) noted that lovers “should have [their] own lives but those lives should merge with one life.” Firmly couched in the expression of “a relationship without restricting each other’s freedom” (birbirlerinin özgürülüklerini kısıtlamadıkları), this notion of autonomy and independence in a relationship means the ability to pursue one’s own interests while respecting the ability of the other to do the same, as well as the ability not only to express one’s own desires, interests, and thoughts in a relationship but also to act on them.

When my respondents refer to freedom concretely, they mean freedom to shape their existence and to determine their involvement outside intimate relationships. This notion of freedom is again constructed against patriarchal courtship/romance/marriage, where male actions infringe upon the independence of women, circumscribing their behaviors and identities. Autonomy serves as the crucial component of this nonpatriarchal relationship ideal because it allows for romantic
partners to relate on an equal level and entails respecting the desires and personalities of one another, making possible mutual recognition—full comprehension, deep understanding of each other. My participants’ definition of the ideal relationship is remarkably similar to what Giddens (1992) calls a “pure relationship” in which personal democracy allows for autonomy, and with autonomy comes the responsibility to respect one’s partner’s independence, to be reflective about one’s own actions, and to hold one another accountable to maintaining a situation of equality.

For these young women, intimacy as an expression of love and relatedness helps lay the path for autonomy and independence. How do they define intimacy? In order to describe what they consider to be true intimacy, they reference the ability to completely and mutually self-disclose without any reservations and to elicit the total understanding of themselves and their value by their romantic others. Sonay, whose story opened this chapter, illustrates this perspective with a particular reference to the virginity issue. Sonay claimed that her boyfriend of three and a half years is comfortable with her decision not to have vaginal intercourse because “he knows well why I am not ‘being together’” (a euphemism for coitus, the most complete expression of sexual intimacy):

I know occasionally he wants it and vocalizes, like “at this moment I really want it” but he never pressures me. In fact we talked about it the other day. I said, “What would you do if I said I wanted it?” His response was, “That was a desire in the moment when we were making love (being sexual without vaginal intercourse) and later you would regret it; I don’t want you to be unhappy.”

Later he reassured her that “it will not happen until you are absolutely sure.” For Sonay, because there is a true love and intimacy between them, her boyfriend deeply understands her and her motivation (she defines it as “my consideration of my mother’s feeling”) to the extent that he even can anticipate the emotional and psychic consequences for her of potential transgression. Instead of competing with Sonay’s mother’s wishes regarding her sexuality, thus threatening Sonay’s deep attachment to the mother, he recognizes the importance of mother-daughter connectivity in shaping Sonay’s sexual self.
Sezen’s (23) story describes her attempts to withstand and respond to the creation of a subjugated, merged self, illustrating young women’s yearning to establish and negotiate relationships in which they can maintain their personal autonomy. Her story is instructive as it is an illustration from a fresh relationship. It also brings to the discussion a complex experience of contradictory desires of the body and the mind. Although she has never engaged in any sexual activity other than being kissed and touched by her very first boyfriend, whom she had started seeing just two weeks before her interview, 23-year-old virgin Sezen said, “I don’t feel myself a woman or a girl, I see myself in between.” In high school she “didn’t think that relationships with men were wrong,” but she “couldn’t practice it [herself].” She explained, “Maybe I wasn’t good at it, or maybe had my body concurred with my thoughts, I would have experienced things in high school.” When Sezen arrived at college, she and most of her close friends lacked any sexual or romantic history, and she wasn’t able to experience any romance until her last year in college, although she fell madly in love with a man at Boğaziçi who never noticed her.

She had been in love with her boyfriend for six or seven months before they got together, but she couldn’t approach him. He was not aware that she was interested in him. She made him feel that he was the one who had feelings about her first—something that makes Sezen happy: “Men don’t like girls being dominant—knowing more than boys.” The central preoccupation animating Sezen’s romantic and sexual experimentation with her very first boyfriend was avoiding self-subjugation—not allowing him to dictate what she should want.

Sezen admits that she is drawn to her boyfriend and sexually awakened by him because she loves the attention she gets from him—she has never had close attention from a man before—for example, his pushing back her hair when it falls forward on her temple. He is more experienced and knows she has no experience, so he is careful to behave cautiously, making sure that she does not show negative reactions to his sexual advances. Neither Sezen nor he has private space, so they are getting closer sexually (no kissing on the mouth yet) in parks and other similar places. Her love for him is sensual and arouses sexual desire. He makes her very sexually excited, even when she is only thinking about him. Indeed, Sezen’s inexperienced status and sexual innocence made
her the subject of a remark by her best friend, who, knowing that she had never gone out with a man before, told her, “You will have orgasm when you first hold a man’s hand.”

While Sezen discovered the thrill of sexual desire attached to a specific man, a consuming dilemma surfaced: “When we sit in a booth I don’t sit across from him, but he tries to be face-to-face, trying to get close. In fact I like it, but my body behaves in a way that indicates it does not like it.” Her body acting the part of the sexually timid female, responding to a model of sexual interaction in which female passivity is enacted, bothers her. And indeed, during our conversation, Sezen recounted how she was acutely aware of and uncomfortable with a passive and submissive role during the first act of intimacy with her boyfriend—touching hands. When they took a long stroll, she kept her hands in her pocket. He tried to get her hands out of her pockets, but she said to him, “I like to walk with my hands in my pockets.” She added, “But I also wanted to hold hands with him.” Reflecting on her inexperience, Sezen observed,

I don’t know how to hold hands—you are not supposed to hold his hand as if you are holding your mother’s hand. Indeed, he changed the way I held his hand and I said, “you know I am a rookie”—that is we showed that he is the experienced one and I am the inexperienced one. . . . While holding hands he was constantly putting his thumb on mine. One time I took my thumb over his. This troubled him. He said, “Hmm you are trying to dominate, aren’t you?” [Sezen replied,] “How much we are interested in satisfying the need for dominance, even a finger reveals this.”

To say “I am in love” makes Sezen uncomfortable “because regardless of what the other side does, you feel you are being besieged and conquered. The feeling of imminent disempowerment, self-subjugation prevents me from feeling powerful.” To explain this feeling of being besieged, she cited a particular incident. Like many men in Turkish society, her boyfriend is an ardent fan of a particular football team, and he wanted to convert her to his team. She said no. Although she could have easily converted, as she is not an ardent fan of any team, she saw this conversion as an important symbol of her besiegement and submission to his will. She read this demand as a demand for self-renunciation, her love
culminating in a loss of identity. Sezen’s attempt to withstand a submissive role extends beyond sexual interaction. As the relationship unfolds, she said she was continuing to discover many other issues emerging in the realm of domination and subordination, fostering in her a sense of unease and disappointment. In this regard, she also observed that her boyfriend is already feeling a lack because of her superior knowledge and taste in their common hobbies (films and jazz music).

Caught in between her sexual desire for her boyfriend and her desire not be subjugated in the relationship, Sezen feels ambivalent about whether she is ready to go “all the way” with him. Because love presents itself in the form of submission to his wishes and her surrender, if she does have sex with him and commit more fully to the relationship, she thinks it will involve renouncing her personality and her interests. Sezen is against marriage—seeing it as bringing unhealthy dependencies and many responsibilities: “The idea of sharing what I plan to do with another person scares me and having to make all of my decisions with that other person.” For her, achieving an independent female identity—being a woman who possesses her own decision-making abilities—in a marriage is not within the realm of possibility. The ideal in her head is to have a “lonely world”: she wants to live alone, but have a lover who occasionally visits her in a world in which neither restricts the other’s freedom.

Another participant, Didem, commented on male ideals of the perfect woman by noting that “unfortunately, Turkish men like women who need them, the type of woman who is needy.” Speaking in a male voice, she further elaborated the desired woman in the male narrative: “It would be nice if she is voiceless and if she does whatever I say to her.” But Didem simultaneously complicated her own formulation with a counternarrative, stating that men are, in fact, attracted to unsubordinated, self-possessed, and self-trusting women like her because the idea of chasing after and getting such powerful girls strokes their pride and serves to increase their self-esteem, but they find relationships with these girls difficult, a topic that I examine in depth in the next chapter.

Given the noncomplicity these upwardly mobile, highly educated women demonstrated in maintaining traditional gender roles in romantic contexts, we should conclude that romantic ideals act as sites of contestation for patriarchal, hegemonic masculinity in Turkish society.
and are important sources of its dissolution. In the next chapter, we will see the complex challenges some men face in disowning the patriarchal construction of masculinity as protective, controlling, and dominant.

Virginal Façades

A virgin is an elite female among females, withheld, untouched, exclusive. (Ortner 1978, 32)

Among upwardly mobile, educated young Turks, a virgin is no longer an “elite” (valued) woman, but then neither is a self-proclaimed nonvirgin. It is within this dichotomy between the two undesirable states of the virgin and the nonvirgin that new constructions of young elite women are being built. In order to achieve the new expectations of desirability, the new elite woman must demonstrate a capacity for passion and sex, not just romance and marriage. She must not be sexually innocent or naïve, but neither should she exude excessive sexual experience. She must evoke sexual availability and accessibility and must be ready to disregard the spatial and moral boundaries of her family. Vis-à-vis her female peers, she must reveal a self that is in control, a capacity to negotiate and attract and reject men successfully. Vis-à-vis her parents, she must maintain a façade of being sexually untouched while also engaging in relationships with men.

In order to negotiate the contradictory expectations and normative definitions of how young women behave, feel, and relate sexually to men, the young women I studied attempted to create identities in relation to their state of virginhood that are purposefully ambiguous. I call these identities virginal façades to capture the dynamic nature of putting on appearances, pretensions, and creating or permitting silences that enable young women to accommodate their own desires and negotiate the often conflicting expectations of parents, men, and peers. The notion of virginal façades, ironically, also befits the façade embedded in the popular and official reference to unmarried women as “kız” (girl), which assumes that all unmarried women are virgins. Finally, the notion of façade helps to signify the importance of the “audience” in managing identities; the self must be properly presented and then evaluated by others. Peer-group and parental scrutiny and judgment of the sexual
behavior of young women figure strongly in the construction of this virginal façade. First, I proceed by examining how peer judgments are articulated and experienced.

Motor Girl: A Cautionary Tale

Evaluations of the sexual behavior of women by their peers operate within what Skeggs (1997) terms a dialogic form of recognition: recognizing the recognitions of others. Recognitions are always deeply imbued with value judgments of others. The power of these judgments lies in their explicit or implicit expression through day-to-day peer conversations, romantic and sexual storytelling about others, and gossip. These all operate to differentiate, categorize, and label young women and their sexual behaviors and practices, distinguishing “respectable” girls and relationships from “bad” girls and undesirable relationships.

Those young women who engage repeatedly in uncommitted encounters involving acts of penetrative sex are judged and categorized as “promiscuous” and referred to as “motor girls” or “bir gecelik kızlar” (one-night girls). They are alternatively labeled as “yırtık” (torn) or “bozulmuş” (spoilt), explicit references to the broken hymen. It is not, however, the broken hymen alone that differentiates the motor girl from other girls, but also her refusal to seek sex within a setting of love. Most importantly, the motor girl signifies fear of unbridled sexuality and unrestrained sexual freedom. She is the personification of the notion that a young woman who loses her virginity loses control of her sexuality, because as a nonvirgin, she has to sleep with every man she has a relationship with. This fear of “falling” is not only associated with the danger and stigmatization of multiple sexual encounters and sexual adventure, as personified by “motors,” but is also linked to a host of other conduct and practices, ranging from having multiple brief affairs with or without sexual intimacy to changing boyfriends too often and even to falling in and out of love too frequently. All these practices are open to the potential interpretation of a manifestation of unbridled female sexuality. The nonvirgin women I interviewed explained that this was the reason some girls are reluctant to “go all the way.” It is this anxiety about navigating the domain of complex and freer sexual choices when no longer a virgin that figures centrally in young women’s choices to remain technical
virgins. This unease is a sign of danger on the threshold of identity, an identity in-between, with its claims of innocence and sexual purity and its fears of dissolution and falling to impurity. It is in this context that losing virginity is considered such a transformative and enduring event.

Feray (22) talked about how her best friend responded harshly after she broke up with a young man whom she didn’t even have sex with, telling her, “You finished it again, once more a relationship began quickly and ended quickly.” For Feray, her friend’s “reaction was very hurtful because it was like a reaction: ‘let me tell you how many men you slept with.’ This was very disturbing to me because it was as if she was saying ‘it is not even clear how many men you have had so far.’”

The motor girl’s opposite is not a virgin but a girl who is in control, who “doesn’t let herself be used in a relationship,” and who demonstrates internal restraint. Leyla (22) described the reaction of her dorm friends to her relationship with men by relating how her friends quizzed her motives, asking her questions that, in her view, emphasized their denial of her own desires and pleasure:

“Why are you sleeping with every man who comes to your way? You shouldn’t sleep with everyone. How long have you known that man? Do you love him? Did you really fall for him? ... Why are you letting yourself be used?” As if I myself didn’t want it; as if he used me and left me ... they say, “don’t be stupid, you deserve better,” as if I need to get something in return: “will he see you again?”

The imperative to “not let yourself be used” dictates the most salient dimension of “respectable” expressions of a young woman’s sexual behavior, the opposite of what a motor girl is imagined to practice. The language of self-control and self-respect contained in the vocabulary of “not letting yourself be used” strongly resonates with this particular group of women who are foremost defined by their high-achiever status. Yet because this imperative is relative—whether one is “letting herself be used” cannot be determined outside specific situational contexts—only those who experience sex with a steady boyfriend in a long-term relationship are able to change the meaning of it. Thus the virginal façade is not merely about displaying and narrating a self that cannot be recognized as “motor” by others but more importantly is about presenting
relationships with men in such a way that compliance to the framework of the fusion of love and sex is clearly present.

In these new definitions of purity and impurity, a girl who loses her virginity in a long-term relationship, which is assumed to be connected to love, is still morally a virgin (pure), while a woman who loses her virginity during a casual encounter becomes impure. Because long-term relationships and sex within those relationships are privileged in this new code of sexual ethics, the young women I interviewed chose not to disclose their sexual histories and experiences even to close friends, with the exception of a few confidantes. They neither disclose their state of virginhood nor share any information regarding how far they go sexually. Instead, they adopt virginal façades.

Parental expectations form the strongest source of internalized pressure to remain a virgin before marriage, though this is not the only moral gauge. In the next section I turn to an examination of what parental expectations contribute to the construction of virginal façades.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Navigating Parental Expectations

While not the only moral gauge for these women, parental expectations form the strongest source of internalized pressure for them to stay virgins. Even though daughters' understanding of parental expectation concerning their sexuality involves the dictum that they should remain untouched until marriage, it would be quite wrong to assume that parental control manifests itself only in terms of inhibition. According to these young women's narratives, daughters are actively encouraged by their mothers to "find one" so that they can maintain a "respectable" relationship with a desirable young man who could potentially become a future husband. This parental expectation is especially present for lower-status families who are eager to marry their daughters upward. Even the most sexually conservative parents expect their daughters to use their chances to build romantic relationships that could lead to marriage with a higher-status spouse. Similarly, upper-middle-class families' downward-mobility concerns also motivate an interest in their daughters' intimate relationships.

Generally speaking, for the parents of Boğaziçi women, the relative sexual freedom of their daughters, the ease with which they interact
with male peers, and the formation of deep cross-gender friendships are in fact symbolic of their modern, educated, and cultivated status. As high-achieving girls, they are also expected to have fun and engage in respectable courtship with men. Yet the parental definition of a respectable relationship promotes sexual modesty, restraint, and the preservation of virginity. How do daughters then manage such a tightrope of liberated modernity and sexual restraint?

By and large, young women remain silent about temporary boyfriends. Boyfriends are introduced to parents if the relationship is intended to last. Daughters also don’t disclose boyfriends when they anticipate parental disapproval of a particular partner. Moreover, they do not talk about or introduce partners who fit the definition of a perfect future “groom” if they are ambivalent about them—this is to avoid the opposite problem: being pressured to maintain an unsatisfying relationship. However, the most important concern for a young woman as a high-achiever daughter is to avoid creating an image of herself as a serial dater, someone who struggles and constantly fails in her relationships and continually needs to move on to the next man, blemishing her high-achiever status. In response to my question why she was hiding her current relationship from her parents, Buket (21) related a very common experience:

Why do I feel the need to keep it secret? . . . Because I already told [my parents] about the previous boyfriend and about the one before him. Both of them ended fairly quickly, we didn’t get along. This time I decided not to tell them before I get certain things [in the relationship] on track. Because if it ends again quickly I don’t want to face them once more to say, “it has finished again.”

These silences also enhance daughters’ freedom to navigate their clandestine lives without constantly lying. A virginal façade inevitably leads to a clandestine life. Those who live away from family and/or live on- or off-campus alone or with friends have ample opportunities for transgressions; therefore, they tend to disclose less to their parents, and their secret lives tend to be more extensive. In contrast, young women who live with their families in Istanbul have limited opportunities to transgress, and thus their secret lives tend to be hard to manage.
According to the young women I interviewed, all of their parents adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell policy” concerning their daughters’ virginity, including the most sexually liberal parents. This policy, freeing daughters from feigning compliance and shielding them from potential conflicts with their parents, saves the parents from the anxieties of knowing. Indeed, everyone is invested in the façade.

“A False Sense of Self”: Guilt, Class, and Sexual Secrecy

Not surprisingly, sexual secrecy creates guilt, and guilt is steeped in social class. Indeed, the women who expressed the most guilt are those who come from modest class backgrounds with uneducated parents, typically with rural origins. Compared to savvy, highly educated, upper-middle-class parents, these parents’ lack of knowledge about the daily lives of their daughters equip them poorly to understand the cultural milieu and relationships that their daughters have entered through their education in an elite environment in Istanbul, enabling their daughters to put on façades easily. Mehtap (22) had many short-term sexual relationships as well as a longer relationship with a boyfriend but was still a technical virgin. She comes from a modest family background with uneducated parents. Living at home made it especially hard for her to experience her sexual autonomy and required her to lie constantly, intensifying her guilt about posing as what she called “a false sense of self”:

I am not who my parents think I am . . . in my parents’ mind I am so far away from sexuality (being a sexual being) . . . . I am such a little innocent girl. I have nothing to do with those kinds of things . . . . I feel like I have to behave the way they want me to behave, because they are the ones who give me everything. When I go home after a sexual experience and see them treat me as an innocent person [it] makes me feel guilty. I feel so bad about myself . . . . This weekend I told them I went to Ankara for a school trip, though I went to see a male friend [with whom she had a sexual encounter]. Everything was fine and beautiful there for a while, but it was still on my mind while I was having sex what my parents were thinking, that I am innocently taking tours in the university . . . it is so hard to feel this pressure . . . . It is so hard to live with this contradiction. I think it is engraved in my subconscious that sometimes I think that when
something bad happens to me I feel I am being punished for posing a different self to my family and for doing things that I am not supposed to do. In the past, because premarital sexuality is sin and forbidden, I felt guilty also in front of God, but I overcame that. But I can't overcome this one.

Another technical virgin with a modest social-class background, Sonay, whom I quoted earlier, made the following comment in response to my question about whether she will tell her mother if she loses her virginity: “If I lose it of course I won't tell my mother, but then every time I see my mother I will remember it [losing my virginity] and will feel guilty, thinking 'how did I do such a thing? She doesn't feel anything right now but if she knew she would be feeling horrible and a huge disappointment in me.” Acceptance to an elite university, such as Boğaziçi University, demands long-term investment by modest families in their children’s education and many financial and emotional parental sacrifices. In turn, these daughters have a strong sense of emotional indebtedness to their parents that translates into an intense desire to protect their parents from potential disappointments and unhappiness. It is within this modest social-class context that we should consider young women's intense feelings of guilt. Yet, as will see in the following pages, there is a more complex explanation for the strong maternal voice in young women's sexual lives.

None of the upper-middle-class daughters' narratives contained expressions of guilt toward their mothers in relation to their secret sexual practices or virginity status. It seems they take parental sacrifices for granted because their class privileges and advantages assume familial investment in their elite education. Also, it seems their parents are those who most often “feign” ignorance about their daughters' virginal façades. Perhaps because these women recognize that their parents know the truth but feign otherwise, they are less likely to feel guilt.

The Turkish case reminds us that we cannot isolate sex and sexuality from questions of social class and its privileges as well as its injuries. Class is central to the formation of women's sexual subjectivities, especially in relation to young women's assertions of sexual autonomy and resistance against the regulation of their desires. Those young women who actively elude and resist the merging of sex with love are staging a clandestine and individualized sexual revolution. But some of these
personal sexual revolutions have greater potential to be stalled than others because they carry with them the extra burden of social-class disadvantage, personally experienced as sexual guilt. Sexual guilt reveals its capacity to articulate class and sexuality, but it reveals much more as well. Mehtap, whom I quoted earlier, was plagued by guilt. Unlike her upper-middle-class peers, she did not plan to pursue postgraduate education, despite the fact that she was majoring in a prestigious field and was about to graduate with good grades. She wanted to get married (even if she did not fall in love) as soon as possible, the only way she thought she could end her masquerade as an “innocent” girl vis-à-vis her parents. Pushing her into early marriage and domesticity, guilt became the single most important feeling in the formation of her personal and professional identity. Unlike disadvantaged revolutionaries like Mehtap, upper-middle-class young women’s class status shields them from the injuries of sexual guilt and shame when they transgress parental boundaries, because their class privilege does not construe an elite education as a source of parental indebtedness.

Formation of Sexual Subjectivities/Selves: Permitted versus Prohibited

The particular constellation of these young women’s family backgrounds places them on different trajectories in their formation of sexual selves. Maternal educational background (closely linked with social-class origins and urban or small-town upbringing) was the most influential dimension in the complex dynamics of the development and expression of sexual subjectivity among the young women I studied. Generally speaking, those young women, raised by stay-at-home mothers with limited formal education and lower-middle-class origins, acutely experience competing forces between family expectations for sexual purity and personal desires. In contrast, university-educated mothers place their daughters on a trajectory in which the daughters feel little to no tension between meeting familial expectations and fulfilling personal desires. While the daughters of highly educated parents received explicit messages about parental recognition of sexual feelings and the potential for sexual intimacy with boys during their adolescent years, those who grew up in conservative family circles faced complete parental silence.
on anything relating to sex and sexuality. Described by these daughters as “uncomfortable with sex and sexuality,” this familial voice creates a negative/prohibited view of the sexual self and the world of sexual intimacy with men. Describing this kind of parental background, Sezen said the broader familial message in her teens was that sex did not exist: “Even when watching a documentary about animals, when it comes to the scene about animals copulating, the remote control was searched to change the channel. They pretended there is no such thing—sexuality.” Concerns about maintaining the sexual purity of their daughters often prompted these parents to exert silence in order to withhold recognition and devalue their sexual desires and feelings. Like Sezen, Sena observed that sexuality in her family was always a silenced topic, “something that cannot be experienced before marriage, and after marriage not for pleasure but for reproduction.” She explained, “They don’t think girls’ sexuality is dangerous because they are sexually passive, but there is danger and that danger comes from men. Therefore they told me we trust you but we don’t trust men.”

In contrast to these women’s experiences, the young women who came from urban, middle-class families with educated mothers described their parents as comfortable with the realm of sexuality, providing these women with a central orientation to foster self-trust in order to become self-regulating individuals. Beril observed that her father never interferes with and gives tremendous importance to her privacy, saying, “It is a matter of private life,” while her mother encourages her to prolong the pleasures of youth and courtship. In fact, her mother remarked that “boyfriends are temporary; [pointing out the long duration of Beril’s current relationship] this has been too long—aren’t you considering splitting up?”

Young women like Beril have had more opportunities to begin courtship at an early age and acquire sexual and romantic experience earlier, thus building skills and capital in negotiating intimate and emotional relations and exploring their sexual desires and capabilities. They often feel no need to keep their romantic selves separate from their role as daughters and are able to share and integrate their romantic lives into their family lives. In dramatic contrast, the messages of prohibitive parents like Sezen’s and Sena’s continue to exert a powerful hold on these daughters, who keep their romantic and sexual lives clandestine. For
these young women, family relations are seen as invariably antipathetic to their own romantic and sexual interest; it is, indeed, a realm that threatens these interests and is therefore a realm, in a few cases, of open contestation and, in most cases, of inner struggle.

The consequences of these class-based family differences in the development of sexual subjectivity for the young women I interviewed are long-lasting and have a multifaceted impact on them, their sense of femininity, and their relationships with men, as we will see in the following pages. However, it is important to note that like all abstractly constructed taxonomies, the divide between the permissive and prohibited family environments is also an artificial one, as some other important distinctions are obscured or lost by dividing young women's development of sexual subjectivities into two neat categories. For example, Feray developed her sexual subjectivity in a mismatched relational context; she grew up in a small town, yet a relatively liberal home environment. Her university-educated parents were open to her having boyfriends in high school. Particularly, she was seen by her father as capable of the emotional intimacy necessary for connecting with boys. Her father always told her, "You will live your life as you know it and I trust you. This is your life and you will make your own choices." Her mother's advice was, "Of course you will go out with men, but don't engage in behavior that would harm you." But she was surrounded by sexually conservative friends in her small town and it bothered her to have drastically opposing views from her friends. Feray referred to the collective imagination of her girlhood friends in the small town where girls had no vocabulary, no permission, and no shared identity with which to describe their sexual feelings: "[For them] no sexual relationship was acceptable before marriage. There wasn't even talk with a sexual content, like to know your body, your sexual desires and passion—something like 'I like that boy and he excites me also sexually'—you couldn't even form such a sentence. It was like a closed box." It was indeed difficult for Feray's parents to provide her with a social and material environment that reflected their more permissive views.

Furthermore, mothers who deny and refuse to recognize their daughters' sexual subjectivities often soften their prohibitive stance as their daughters reach early adulthood without any romantic engagement—a disturbing issue and source of anxiety for these mothers. For example,
Sezen pointed out that her mother has changed her tune in her senior year. Leaving behind her usual cautionary voice, she has been increasingly encouraging Sezen to engage in a chaste courtship (but save sex for marriage) in order to find a suitable man for marriage before she graduates, although when it comes to specific situations her mother continues to verbalize her fears, frequently asking, “Is there anything [sexual] between you and that boy?” To put it differently, it might appear that Sezen’s mother also acted as an agent of change/encouragement in the formation of Sezen’s newly found relationship in her senior year. Indeed, these and similar contradictions we face in building classifications signal real complexities and ambiguities.

What sorts of conditions are necessary for effective personal transformation, pushing and transforming the limits of young women’s negative/repressive/inhibiting sexual socialization? It seems this is accomplished only if reciprocal affective and communicative relations with other women are in place. Young women who fashion their own freedom despite their mother’s strong voice tend to have real-life intimate role models that they find in their immediate circles, such as older sisters and cousins. For other young women, like Sena, who have no close role models, no blueprints as they try out new identities, personal transformation in the context of and as a response to sexual inhibition can be accomplished only if there are conceptual and normative resources, like feminism, for girls to draw upon in naming, understanding, criticizing, and ultimately overcoming norms, ideals, and experiences that reinforce sexual repression.

Sena’s and Feray’s stories illustrate this point. For Sena, it was the discovery of feminism in college that made the difference: in the past ashamed even of her womanhood, she now “reached the lightness of womanhood because of feminism.” She said that for a period, she felt sorry that she lacked a penis and wished she were a man. She struggled with asking herself, “Why are men being rewarded for their penises and my vagina must be hidden?” and described the feeling as “an uncomfortableness of being yourself and wanting to become something else that is not possible.” Now, she explains, “Feminism opens my mind and is a source of power because it keeps me wide awake, gives me consciousness.” For Feray, the power of permission to inhabit the identity of the sexually independent woman came from a (sexually liberated) female
cousin who was six years older than she: “She made me comfortable—[I thought,] she lived through it, why can’t I? . . . there is the possibility I can too.” It seems the power of permission comes from other women’s voices and embodied experiences.

The Impossibility of Being Sexual and a “Good” Daughter

Despite many instances of achieving sexual transgression, in most cases, these young women still bear an uneasy relationship to the cautionary voices of their mothers, saturated with the language of struggle, guilt, and shame, inviting a need to self-enforce the virginal façade. Indeed, the fragile balance of young women’s desires to be both “sexual” and “good daughters” was revealed in many narratives. For instance, even though her parents know that she has been in a relationship for three years, Sena’s mother never revealed to her neighbors or friends that she has a boyfriend. “On the contrary,” Sena revealed, “this is a source of shame for her.” Reflecting on her virginity loss, she observed that “losing my virginity—the fear I inherited from my family—I carried that for a while when I came here; couldn’t defeat it. In fact, since I cannot share it with my family, it means I still couldn’t defeat it. The feeling that they’d know I am not virgin anymore disturbs me.” Sonay said that if she loses her virginity she will protect her virginal façade. When she goes back home to her small town and occasionally finds herself part of female conversations about “bad girls in Istanbul, doing bad things,” she finds peace that “I don’t have such a problem; I am not one of those bad girls—I didn’t do anything bad—bad from their perspective.” Her mother doesn’t ask about her experience, but if she did, Sonay would like to be able to say, “There is nothing sexual between us.” Her dilemma of wanting to be both sexual and a “good daughter” is always present: she wanted the experience of “being together” (having penetrative sex) many times, “but because of my consideration of my mother’s feelings I put it in the back of my mind . . . but on the other hand, I am thinking in the future I might regret that because of me, we had missed living certain things, but yet my family’s side outweighs it [ailem ağır bastıyor].” The deep feelings of right and wrong in sexual matters, which she got from her mother, motivate her more powerfully than her other desires and are resistant to change.
Even Feray is distinctive in the extent to which she still carries what she regards as her mother’s fixation—“don’t do anything to harm yourself”—even though there are no parental controls over her (“if they try, they know I would distance myself from them”). She feels defeated about changing her mother’s perspective, and therefore, even though she continues introducing her boyfriends to her parents and having conversations with her mother about her boyfriends and about how her relationships are going, she only talks about the emotional aspects, not the sexual dimensions. The mother knows that she is possibly not a virgin but “she is afraid of learning/knowing it.” More importantly, Feray explains, “We don’t think alike on this issue,” signaling an absence of identification with her mother. She feels sad knowing that her mother thinks, “My daughter shouldn’t hold these views.” She explains, “The image of the purest girl in her white gown—that image carries a lot of meaning for her. . . . Because I know she gets sad talking about these issues, I don’t talk.”

The maternal voice forms the emotive center of the family in many narratives, and its deep affective strength is present as the daughters embark on their sexual and romantic encounters. In order to better comprehend the psychic struggles involved in managing the contradiction between being sexual and being a “good daughter,” I will explore Sena’s and Mehtap’s stories in much greater detail below.

Sexual Guilt and Feeling Feminine: Sena’s and Mehtap’s Stories

The romantic and sexual histories of the young women who come from sexually prohibitive families hinge on the strongly felt contradiction or impossibility posed by being sexual and a “good daughter,” between sexual selfhood and connective identification with their mothers. As they embark on sexual and romantic encounters and become sexually awakened, they claim to become more conscious of having been repressed sexually while continuing to grapple with a feeling of disloyalty carried over from girlhood and the question of how to be responsible with respect to virginity. The burden of managing this contradiction comes at considerable emotional cost for these women. However, this contradiction’s impact on the women not only is limited to emotions of sexual guilt and shame, but profoundly shapes their sense of femininity in the
relationships they engage in, even significantly affecting the domination-subordination dynamics of some relationships. Although they chose different paths in becoming sexual, Sena through open rebellion and Mehtap through having a secretive sexual life, Sena’s and Mehtap’s stories powerfully illustrate how this contradiction is managed through the production and enactment of forms of traditional femininity tied to mothers in their self-making.

Sena’s story captures her almost simultaneous desires to meet the expectations of her family and to defy them. She is free and trapped in unexpected and tragic ways. As discussed before, Sena’s sense of sexual subjectivity was shaped by her conservative family upbringing. But she identifies a quick change in her views once she came to Boğaziçi. In the past, she used to think, “If I am going to have a sexual relationship I have to love that person to death and feel a great deal of passion.” When Sena’s boyfriend, four years her senior, wanted to move quickly, she wondered “if he wants to take advantage of me—because I internalized that idea.” They were exploring sexually in open-air places; one evening he took her t-shirt off, and she got angry because it triggered the message she received from her mother: “men only want sex.” She said to him, “What are you doing? Who do you think I am?” He apologized later and said, “You are an innocent girl and I am dirtying you,” affirming her mother’s view.

Sena has been with this lover (her word) more than three years and has been living with him for two years. She calls her relationship oppressive, constricting, and intolerable and identifies it as akin to “living in a classical family dynamic.” She acutely recognizes herself as oppressed, although her understanding of oppression is complicated and highly complex. As she narrated, living together for two years has turned her love/passion into mercifulness (sefkat): “I call him my son. When he gets sick, I panic; when his morale is low, I do everything to make him happy, and I hug him constantly.” What has emerged is a relationship between a “mother” who supplies unreciprocated maternal care and a “son” who is needy and controlling. In Sena’s narrative, this dynamic is not positive, but it still makes her happy. Acting out a maternal role is not an unwanted desire for Sena, as the helpless child (her boyfriend) depends for his very survival on powerful Sena, and to think him a small, needy child offers satisfaction. Yet she sees herself as sacrificing too much for
him, as the parameters of her maternal role are quite broad. The corrosive effects of this dynamic are captured by her description of how much she subordinated her needs to his: “He took too much from me, I missed my exams to take care of him and his problems. I gave my energy to him. In the process of giving order to his life, I ignored my own studies. I lied to my family and got withdrawn from my friends, particularly male friends, because he doesn’t want them to visit me.”

One striking feature of Sena’s narrative of oppression is that she tells herself/me that she is being oppressed, but believes that “from an emotional point of view, it is not really harmful”—perhaps because of the satisfaction she finds in responding to a needy “son” with her affection and care. What she finds really harmful/oppressive is being demoted by him as a submissive, subservient woman in front of others. Being consistently subjected to shaming behavior by him—he discloses to outsiders her obedience to his desires—brings her the shame of female subordination while bringing him pleasure: “He takes pleasure for belittling me in front of others.” Sena’s boyfriend constantly orders her around, telling her, for instance, “Bring me a glass of water, bring me that journal.” Her usual response is, “Why don’t you get it?” But then he declares to the interlocutors, “Don’t mind her behavior now, in fact she obeys me normally,” and she shuts up and complies. According to Sena, in these instances of being humiliated and ridiculed in front of others, when she sees a degraded image of herself, she behaves exactly like her mother because “I am concerned about what the others/audience think, and he uses this and can be very oppressive, because I don’t want to fight in front of other people and I tend to go along and soften the situation.” In these instances, the way her public (feminist) and private (submissive) behavior are at odds is displayed, and the way she is in private and the way she appears in public (dominated like her mother) converge. Sena places herself in a parallel relationship with her mother: she becomes what she likes least in her mother—“a carrier of patriarchy more than my father,” and obsessed with patriarchal respectability—“what the neighbors think.”

In the past, according to Sena, there was much romance and sharing of intellectuality between the lovers; they read and discussed poetry and listened to music together, which they now no longer do. Now she has intellectual conversations only with her friends, which her lover finds
problematic and objects to, asking her, “What are you doing without me?” But from the very beginning the worst part of the relationship was sex:

It was given in the beginning that I was the inexperienced one, he was the experienced; he knows, I don’t know. It continued a while like this—like a game. Our sexual life has been terrible since the beginning. But he says relationships are like this, don’t expect better than this, “what more do you need”—it is his way of covering his weaknesses. Expressing my desires verbally is unacceptable—in this sense the relationship I have is very limiting, constricting, and oppressive.

Sena remains silent about her own desires:

For instance I don’t say “I like this or that”—my saying so from his perspective is an indication of my openness to sex, and he thinks therefore I can be open to other men. My sexual desires shouldn’t be expressed—whatever there is should be enough for me. He is so oppressive in this regard, because he is not happy with himself and because he knows I am not happy. He tries to keep minimizing it: [he is] mute on this topic. If there is talk it is a threat for him or he makes fun of what I want to shut me up.

Sena described her sexual appetite as having become blunt: “My sexual life independent of him—with another man—just out of question, including masturbation—it terrifies him.” Sena has tried to convince herself that sex is not important, that “we are together and we love each other; that should be enough.” But she added that “of course it does not work that way.” She had a sexual relationship with another man that lasted a month. She confessed to her boyfriend, “Yes, I also loved that man and he excites me. I cannot lie to you.” Not surprisingly, her boyfriend’s reaction was very hostile: “You sold your soul and your freedom, what kind of a person are you?” Since her confession, he repeatedly asks her, “Are you a whore? How large are your sexual desires?”

When I asked Sena why she didn’t leave her boyfriend, she told me that he says he will commit suicide. Yet she also cited another significant reason: Sena blames herself and calls herself a scapegoat: “I cheated on
him without telling him; I made him so unhappy.” I asked her if she is still in love with him and if this also contributed to her staying. She said no and elaborated: “It is mercifulness (sefkat), affection, like a relationship of a mother and child. It reached that point—a traditional relationship with a modern appearance” (modern because they live together unmarried). When I talked with Sena, her boyfriend was about to leave Istanbul for an internship, and his biggest fear was that she would sleep around in his absence. Sena said she doesn’t have similar concerns about him; on the contrary, “If he will be happy with another person, he should, because I saw I can be happy with another person. I am unhappy with him. It is like I chose unhappiness.”

Why did Sena choose unhappiness? Her resignation is truly tragic. How can we comprehend the density of meanings associated with Sena’s construction of a maternal sense of self by positioning herself as a mother and dubbing her boyfriend her “son”? Why does she allow herself to miss out on academic and fun things in order to care for her “son”? Why can she not free herself from a form of femininity very much tied to her mother? Why can she not bring her choices into line with her feminist ideology? Why is she compelled to inhabit an oppressive relationship? What is not within Sena’s power to change?

The most striking aspect of Sena’s story is the irony of the disjunction between her embracement of a feminist identity, which for her means a commitment to a nonsubordinated self, and the self she is compelled to inhabit, which is disturbingly out of sync with that feminist identity. As she described it and as I quoted earlier, for her, coming to have a feminist consciousness is the experience of coming to see things about oneself and one’s society that were previously hidden. For her, feminism means, for one thing, that one’s very sense of self and personhood are seen as socially constructed: “In the past I always wished I had another family and I had another lover, now I understand why I have this family and this lover.” Indeed, embracing a feminist vision of personal transformation has effected what she considers a radical change in her young life, from growing up in a sterile family environment in a small town to living independently in Istanbul. Sena is one of those rare young women from a modest class background who managed to achieve independent living in a studio apartment, shared with her boyfriend, with financial help from her parents, who know her boyfriend visits but do not know
(or perhaps more accurately “pretend not to know”) that he lives with her. Her separation from her family home was full of challenges, and she still feels tremendous parental control and pressure through phone calls. (Her parents constantly remind her that “[her boyfriend] should only come to [her] apartment with friends. If others see a single man coming in, it would be shameful.”) Indeed, because they fear that financial independence would enable Sena to further separate from them, her parents pressure her not to have a job, although she wants one. She identifies her family as the greatest obstacle to her personal happiness: “Even though I separated my home from theirs physically and despite the fact that I live with my boyfriend—which is a radical act really—to be able to depart from that kind of understanding to reach this point, I haven’t discarded them in my head.”

What Sena hasn’t been able to discard is a strong maternal voice, which invades her consciousness so pervasively, equating being sexual with being bad. Happiness is denied to Sena because she undertook action that is too self-regarding, independent, and sexual, putting respectful femininity in danger. It seems she cannot be autonomously sexual without in some sense compensating for that “lost” femininity. Being properly submissive to the decisions of her boyfriend and adopting a maternal, self-sacrificing role allows Sena to compensate for the femininity she has “lost” by being sexual and allows her to feel respectable. Although her sexuality threatens her femininity, Sena is able to “redeem” herself by enacting the traditional feminine virtues of devotion, self-sacrifice, patience, and compliance. The way out of Sena’s predicament seems to be to abandon her lover, but to do so would mean abandoning the good, maternal, self-sacrificing self she has produced though the relationship. And she needs this self to feel she still belongs to the category of “good” because she retains a sense of identification with her mother and implied complicity and connectivity with her.

Consumed by extreme guilt, Mehtap, whom I quoted earlier, manages this contradiction between being sexual and being a good daughter by following the model of womanhood that her mother charted for her, with the exception of her secret sexual life. We find an expression of the complex interplay between femininity and sexuality in Mehtap’s approach to sexual pleasure and her accommodation to her mother’s desires. She clearly disassociates sexual pleasure from love: “The bottom
line is I am enjoying this, getting pleasure out of this, and in order to experience [pleasure] you don't need to be in love.” As a result, she avoids or drops lovers who want to have, as she puts it, a long-term “emotional relationship.” However, she believes that every sexual engagement has its emotionality: “[Lovemaking] is not a mechanical thing that can be lived without emotionality. You have a moment of emotionality. If it doesn’t exist, you don’t have lovemaking [sevişme]. In fact, lovemaking is emotionality.” Then she goes on to explain that even when there is no love, “You have to feel a moment of love if you are going to experience something together, and I love to do nice things to a man, to feel like a woman, feminine.” Mehtap’s way of feeling feminine involves an accommodation of her mother’s model of womanhood.

I took the model of womanhood that my mother created for me in her mind, the woman that my mother wanted me to become. My mother always wanted me to become educated and in possession of a profession—she never wanted me to be become a stay-at-home girl, but she didn’t want me also to completely disengage from housework etc.—generally it is the case that when education is emphasized for girls, they distance themselves from housework etc. She didn’t want me to become like that either. She gave me all the qualities associated with housewifery.

Using the housewifery skills that her mother instilled in her makes Mehtap feel feminine and perhaps allows her to reinstate and restore a sense of a true, good self “damaged” by her sexual explorations. Mehtap’s narrative about her relationships with her lovers is full of examples in which she displays womanly qualities and skills that make her feel feminine. She strongly connects feeling one’s gender identity with the performance of one’s gender-related duties. The weekend spent in Ankara with the man mentioned in the quotation in the previous section is a good illustration of this interesting intersection:

He was working that Friday, and I arrived Thursday night. He had to work until noon. I got there early in the morning to tidy up his place and cooked several wonderful dishes. And made dessert and then dressed up and put on makeup and started waiting for him. This is what I love most, to do things for a man. And then look your best to wait for him.
Mehtap’s narrative powerfully articulates the contradictions between a desire to follow the model of womanhood that her mother charted for her and a desire for sexual pleasure without being in love. As mentioned before, Mehtap’s secret sexual life contains many short-term sexual relationships, including a more long-lasting relationship with a boyfriend. But she is still technically a virgin who avoids penile-vaginal intercourse. By enacting and performing a housewifely femininity, Mehtap seeks to escape the contradictions of her opposing desires and to restore a sense of a true, good self, a self that she feels is being destroyed by her masquerade as a sexually “innocent” girl, while Sena’s attempt to resolve the conflict amounts to splitting herself between a maternal femininity and a feminist self.

What connects Sena’s and Mehtap’s voices is their pasts—girlhood environments marked by the wider familial context of sexual inhibition—and how their inner struggle with their mothers’ voices continues to shape their sense of femininity. The psychic struggles of these young women are also intrinsically related with the issue of upward mobility. They are the ones who feel the greatest distance and difference between their future selves, embodying a new class status and the invention of unsubordinated female selves, and their mothers. As Walkerdine (2003) theorizes, the threat of losing all material and emotional connections to the mother, or conversely of not being able to distance oneself enough from the mother (243), generates a complex bind in the construction of these young women’s sexual and gendered selves. It seems impossible for these women to unlearn, to forget, the cautionary voice of their mothers, even when their acts of sexual freedom cannot obliterate the guilt-ridden maternal standard by which they have been raised. Indeed, we have seen how very present their mothers are in these women’s most intimate sexual moments, and sexual guilt, it seems, never disappears because of the mother’s intractable presence. For some, being different from their mothers will always feel like a betrayal.

Without Sexual Guilt: Feray’s Story

For those women who feel torn between competing desires of being sexual and being a good daughter, we have seen that more than any other emotion, guilt determines the dynamics of sexual selfhood. Feray,
who doesn’t experience this powerful contradiction and thus is freer to explore her sexual desires and feelings, makes an interesting contrast with women like Mehtap and Sena. In many ways, Feray epitomizes the new generation of liberated Turkish women whose navigation of romantic and sexual relations is unconstrained by family concerns and the maternal voice. Raised within a small-town context, yet also encouraged by her parents (both university-educated professionals) to find her own voice in making decisions, Feray believes that sex, to feel sexual, is given, not to be deferred until marriage. Determined to integrate her sexuality more fully into her life, Feray believes in her right to sexual freedom and the self-knowledge she gains from her romantic and sexual explorations. For her, being in love is not a requirement to having sex:

Before I go out with a man I don’t need to be in love—only being affected by that person is enough. I don’t exaggerate the importance of a good relationship that has ended and say since I won’t have the same feelings, therefore I shouldn’t go out with another guy. Instead, I think, “yes that was a good relationship, but I cannot wait for a similar man to emerge; he could appear in five or ten years or never, why should I wait?” I want to live life—there is no reason a relationship needs to last five years. Relationships that end in two or five months also can be successful.

Feray’s true love was a man whom she said she “desired... in his totality.” She was in love with both his mind and his emotional and sexual self, but he was in another long-term relationship. Her love was destructive. During that time she lost herself in the relationship: she withdrew from everyone and ignored her coursework, etc., and started living “alone.” Learning that she was cheated on made her sad, because she believed “we lived a lie.” Still, she does not regret the relationship, because she really loved him: “I don’t hate him—I am glad I met him and experienced these things.”

At the time of our discussion, Feray had just ended a relationship that had lasted for two and a half months and was in a new relationship. Her expectation from a relationship was not just to have fun, but to share intellectually: “We have to look at the world from the same point of view. Frame of thought is the most important quality—what can I learn from him and how in interacting with each other can we learn together?”
Her previous relationship ended, in part, because her boyfriend was insensitive to societal issues and very individualistic: “It is good to go out a couple of months, and then when you deepen the relationship, you realize ‘I cannot be with such a man—a man with such views.’” When Feray and this boyfriend went out with friends, they had fun, but when they were alone they had nothing to talk about: “I remember listening to the conversations of the people sitting in the next booth.” For the first month, the sexual relationship went well; sexually she was very eager. She felt a sexual attraction and desire for him before she felt love for him, and her desires were embodied—she constantly wanted to touch him and to be touched: “That is the reason it continued more than a month even though I felt we were not sharing emotionality.” A key instance of this lack of emotionality was his inability to share his feelings. According to Feray, he wasn’t revealing his interiority. Feray addressed this issue head on, and they talked about it. He said, “I cannot even tell my mom I love her. I have such a problem.” Feray reflected that when he revealed this information, she tried to mobilize her sense of empathy, one of the traditional qualities of femininity: “I thought of myself, ‘Feray you are so brutal. Try to understand him, try to enter in his interior self’ . . . but I couldn’t do it with the type of guy who couldn’t express his feelings—you cannot be with such a man.” Because he never shared anything with her, neither his anger nor his love, he was unfeeling; he drove her “crazy.” At the end, she said, “I am disgusted by you.” Feray observed that “when you are sexually close to someone, you seek out emotional closeness” and added, “If I cannot share emotional things, I cannot share sexuality either.” When her emotions toward him started declining, she started trying to avoid him whenever she saw him. Describing this “very strange thing,” she explained, “Even holding hands, kissing were making me uncomfortable—it should be over because I had started becoming uncomfortable from his physical touch.”

Feray describes her new relationship as being filled with intellectual desire, but lacking sexual excitement: “I cannot say I sexually desire him. I concentrated on his brain, and his frame of thought excites me. I desire him, but this desire does not have a sexual content.” Indeed, later (by the time we talked a second time), she told him that she did not desire him sexually at all. He was upset by her stance and accused her of not giving romance a chance—focusing only on sex. He said, “You put only my
sexuality in desire . . . how come you didn't give it more time? You take an instant photo and only look at that photo and see no sexual desire and conclude it should be over."

Feray enjoys her freedom to find out what excites her sexually as well as intellectually, and the self-knowledge she gains from her explorations is valuable for her. Accepting sex as a natural extension of her life empowers her in negotiating her own identity and making decisions about whom she wants to attach with.

Conclusion

The norm of virginity in Turkey is fragile and subject to challenges from the new elite women whose parents' insistence that they remain untouched is profoundly contradicted by these parents' heavy investments in their daughters' education, which stretches between puberty and marriage. This contradiction opens up, both discursively and experientially, new paths of sexual freedom and autonomy for young women who forsake virginity and negotiate new identities as unmarried non-virgins. In the process of negotiating often-contradictory expectations of their sexual behavior, they cultivate virginal façades to accommodate the old norms still grounded in virginity as well as the new rules of an emerging premarital-sex culture. The moralizing discourses of this new culture privilege the morality of virginity as a new norm by which it becomes acceptable for young women to lose their virginity as long as they do so within the context of love and emotional investment.

This chapter has illustrated how young women's sexual agency is linked to social class and gender in complex ways. Competing forces of familial expectations for sexual purity and personal desires are felt and managed in significantly class-based ways. While the young women with urban, middle-class backgrounds, who were raised in sexually less inhibited family environments, are able to dislodge patriarchal claims of the equivalency between being sexually pure and a good daughter in their self-making, those who were raised in sexually repressive family circles struggle a great deal with undoing this equivalency in their "transgressive" sexual explorations, in most cases compensating for their feelings of sexual guilt and shame by enacting traditional gender roles and by fashioning submissive selves in their relationship with men.
Although both groups of women share an important commonality in rewriting the patriarchal romance—desiring nonpatriarchal men and seeking relationships in which they can safeguard their autonomy and independence—the daughters from sexually prohibitive backgrounds, whose upward mobility also threatens to breach their maternal attachments, are less able to act upon on new relationship ideals defined by female autonomy and unsubmissiveness.

It is important to note that this premarital sex culture and its ideals for young women's sexuality are being formed in a cultural milieu of increasingly diversified moral values. Particularly, this new premarital culture is being formed in a complex field of tension with a new Islamic morality that tolerates male-female intimacies and socialization only within the accepted boundaries of Islam. The embrace of pious identities among other educationally advantaged young women and men, who are the subjects of chapter 4, has invited new challenges to sexual politics in Turkey. The top-down imposition of pious values and policies by the AKP government adds a new layer of complexity as desire, pleasure, and sexual entitlement for women as sexual subjects continues to be the most challenging issue confronting feminist politics in Turkey.

Addressing the question of whether virginal façades empower or disempower young women is difficult. Ambiguity, vagueness, and secrecy, in their various combinations, have the potential to empower young women because they allow them to enter their sexual lives to negotiate their sexuality. They enable young women to transgress parental boundaries by enlarging the parameters within which they can express desire, engage in sexual interaction, and increase their sexual knowledge.

Yet putting on "virginal façades" ultimately reinforces the privileging of virginity and diverts attention away from articulating a discourse of desire and pleasure as well as exploring the social and emotional risks of sexual intimacy (see Fine 1988). One of the young women I interviewed was vivid in describing a very close friend's virginal façade: "Every man she is with, she shows him as if he is the first man in her life. Her every kiss is as if it is her first kiss. Her every love-making is as if it is the first time." I asked her and others whether men believed such façades. Their response was reasonable: "Yes because they would like to believe." Virginal façades help young men cope with the tension between modern masculine renunciation of the importance of virginity and loss of the
male prerogative of being the first man a woman has a sexual relationship with.

Protecting one's reputation with a virginal façade comes with a heavy price. Deborah Tolman identifies this cost as the price of losing an important source of empowerment: "authentic relationships with other girls and women" within which "collectively articulated critiques are carved out and voiced. Such knowledge of how a patriarchal society systematically keeps girls and women from their own desire can instigate demand and agency for social change" (Tolman 1994, 339–40). Indeed, some examples we encountered in this chapter reveal that effective transformation of the repressive and inhibiting sexual socialization of girls can be accomplished only if there are normative empowering resources like feminism and embodied experiences of close role models. It seems that only women can liberate other women to be sexual. The loss of empowerment among young Turkish women find its powerful expression in virginal façades as private enactments of hidden subversions—not as collective/public challenges.
Passive Resistance and Class in Lesbian Self-Making: Alev’s Story

In her early twenties, lesbian feminist Alev talked about her self-transformation from an adolescent self “carrying a man’s soul stranded [sıkışmış] in a woman’s body” to a lesbian self: “I am a woman and I am happy to be a woman and I am a woman who loves women.” Highlighted in her self-description was also a key shift in her object of same-sex desire from a figure of the flamboyant femme (“excessively feminine, thin, and petite”) to a figure of androgyny (“childish/boyish masculine”). The story of this transformation is quite complex, involving the negotiation of Alev’s identity and subjectivity within a network of many actors and discourses, among which the power of her mother’s homophobic imagery, which constructed homosexuality as deviance and sickness, played a central role. Situated between open defiance and collusion with her mother’s hostility, Alev managed to simultaneously accommodate these contradictory orientations in her self-making. She claimed to achieve a “harmony” (denge) by what she called her “passive resistance,” allowing her to stay connected with her mother via the creation of façades and pretensions that enabled her to be seen as heterosexual, while simultaneously keeping her lesbianism in the forefront of her mother’s consciousness. A significant element in Alev’s narrative of self-transformation is her same-sex relationship with Pembe, a young woman of her educational level who belongs to a vastly different social class and gender habitus. This relationship of class unequals brought Alev into an intimate connection to the gender and class cultures of her lover’s working-class family and community. Alev’s story helps us locate the specificity of class differences in sexual identity formation and demonstrates how sexual desires and impulses and gender nonconformity manifest themselves in specific class-based communities that imbue them with specific meanings. Particularly, Alev’s narrative and her lover’s story as they appeared in her account reveal how lesbian identities are diversely realized as well as how enactment of lesbian sexualities is articulated and embraced or rejected in a complex and nuanced way in the context of class belonging, which polarizes and structures experiences of gender identity and sexuality. Defined by the constant need to negotiate differences in their class habitus, Alev and Pembe’s relationship also brings the co-construction of gender and class into focus.
When Alev was growing up, she saw herself as different from other kids, both boys and girls, and had a very clear awareness of her difference. The words she used to describe her differentness were “strange” (garip) and “extraordinary” (sira disi). Alev did not experience her difference as an expression of gender nonconformity, and she did not conceive of her difference as based on sexual orientation until she felt desire for a girl at age fourteen. Instead, being more mature and intellectually oriented than other kids in her school were the important features of her difference. For even at a very young age, Alev was preoccupied with activities like reading encyclopedias and watching opera, ballet, and documentaries on TV, which seemed peculiar to her peers. Because her friends always found her extraordinary, Alev rarely had dialogues with her peers. She explained, “I didn’t know their games, there is a language among kids, I was also foreigner to that language.” Significant to observe here is the class identity of activities Alev engaged in, reflecting her socialization into upper-class taste in high culture. The isolation and loneliness of her early girlhood years partially ended in high school. As she put it, “I was loved more in high school.” Yet her classmates in high school also supported this picture of her exclusion and differentness. She was in a class of thirty-four with twelve girls. When boys ranked the girls by level of prettiness, “the list stopped at eleven.” She explained, “I wouldn’t be placed even as twelve on that list. I was nonexistent; I couldn’t be among girls or boys.”

She experienced her first love—same-sex desire—within the peer context. In fact, her love and desire for girls first appeared to her as another site of her real authentic difference from her peers. She perceived it as an integral part or extension of her being strange. She fell in love again the next year, and the intense feelings of sexual desire motivated her to confess her love to her object of desire: “She asked if I am bisexual or lesbian. I said I don’t know. She quizzed, ‘how could you not know?’ I said, ‘the only thing I know is I love you.’” Her object of desire urged Alev to self-question to find out if she was lesbian. But Alev was afraid of asking and confronting that question. However, she started thinking that because she desired women, she must be a man: “Of course I wasn’t thinking lesbianism. I didn’t know what it was. I was thinking I am neither girl nor boy, a third kind. Maybe a bad copy of a man—a copy in a woman’s body.” It was very difficult to accept what her feelings meant—that is, that she had homosexual desire—because homosexuality was
damned by her homophobic parents. Her guilt became an unbearable emotion: “Homosexuals are bad people, did I become one of them? If I am, my family will be ashamed of me.” A year later when she was sixteen, she came out to her mother in a “funny way.” She described the scene:

I sat across from my mother and told her with a sobbing voice, “I have something important to tell you.” I buried my face in a pillow, because I was feeling extreme shame, as if I was going to die from shame. She said, “what happened?” and started to name a couple of possibilities: “are you using drugs?”; “are you pregnant?”; “are you a terrorist?” The last possibility she listed was, “are you liking women?” When she raised that possibility, I felt so ashamed I further pressed my face into the pillow. I said, “I cannot tell you because I am shamed so much; it is alright if a close friend of mine would tell you.” She said alright. I phoned my friend, who knew from the very beginning, a very close friend. She told my mother how I was in love with a woman, how I was constantly chasing her, and how I was writing her love letters, in addition to listing all my other secret “sins”—”she is also smoking, and she is an atheist.” The moment my mother heard, she started crying violently and became very sad, as if I had cancer. She immediately called her gynecologist, sobbing on the phone, “My daughter claims she is a lesbian, what shall we do? Should I bring her to you?”

The gynecologist recommended a psychiatrist. Alev thinks that her mother called the gynecologist because her testosterone level was high and she attributed Alev’s having “masculine feelings” to it. The recommended psychiatrist was a big name in Turkey, but after a couple of sessions she told Alev that they didn’t connect and referred her to another one. Alev resented this psychiatrist’s asking her “stupid questions” at the first session like, “tell me about your fantasies.” “I was so fearful and under great stress. How could I tell someone at my mother’s age about my fantasies? Later she called my mother in and told her I was a lesbian, without asking my permission. The diagnosis further destroyed my mother.”

Alev went through a very difficult period. Because the psychiatrist put her on antidepressants, she could no longer think straight and was constantly sleepy. There were lots of fights with her mother: “My mother
destroyed all my posters of women artists and sports figures in my room. She bought me lots of skirts, and she insisted that I should put makeup on. Whenever I trained my gaze on a woman on TV, she gave me a jumbled and messed-up look and instantly changed the channel.” Did Alev put on makeup and don skirts? “Makeup yes, but not skirts.” The way Alev reflected on her reaction to her mother’s efforts to make her feminine through proper gender display was telling about how she started managing contradictory demands of the self and others:

I did not try to make her happy/pleased; I wasn’t doing anything to please her, really. It was interesting: on the one hand I was feeling extremely guilty—how I was a bad child and why I am doing this horrible thing to my family. And, on the other hand, I was putting up a struggle to pursue my life the way I desired.

Alev’s mother told her father, “Our daughter is in love with another girl.” Responding in his typical “passive attitude toward anything relating to family matters,” her father observed that it was a problem of adolescence and comforted her mother by saying that it was a passing phase and that they would take her to a doctor. He never confronted Alev—never asked any questions. On the contrary, according to Alev, he treated her as if she were sick: “He would gently slap me on the back and say ‘you will become better.” Her mother also told Alev’s older sister. The sister’s very loving and positive response and her expressed commitment to be on Alev’s side caused “big fights” between the mother and the older daughter. Her mother declared openly, “If my daughter is a lesbian, I cannot live with her under the same roof; I cannot share this home with a deviant [sapık].” Because of her schooling (at that time she was attending a highly selective high school in Istanbul), Alev could not completely move in with her sister, who resided in another city. Thus her elite education kept her rooted in her family home. However, Alev started spending her every summer and every other school break with her sister, who on the day the school was out would fly to Istanbul to take Alev back to her home. Alev’s mother’s rejection of her as deviant was offset by her older sister’s acceptance and support. Her sister also had her own history of family exclusion and rejection: after she became pregnant and had a child out of wedlock, she was thrown out of the family home at a
relatively young age. Alev noted that for her mother, the most important thing in the world is family, and she gives great importance to the concept of honor. An honorable girl should not engage in sex until marriage: "If she does, [my mother] treats this as the biggest shame. For her, virginity loss before marriage and someone learning about this is the worst possible thing. She considers it as a stain on [parents'] honor."

The second psychiatrist Alev was sent to was very helpful and made her realize that openly defying her parents was perilous. She discontinued the antidepressant prescription and advised Alev to keep her family dialogue limited to her school life, to not share her private life or her friends with her family members until she finished high school. "I was screaming all the time and breaking things and threatening my mother that I was going to kill myself." The psychiatrist told her, "Don't do these things. You will damage yourself." Because the psychiatrist stopped the medicine and told Alev's mother that she did not need any therapy and that she was very intelligent and balanced, her mother believed that she was "cured." "Because my mother sees depression and homosexuality as illnesses, by definition they naturally emerge together: homosexuality is deviance engendering psychological problems. If the doctor is not giving medicine and discontinued therapy, [I] must have been cured." Alev acknowledged to her mother that she was cured but did not say, "I am not lesbian." What she acknowledged was that she no longer felt unhappy and depressed. According to Alev, her mother was satisfied with this partial acknowledgment simply because "she cannot believe a lesbian can be happy and balanced."

"Cured," Alev started putting on façades. At the university, she had a gay classmate who had similar issues with his own family. They made a pact to pass as a couple vis-à-vis their respective families. She changed her female lovers' names to male ones; when she received a gift from her girlfriend, she introduced it to her mother as a gift from her boyfriend; and when she went out to a dinner to celebrate the six-month anniversary of togetherness with her girlfriend, she marked it as a celebratory dinner with her boyfriend. Despite Alev's mother's tough stance with her older sister in relation to her daughter's interaction with men and virginity, her attitude with regard to Alev's boyfriends was relaxed and even very encouraging. For instance, Alev was allowed to take vacations with her "boyfriend," albeit in groups, and her mother even expressed that
she was pleased that “he is always with you to protect you.” According to Alev, the possibility of Alev sleeping with the “boyfriend” never crossed her mother’s mind. Perhaps it is not that it didn’t cross her mind, but that she was so desperate to see her daughter in a heterosexual relationship that she was willing to set aside her mores about virginity.

Despite the enactment of all these façades, Alev also simultaneously kept her lesbianism in the forefront of her mother’s consciousness through her open displays of contact with other women. Negotiating the line between collusion and open opposition, Alev’s passive resistance to her mother’s desires can be said to constitute a silent rebellion against being a “secret subject”—a refusal, despite the façades, to allow her identity as a lesbian to be fully repressed, denied, or ignored by her family. For instance, one summer her lover (pretending to be a female friend) stayed with her in the family home. Because her parents were away vacationing, the house was empty. “Naturally we slept in the same bed. I don’t know if innocently or politically, I told my mother that we slept in the same bed, despite the fact that there are plenty of other rooms. ‘Why,’ she asked; I said, ‘because we wanted to.’” Alev also never refrained from showing and receiving physical affection from women around her mother, despite the fact that her mother always got very upset and uncomfortable when she saw Alev kissing and hugging girls and women.

Alev’s first “lesbian” relationship was with a close friend who, in Alev’s terminology, was heterosexual—the same friend she came out to in her senior year of high school. One night when Alev stayed overnight with her, her friend got drunk and became obsessed with finding out whether Alev loved her. Alev said she loved her as a friend, but the friend insisted on knowing whether Alev also found her attractive. With the influence of alcohol, they made love and started seeing each other. Solely based on sex, the relationship was devoid of any claim making over each other. The lack of recognition of the relationship by outsiders (“Nobody knew. She even hid it from her best friends because she was heterosexual.”) made this relationship the worst kind for Alev. It lasted for five months. The girlfriend started giving her the cold shoulder and called one day to say, “I don’t love you anymore, and I see you as a friend and besides there is no future in these types of relationships.” Alev observed that her reference to the relationship without naming it a homosexual relationship was particularly hurtful. Alev, who had developed a strong
bond and loved this woman, was devastated: “I begged and cried and went after her but she didn’t accept me.” Recently they had run into each other. She had been with her boyfriend and introduced him in a way that screamed, “my lover is a man” and even said to Alev, “I see you haven’t learned your lesson yet,” meaning that Alev was still a lesbian.

When I talked with Alev, her relationship with Pembe was seven months old. Alev described Pembe as having been raised in a “proletarian family” in a squatter settlement neighborhood in one of the poorest outskirts of Istanbul. Intertwining low-income and rural-migrant statuses, this neighborhood is inhabited by socially and economically marginal first- or second-generation migrants from rural or provincial areas. In stark contrast, Alev was raised upper-middle-class in Istanbul in a palatial home by high-powered professional parents who are “Westernized and modern and economically even more than upper-middle-class,” and who spent some early childhood years in Europe. The vast disparities between the two women’s class backgrounds made the relationship challenging, especially at the beginning, as they navigated class-divided social and material environments and friendship networks to find spaces where both were comfortable. Alev said Pembe felt oppressed but also made Alev ashamed of her class advantages. Whenever and wherever she tried to integrate Pembe into her own circles, she resisted: “She didn’t want to meet with my friends; she did not want to be in my circles. I became a source of shame for her.” To me, it seemed that one of Alev’s personal struggles was to avoid not translating the imbalance of their class-based material and symbolic resources into a power imbalance. Alev’s narrative was full of illustrations of her “class equalizing/balancing work,” the routine actions and strategies through which Alev maintained the relationship across the line of class, so that Pembe did not feel a subject of class domination. For instance, Alev always made sure that Pembe received gifts from her with high value in symbolism, not in materiality. She avoided taking her to middle-class leisure and consumption sites, and they spent from a common purse by pooling together their funds. But more importantly, she protected Pembe from her mother’s class-based prejudices against her by concealing her own emotions about the subject—hurt feelings and pain.

Alev claimed that they were eventually able to transcend these problems, in large part because their “gender roles” were so compatible. Indeed, Pembe perfectly embodied Alev’s desire for an androgynous lover.
According to Alev, Pembe is "neither totally a woman nor totally a man. She draws elements of femininity and masculinity. It is great that she captures this balance in our relationship. Otherwise, it is a problem among lesbians; who is active and who is passive, what are we going to do? Some want to see themselves as completely men." Alev described the relationship as "a romantic relationship, like a heterosexual marriage. We are together at every sphere of life and in school: we shop together, share a common budget with pooling our respective allowances together. Except for living together, it is a relationship of husband and wife." Romantic passion is embraced fully by Pembe. Images of Pembe's romantic acts include Pembe singing songs to Alev every morning on the ferry, writing poetic essays for her, preparing romantic animations on the computer, writing and playing songs for her, and arriving unexpectedly with huge bouquets of flowers. But the most romantic moment was when Pembe produced a set of rings on Alev's birthday on the exact minute she was born. When she presented the rings, Pembe declared, "I want to be with you for the rest of my life."

This rosy picture is frequently marred by Pembe's desire to remain in the closet and refusal to participate in and integrate into the lesbian community. Alev is embedded within a lesbian community and social and political networks that allow her to enact a lesbian identity, and she is heavily invested in political organizing. Indeed, she is a founding member of a university-based LGBT organization. Alev feels a sense of pleasure and belonging in political and friendship networks and in the spaces of lesbian establishments like cafes, bars, and clubs where she feels she and Pembe can feel recognized and be open in their affections. In contrast, for Pembe queer spaces are threatening in multiple ways, and she sees other lesbians as predators of Alev. Indeed, according to Alev, she only frequents lesbian spaces and events to control Alev's interaction with other lesbians. I inquired about why Pembe was not interested in participating in the lesbian community and political activities. She listed two main reasons. The first one relates to her biggest fear: that she will be found out by her family and outed in the university if she is seen in lesbian political circles and her picture and name appear in publications. The second reason, according to Alev, is that she simply finds it unnecessary to be political. Reciting Pembe's words, she says, "'I have a lover and I am happy; I am with the one I love' (from the very first day, she has been
thinking it will be a lifelong relationship with me). ‘My siblings know, my closest friends know. I am comfortable.’” Alev assessed that Pembe could not comprehend the issue of gaining rights via political struggle and public visibility.

Managing these contradictory orientations, Alev’s seeking out and Pembe’s active avoidance of the lesbian community constitutes one of the important tensions in their relationship. Alev confronts this tension at multiple levels: as Pembe’s excessive jealousy, as an obstacle for her social and political activities, and as an obstacle for her own integration into the lesbian community. Pembe’s excessive jealousy is also directed toward those outside the lesbian community. Pembe even prevents Alev from interacting with her close heterosexual friends: “I cannot stay overnight at their places anymore, and I cannot invite them. She is reviewing my phone bills to see whom I called and how long I talked. She even tried to break up with me once when I happened to say ‘hi’ to an ex in the street when we bumped into each other.” Pembe blames Alev for her lack of trust. However, for Alev, the issue runs deeper than trust: it is about their divergent understandings of relationships. Pembe’s understanding is that “you are mine and I am yours.” It is constructing a relationship of dominance over each other.” Pembe is consumed by jealousy because she prefers to conform to a masculine ethos of romantic love in which possessiveness and jealousy are valued elements, while Alev subscribes to androgyny and sexual equality. Also, sexually, Alev identified an important inequality in enacting and realizing their respective desires. Alev feels that Pembe acts on her own desires without taking hers into account: “Everything I desire to act out is to be limited, but I can permit her to do everything she desires.” Particularly, Pembe builds sexual boundaries that prohibit certain sexual acts: “like things with enduring effects such as losing her virginity—she desires to preserve her virginity because of her family considerations, she says ‘until I gain my economic freedom, I should stay as a virgin’—or things that would bring pain to her like anal sex.” Because of the fundamental difference in how they define relationship ideals, Alev said she sometimes finds herself captured by a state of hopelessness, wondering whether there is a potential to change the relationship dynamics. Nevertheless, she once again deploys her passive resistance, meaning “to be seen as agreeable to Pembe’s desires outwardly but influencing her choices and behaviors inwardly [içten
As we will see later, what Alev wants to see changed about Pembe and the relationship is entangled with Pembe's enactment of working-class gender identity. Indeed, while the realms of gender and romance enabled the couple to deemphasize the significance of class differences, it did not render them trivial.

Establishing intimacy in the context of class inequality added another layer of class challenge for Alev, who has a seemingly impossible quest: to have her mother like and show affection toward Pembe. When Alev introduced Pembe to her mother as a close friend from school, a friend she likes a lot, her mother behaved nicely toward her, yet she was very formal and cold and had an elitist stance. In fact, her mother reacted at the mere sight of her girlfriend and told Alev that “she looks like the daughter of a doorkeeper.” On another occasion, after Alev’s mother happened to talk with Pembe’s mother on the phone, she remarked that “she sounds like the woman who cleans our house.” Alev named her mother as a class elitist, who is full of class-based prejudices and holds the view that lower-classness constitutes an irremediable difference. Alev’s efforts to integrate her girlfriend into her family life as a regular friend are on a fragile path, because she is so afraid that Pembe will detect her mother’s class prejudices (as they apply to her) and have her dignity and pride wounded. In stark contrast to Alev’s mother’s class-based hostility, Pembe’s family is extremely embracing of Alev; they adore and love her. Pembe’s parents tell her, “You are like our daughter.” And “they pay attention to everything about me more than my own parents. Her father even occasionally asks me if I need allowance/pocket money.” The differences between her experience with Pembe’s family and Pembe’s almost nonexistent relationship with her own family is a great source of pain for Alev: “I am experiencing this as oppression. I always wish my own family could also reciprocate and show the same kind of love to Pembe that I receive from her family.”

However, Alev’s integration into Pembe’s family is not without any threats. First of all, Pembe’s four siblings, who all know Pembe’s sexuality, sometimes allude to the true nature of the relationship in front of her father and her mother. Pembe is more fearful of the involuntary outing of her relationship with Alev as a same-sex relation than she is of her parents learning she is a lesbian. Yet the more intriguing dimension of this threatening dynamic relates to one of Pembe’s brothers. According
to Alev, this brother makes advances and behaves as if he has a crush on Alev, a behavior she attributed to his jealousy of Pembe having a girlfriend. Incidents such as his publicly recounting a dream in which he saw himself making love with Alev make Alev very uncomfortable and also cause friction between sister and brother—Pembe did not talk with her brother for a while (küs kaldılär) over the “dream” episode. In order to discern fully why Alev understands the brother’s behavior as an expression of sibling jealousy, we need to understand how Pembe’s gender identity is perceived in the family.

Excelling in soccer and the masculine ways of fighting and swearing (enactments of rough, working-class, boy masculinity) when growing up, Pembe is treated and proudly loved as if she were a son by her parents and extended kin (Alev said, “Her mother even calls her ‘my son’ when affectionately addressing her.”). Pembe also receives support and encouragement for her masculine gender displays, for instance, for how she wears her hair: “She gets a very short masculine haircut and comes home, her family members say ‘good but we wish you got it cut even shorter.’” Pembe’s parents were also very vocal in expressing their wish that Pembe were actually a man so that she could marry their beloved Alev. Pembe’s recognition as a son shocks Alev. Erotically, Pembe is also assigned a heterosexual male role by her family. To wit, Alev referenced a couple of family scenes she witnessed with astonishment. For instance, on one occasion, Pembe came home and told her aunt that “there were beautiful girls on the bus today.” In response, the aunt said, “You should have groped/felt up them [dandık atmak]” (being groped by men in crowded buses is a common experience of girls and women in Turkey). Or in her parents’ company, Pembe would raucously shout at a passerby woman in the street something like “you are a girl to be taken” (götürmelik kız). It is not only her family members who assigned Pembe male sexual agency but also the neighborhood girls. According to Alev, before Pembe and Alev became lovers, Pembe could find a lot of girls, especially in her neighborhood, to “satisfy her sexual needs”—Pembe possessed the power of seduction as she was seen and accepted as a man. It was very surprising and shocking for Alev to learn that “she would call a neighbor’s daughter, even headscarved ones, just to sleep with her, like ‘come to our place now there is no one home right now,’ with ease. They both knew what they were doing.”
Alev marked her alienness from these same-sex casual sexual intimacies practiced by Pembe with a mobilizing vocabulary including the words “strange,” “astonishing,” “baffled,” and “unintelligible” when recounting Pembe’s experiences and described such events as an outside observer. Pembe’s gender nonconformity, which not only escaped the negative response of being deemed unnatural or forbidden but also was given encouragement by her family members, runs counter to Alev’s own experience. She also finds Pembe’s spontaneous same-sex practices peculiar because they disrupt her understanding of lesbian identity, an understanding closely connected with middle-classness. She articulated the class connotations this way: “I always thought that if you were a lesbian, you would be at a bar or on the computer chatting with another lesbian, but a headscarved neighborhood girl in a squatter settlement can sleep with a neighbor’s daughter . . . ?” Alev’s power of imagination only permits a scenario for same-sex desire that is similar to her experiences, in which “two young girls fall in love before they discover themselves.” She can, in her words, “imagine this more romantic scenario but not this [referring to Pembe’s experience with her neighborhood girls].” For Alev, one’s coming out to herself consolidates and stabilizes desire into the attitude of sexual orientation and the person of the lesbian. An expression of same-sex desire or spontaneous homosexual activity that does not channel the person into a particular identity contradicts Alev’s understanding of same-sex desire as the basis for identity. On yet another level, Alev’s descriptions of her relationship dynamics revealed how these desires and identities are governed by class norms that are worked out through concrete interactions. Proper and improper, respectful and disrespectful class and gender expressions and actions are intertwined and made inseparable in her narrative.

Alev’s description of an experience she and Pembe had in a high-end lesbian bar encapsulated these inseparable dimensions of class, gender, and sexuality. That night Pembe got very drunk and started giving aggressively sexual hugs to every woman in the bar. She also lay on the floor and behaved in other inappropriate ways that prompted an intervention from the security guards. In her telling of this incident, Alev was careful to clarify to me that she was ashamed of the situation and not of Pembe, because she loves her. Pembe was acting out like a lower-class macho man, and her disruptive and crass behavior intersected with sexual ag-
gression. She was putting forward a compromised identity as a deviation from the androgynous and romantic self that Alev desires her to be. Less drastic but nonetheless apparent, additional signaling and routine marking of Pembe’s working-class upbringing was explicitly articulated when Alev mentioned Pembe’s deportment, mannerisms, and bodily gestures—how in public Pembe laughs too loudly and constantly swears: “I couldn’t ascribe these things to her identity [yakıştırıramıyorum]. Yes her family is not educated but still it is a self-educated family.” Simultaneously tied and untied to her class habitus and upbringing, Pembe troubles the paradigm of gentle, boyish masculine figure of androgyny, Alev’s object of desire and her middle-class sense of balance.

I think it would not be incorrect to infer from Alev’s narrative about Pembe that Pembe’s assimilation into the lesbian community may mean suppressing or fracturing parts of her self—the parts loved and cherished by her family—and conforming to a particular gender and sexual identity by transgressing class boundaries, which she might experience as a kind of class dominance. By refusing to join Alev’s lesbian circles and community, Pembe is denying herself a new community of affirmation but also refusing to be a subject of class domination. Also, it seems that openly claiming to be a lesbian might not bring an experience of liberation for Pembe, whose family connectivity is important in the way (positively self-affirming) it is not for Alev. In contrast, on the surface it seems that for Alev self-affirmation is about the work of building and maintaining a lesbian identity that is disclosed, monogamously coupled, and visible. However, Alev’s self-making is not completely disassociated from her family and its attending class attachments and affective affirmations or denials.

Strongly signaled within the story of the bar episode was Alev’s own behavior: she explained how in trying to control Pembe’s disrespectful class and sexual conduct, she found herself transformed into a macho persona (maçholaşabiliyorum) by becoming rough and coarse. Thus, Pembe’s public behaviors have the countereffect of making Alev display a macho identity. Alev’s own androgynous identity can be compromised by association with Pembe. Yet any exploration of the ways in which Pembe’s lower-classness threatens to undo Alev’s own self-making would be incomplete if we neglect to take into account Alev’s yearnings for recognition from her mother as a kind of inscription of her lesbian identity.
onto the affective family order. Nor should we minimize the importance
of her desire to integrate Pembe into her family as a shared affiliation and
attachment across class. Indeed, what we see here is the imbrication of
these two desires—how they are intertwined and simultaneously pur­sued in Alev's self-making. Part of Alev's passive resistance is motivated
by the desire to keep her sexuality from being totally invisible to her
mother. It is a rebellion against the powers of invisibility, of silencing one­self, of remaining unspoken, and of submitting to heteronormative de­mands. Yet, despite her mother's rejections and her own establishment
of affirmative networks outside the family, Alev's self-making cannot be
entirely complete without some recognition from her mother. In this
way, Pembe's lower-classness adds an extra layer of difficulty in making
Alev's lesbianism visible to her mother and thus legitimizing and mani­festing her lesbian identity completely. Alev's identity in fact takes shape
through the evolution of this relationship of submission and rebellion
and is also forged through her struggle to make class boundaries perme­able. Alev's refusal to accept a lesbian identity and life dissociated from
her family biography and her desire to give same-sex love access to legiti­mate family expression bespeak the power of and desire for connective
selfing in the construction of new selves in Turkish society.

At the end of the interview, I asked Alev if she had anything to add. This is what she said:

I was always told homosexuality equals unhappiness, but this is
not true. I also believed this secretly for so many years until I met
Pembe. There is no such thing as unhappiness. We are as happy
as a heterosexual couple. I hope other gays and lesbians discover
this because they are approaching their identities with this fear.
Even my sister thought I was going to be unhappy. Why should
we unhappy?

Indeed, she has proved her mother wrong.