

COMING OUT AS A POLITICAL ACT IN LGBT MOVEMENT  
IN TURKEY

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **COMING OUT AS A POLITICAL ACT IN LGBT MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

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This thesis analyzes the coming out action of individuals through perception of political identity. Instead of considering coming out as an individual experience, it is discussed as a political action that effects the others around the individual. This political action is examined from the Queer Theory's perspective of subverting the gender norms. The coming out experience of lesbians, gays and bisexuals not only has an impact of their personal environment, but also effects their relation to the LGBT movement.

The importance of coming out in LGBT movement is explained through the interviews with lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Where they place themselves politically in their socialization process is analyzed. LGBT movement's historical background is introduced and compared with the movement in Turkey. The issues originate from Turkish society's social structure is indicated through interviews.

**Keywords:** Coming Out, LGBT Movement, Queer Theory, Feminism, Gender

## ÖZ

### TÜRKİYE’DE EŞCİNSEL HAREKETİNDE POLİTİK BİR EYLEM OLARAK AÇILMAK

Ertetik, İlay

Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji

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Bu tez, bireylerin açılma deneyimlerini politik kimlik algısı üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Açılmanın bireysel bir deneyim olarak ele alınması yerine, bireyin çevresindekileri de etkileyen politik bir eylem olarak tartışılmıştır. Bu politik eylemlilik durumu, Queer Teorisi’nin toplumsal cinsiyet normlarını altüst etme perspektifinden incelenmiştir. Lezbiyen, gey ve biseksüellerin açılma deneyimleri yalnızca kendi kişisel çevrelerini etkilemekle kalmaz, bu bireylerin LGBT Hareketi ile kurdukları ilişkiyi de etkiler.

Eşcinsel hareketinde açılmanın önemi, lezbiyen, gey ve biseksüellerle yapılan görüşmeler üzerinden açıklanmıştır. Sosyalizasyonları içinde politik olarak kendilerini nereye koydukları incelenmiştir. LGBT Hareketi’nin tarihi tanıtılmış ve Türkiye’deki hareket ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Türkiye’nin toplumsal yapısından kaynaklanan sorunlara, bu görüşmeler üzerinden işaret edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Açılmak, LGBT Hareketi, Queer Teori, Feminizm, Toplumsal Cinsiyet

To my Mother and Father  
and Çaęlar

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Every person is a political actor. Individuals have a potential for changing the world; surely, not in a revolutionary way but with interaction. I am anybody that can affect the people around me, thus somebody else too. When one sees me doing or making something, s/he can recognize the ability of happening. For me, this interaction provides the force of changing the people. From this point of view, people need to trust their power of changing and act against oppressive structures with their identities. Imposed general values can only be destroyed when one shows resistance. Homosexuality in modern times is perceived as immorality/sin/deviance and forced to be kept invisible. Therefore, the more people see homosexual individuals as their friends, colleagues, daughters, father...and so forth, the more misperception towards homosexuality can be altered. Not only 'Coming out', at that point is crucial for displaying one's sexual orientation, but also claiming an identity makes LGBT movement "normalized". Which means perception of homosexuality as a sin or disease can be changed and the movement can take its place among other right-demanding movements. LGBT movement is based on identity politics, thus 'coming out' provides a space that individuals struggle for their rights without concealing their sexual identity.

Homosexuality is oppressed because of many prejudices. The sexual relationship between same sexes is not a reproductive activity, thus, it is enough to blame homosexuals as sinners or perverts. On the other hand, sexual intercourse only for reproduction is an imposition of heterosexism. We are living in a heterosexist world and all of us, who don't fit these norms, are excluded in different ways. As human, our habits, life practices and the world we live in is patriarchal and heterosexist. We, the ones who are aware of that and resist against this oppression are marginalized and excluded by the values assumed to be general. Being aware of patriarchy and developing life praxis as much as we can, is a good way of fighting against it. Moreover, individuals not necessarily carry marginalized identities (in

this case; such as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender) for taking a position in this fight. Not all homosexuals consider their situation as a political issue and take part in the movement.

According to Queer Theory, the definitions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender is irrelevant, because these terms are fluid and changeable in person's lifetime. Also naming the identities limits sexuality and puts individuals in a frame, that no one can fit in completely. Patriarchy and heterosexism make deep and visible harm in LGBT individuals' life. Today's system imposes gender roles for man and woman; and expect from us to fit these roles. It creates moral values that convict inadaptable ones as criminals. Thus society composes a control mechanism to clear the problematic ones.

There is a wide literature about LGBT movement all over the world. The beginning considered as using the word 'homosexual' in 1869, in Germany. Although every part of the world has their own history on LGBT movement, the literature mainly points the sources from Western countries. There are very limited information and a few studies on the issue in Turkey. The reason I choose to study about LGBT movement is to believe heterosexism is imposing and controlling each individual's life. As having a marginalized identity, my aim is to show the reasons behind, taking Turkish society's structure into account. Also I wish to contribute to the literature by displaying the importance of visibility in LGBT movement, through 'coming out'. Therefore, in this study I try to analyze the 'coming out' experiences of people who are either activist in LGBT movement or not, specifically in Ankara. Thus, I aim to contribute to the literature of LGBT movement by examining the conditions of activism in Turkey's social structure.

Until 1980's the debates on movement grew with gender issues and feminism in the West but it wasn't an idea of a mass movement in Turkey. After cold war ended and identity politics gained importance, something began that we can call "movement".

First small groups started to gather and then KAOS GL magazine was published in 1994. Nowadays, there are 4 associations in big cities, 4 initiatives<sup>1</sup> (even more are in founding process) and many other groups communicate with each other via internet. In Turkey, LGBT movement gained ground in a very short time comparing with Western countries. Besides, the aim was not only to observe and follow the Western proponents, but also trying to build a movement according to Turkey's cultural elements.

Turkish society has a strong patriarchal base. Masculinity is the one of the biggest issue that makes the terms 'honor' and 'morality' highly important. On the other hand, the social pressure upon individuals causes everything 'different' becomes hidden. Hence, LGBT people, as 'different', have to deal with being immoral or fight with the negative psychological effects of being hidden. At that point, coming out as a political act becomes highly important because most of LGBT activists think that to ignore is the worst violence, comparing with insult, physical violence and exclusion. By claiming their identity, they come together and struggle against the circumstances that make them invisible.

For building a movement based on Turkey's cultural infrastructure, the discourse of morality needs to be changed. According to current religious ideology, homosexuality is regarded as sin, immorality and disease. Also conservatism perceives homosexuality as an imported concept coming from the West. Therefore, activists in LGBT movement have to deal with many issues, such as struggling to gain Human Rights for LGBT individuals, informing the people that homosexuality is not accepted as a disease since 1973<sup>2</sup> and more importantly enlarging the movement and reach as much people as they could . By avowing their identity, in other words by 'coming out', LGBT individuals can show their parents, neighbors,

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<sup>1</sup> Lambda Istanbul, Kaos GL, Pembe Hayat and Siyah-Pembe Üçgen are the associations and Istanbul LGBTTT, Eskişehir Morel, Çukurova and Hevjin-Diyarbakır are the initiatives.

<sup>2</sup>In 1973, homosexuality was removed from the list of mental diseases by American Psychology Association. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality\\_and\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_psychology)

classmates, colleagues that everybody can be homosexual. Which clearly means that homosexuality is not a disease, perversity or an outsider concept; it is as natural as being a heterosexual. In my study, my main aim is to understand how ‘coming out’ is important, in firstly, one’s ability to change her/his environment and secondly, as being a part of the movement.

Because of Turkish society’s patriarchal structure, LGBT people face with many different kinds of oppression and obliged to hide their sexual identities. They are forced to marry by their families, and live a heterosexual life depending on this social oppression. Morality values, are base of the Turkish traditional values, become dominant upon individuals life and those who do not fit these values are suffer from exclusion. At that point, feminism helps us to study patriarchal elements of Turkish society and display how they affect individual’s life under the name of ‘traditional moral values’. Thereby, in LGBT movement, to question patriarchy can lead us to see how it works to compose people’s perception to sexual identities. Furthermore, the term ‘coming out’ becomes both a rejection to this morality issue and also to the domination of patriarchy. The slogan KAOS GL used; emphasizes directly to the issue: *Liberation of homosexuals will be the freedom of heterosexuals.*<sup>3</sup>

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) movement literally started in New York, USA with Stonewall riots in 1969. Before Stonewall riots, LGBT people were living in ghetto area under the extreme suppression of police and indirectly the state. The ‘sodomy law’ defines every non-reproductive sexual action as crime causes LGBT people face with discrimination and lead them to court. Living under these circumstances and losing homosexual friend in hate crimes or beaten up by conservative youth, they outstand for their lives in Stonewall. In June 28, 1969, homosexual community fought back against police and state-sponsored

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<sup>3</sup>Eşcinsellerin kurtuluşu heteroseksüelleri de özgürleştirecektir.

conservative groups and accordingly to the system; thus ‘Stonewall riots’ became the beginning of LGBT movement.

In Christian Europe and colonies, ‘sodomy law’ was the center point of the movement. Most of the Western countries abolished this law but it still exists in some colonized countries and in the Middle East. After American Psychiatric Association was replaced homosexuality as a ‘sexual orientation disturbance’, the movement took a huge step and gained recognition. Most of the European countries accept homosexual partnership; some of them accept the marriage. Also in Canada and some states of USA same sex marriage is legally recognized. However, the social class dimension is very effective in the conditions of LGBT people in society. For instance, black or far eastern homosexuals and transvestites are more disadvantaged groups in many Western countries.

LGBT movement process followed diverse paths and different ways in Turkey. This diversity can be explained with many dynamics of Turkey’s development. Firstly, modernization and nation-state building process was very fast compared to other developing countries, thus, LGBT movement came to the discussion at first in 1990’s. However, the process in Turkey gained more importance in the last 15 years. Second, neo-liberal policies and increasing individualism brought identity politics as a discussion in leftist movements. Lastly, second wave feminism after 1980’s effected many discussions about patriarchy, heterosexism and human rights. The significant difference in Turkey is, in my opinion, collective feature of the movements which lead different organizations and associations act or make demonstrations together. The woman’s liberation movement, feminist movement, human rights organizations and some leftist organizations work in solidarity with LGBT movement, for instance.

Today, LGBT movement in Turkey is spoken loudly and ever so often. Activists who have been working for homosexual rights in Turkey cannot imagine a

Transvestite appear on TV in a talk-show. Three thousand people have marched in Pride 2009. On the other hand, despite the fact that the movement is growing so fast, the reactions of conservative communities is very harsh. The discourse of ministers or government is focused on immorality and traditional values of Turkish family. The perception of Turkish society about homosexuals is to see them as pop-stars, designers or artist, thus, a huge anxiety occurs when a referee come out and fight for his/her rights. Because of the social pressure derived from conservatism and patriarchy, individuals choose to stay silenced and make forced marriages which lead them to practice unhappy and unsatisfactory lives. Moreover, the ones who chose not to hide and express their sexual identity might face with violence anytime or becomes victims of hate crimes and murdered.

‘Coming out’ means to tell sexual orientation to the other person or people, and it becomes important in case of political identity and activism. The misperception of expecting all disadvantaged communities being part of political identity, leads us to victimize the community. In other words, gay/lesbian/bisexual as an identity refers a political field because when one starts to call them, it means s/he came out. At this point the misperception is to consider all homosexuals as a part of LGBT movement, or carry a political identity. The answer might be in political identity itself, that means as we can not consider all disadvantaged groups as being part of political struggle, we also can not consider LGBT people in the same way. However, in LGBT movement ‘coming out’ is the most significant feature of the movement, when we rethink the phrase: ‘the personal is political’.

In my study, I work with LGBT people who are activists and who are occasionally take part in the movement but do not define themselves as activist. There’s a thin line between coming out only to close friends and coming out to public. Coming out to public can be considered as constructing a political identity. The difference comes to the point at LGBT people’s life praxis. The question I search for is how coming out is important in LGBT movement. This question also refers to carry a

political identity and joining the struggle as activist, in personal or organizational level. My criterion of political identity is doing at least one of these: participating in a protest march (anti-homophobia walk, May day, spring festival march...etc), publishing an article in magazine or web, and naturally working in an association. In addition, I have to indicate that these criteria are not certain limits, they are changeable. For instance, one participant did not call himself activist despite he joined marches.

LGBT people who are activists are working in organizations like KAOS GL or Lambda Istanbul. Besides, some are working independently but related to these organizations through community network. I can speak of three main groups in this network: First, the ones who come out in public life, KAOS GL employees in this group. The second group includes the ones who hide their sexual identity in public sphere, for not losing their jobs or their social status. They do not come out to their families, only to their close friends but active in issues related to the movement (As I will discuss in Chapter 5, distinguishing coming out experiences is not so simple). The last group's only involvement of the network is trying to find partner. As I mention above, if one call her/himself gay, that is a political act. Therefore, in this work, I will consider first two groups carrying political identity and make my research on their perceptions of ability to make a change in their environments. The third group is, for me, overlapping the ordinary people who never consider themselves as a political actor. Even though claiming their identity is a political act, the main difference that separates the third group from the second is their perception of ability to change their environment.<sup>4</sup> Thus I do not include them to my study.

In-depth interviews were conducted in this study. Because of the difficulty of reflecting LGBT members daily life experiences through numerical parameters, I

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<sup>4</sup> These groups that I categorized do not have certain boundaries. For example, the ones who seem not interested in activism might change in time and gain a political perception.

prefer to use qualitative method in my research. I used the snowball sampling to reach the respondents, but as I explain in Chapter 5, most of them are my friends as well. I work with LGBT organizations and make interviews with individuals, who are working in these organizations and carrying a political identity (and their identity is publicly known) and who are not visible in public sphere but claim that coming out is a political act. The questions are constructed to introduce the diversity of LGBT individuals' perception of political act, with the means of coming out.

The movement is experienced in different ways for gays and lesbians, mostly because of the gender or different perspectives in the movement itself. Because of the difference between homosexuals and transsexuals in understanding and practicing 'coming out', I separate homosexuals/bisexuals from transvestites-transsexuals. Transgender individuals experience coming out process in different ways thus, I do not include them to this study. Also, bisexuals' political participation and coming out experiences are quite different compared with gays and lesbians. This study is performed on coming out experiences of lesbians/gays/bisexuals, without make a separation among them, only distinguishing gender.

This study is carried out in Ankara within the connection to Turkey's first LGBT association, KAOS GL. The main data on LGBT movement history in Turkey and on the issues that they are dealing with is collected from the association. Also I used the information from the people who are working there since its first founding. Besides KAOS GL, I apply the experiences of LGBT community in the university (METU), and experiences of others who are in the network but not directly connected to the organizations. Moreover, my experiences as an activist in the movement are mentioned in this study.

*LGBT* is an acronym for the community composed from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. The term is used for referring the community. For the movement,

there were different terms like homophile, anti-sodomy in the west. Homosexual movement<sup>5</sup> was using in Turkey but it changed because of not containing transvestites and transsexuals. T means transgender and includes transvestites and transsexuals both, in the Western literature but in Turkey the common usage is mentioning the two separately; TT. In this study I prefer to use T for transgender. In the recent debates, the terms queer and intersex emerged and the usage of these letters with LGBT is becoming widespread. (LGBTQ, LGBTQI)

*Coming Out* is the term comes from the expression “Coming out of the Closet” which refers to reversing the pressure upon LGBT people from heterosexism. The general opinion on homosexuality is; it is a private issue that needs to be kept as a secret. Through this common idea LGBT individuals face with discrimination and violence. Also being obliged to keep their sexual identity as secret or experiencing relationships in hidden damages one’s mental health, causes suicide in some cases. For all that reasons, the expression of ‘coming out of the closet’ was emerged for emphasizing having different sexual identity is not something shameful. One should come out from the closed/place where s/he hides and show her/himself that it is not a guilt. Closet is a metaphor using for displaying heterosexist society and institution’s pressure upon homosexuals. The pride march was also derived from the same idea, ‘we are proud of our love to same sex, it is not shameful’.

Coming out have three phases in general; the first is one’s discovering own identity, called internal coming out. Second is deciding to come out to others, family, friend, colleagues...and so on. The third phase is one’s becoming openly living LGBT person.

The first organization founded to improve LGBT individuals’ rights, in Ankara is *KAOS GL*. They prepare *KAOS GL* magazine and publish it, they are working on the organization of ‘Meeting against Homophobia’ in different cities of Turkey. Discrimination in education and labor are the other issues they are working on, they

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<sup>5</sup> Eşcinsel Hareketi

already published books and booklets on these. Also they have research and reports on LGBT refugees. Also they give educations, participate in seminars and conferences, mostly in universities and other institutions in Turkey. They attend international meetings on LGBT issues.

The prejudices produced against people who are not heterosexual called *Homophobia* that causes hate, fear and discrimination towards LGBT individuals. Unlike the common idea of being afraid of becoming homosexual, homophobia is an attitude. It is created by the institutions such as religious institutions, education or other state apparatuses and reproduced by the discourses that become prevalent through media. A homophobic person might carry a hatred speech towards homosexuality or may claim that ‘it is acceptable for me but they stay away from my sight’. It is also considered as racism. There are different types of homophobia, such as lesbophobia and transphobia.

*Heterosexism* is assuming every person is heterosexual and opposite sex relationship is the only type of relationship. In other words, it is an ideology that ignores homosexuality and homosexual individuals. Heterosexist system consists of constructed social norms. Today it is seen as discrimination towards LGBT individuals in every sphere of life.

As conclusion, the aim of my research is to examine political identity in LGBT movement, depend on the ideas of gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals. I searched for the means of activism to those who are not visible, and compare it with the thoughts of activists working on the organizations. The questions are constructed as to find out how ‘coming out’ affects their lives. Thus the term ‘coming out’ becomes main idea to display patriarchal Turkish Society’s pressurized elements upon marginal groups, such as homosexuals, transsexuals and feminists, the ones who reject patriarchal domination.

## **CHAPTER 2: QUEER THEORY AND POLITICAL IDENTITY**

### **2.1. From Feminism to Queer Theory**

Feminism has opened many fields to discussion and introduced different forms of thinking and perceiving. Discussions on the meanings of gender, body and sexuality, with effect of postmodernism, engendered queer theory to emerge. Feminist and queer theory is the crucial for analyzing LGBT movement and provides us to look from a critical perspective to exclusion of disadvantaged groups. In this chapter, from a feminist approach, I aim to analyze the effects of gender and difference debates on feminism, the relationship between feminist and Queer Theory and the main issues on identity within the Queer Theory.

#### **2.1.1. Feminist Approach**

Perception and interpretation of the world was only one sided before feminism; from men's perspective. All the developments in the science took place without voice and experience of women, thus the only knowledge we can reach is masculine. 'His-story' is also written by men. Women aimed to change their subordinated position by resisting against men's domination. First, they conducted a movement to achieve acceptance as citizens, then fought for equal rights with men. Meanwhile they also displayed the discourse of men's domination and its area of legitimization. Women have always been secondary in the history as we can see the evidences of their subordination; gender roles.

Since it appeared as displaying women's subordination within the system, feminist theory has been experienced many changes. Considering women's problems and wrestling for equal conditions turned into problematic of the system. Scholars discuss feminism in three waves; struggling for basic rights is the first; displaying demand of equality in academia and activism is the second (from 1960's) and

dealing with gender issues concerning identity politics (from 1990's) is considered as the third wave in feminism.

There are numerous diversities in feminist theory. At first, women realized inequality in social and legal areas and demanded the same rights with men. Liberal feminists focused on proving women's ability in men's work and fought for gaining equality. Then, Marx's analysis of capitalism was depended on change in the current system. Marxist and socialist feminists seek their liberation out of capitalism. But women's subordination problem was over the systems, according to radical feminists. Radical feminism betrayed the term patriarchy and analyzed the power relations that privileges men and subordinates women.

Liberal feminism, Marxist/socialist feminism and radical feminism are the main approaches in feminism. Although there are some intersections among them, each emphasizes a different point to struggle and conceptualize feminism in different ways. Liberal feminism argues that inequality between man and woman can be ended through reforms provides equal opportunities. Social and legal process is very important. Marxist feminism settles capitalism in the center and claims that capitalist system structures gender inequality. Family structure keeps women in the house, burdens all domestic works on her and exploits her labor in the house. Women's liberation can only be possible when capitalism is collapsed, according to Marxist feminists. Lastly radical feminism emphasizes on patriarchy. Similar to Marxist feminists, radicals also consider family as a main problem of women. But distinctly; unpaid domestic labor, reproduction, sexual and physical violence are part of the patriarchal system. Thus radical feminists make patriarchy problematic and try to show how it embodied every field of our lives.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hines, Sally (2008). Feminist Theories. In D. Richardson and V. Robinson (Eds.) *Introducing Gender and Woman Studies* London: Palgrave Macmillan p 22-23

Radical feminism, with the contributions of postmodernism and postcolonialism, displays that gender roles structured by patriarchy and subordinate women. Patriarchal system is a system of dominance and keeps the power relations with gender classifications. Hence radical feminists attack gender roles to show how masculinity is privilege and femininity is not. Problematization of gender roles brings sexuality into question.

### **2.1.2. Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory**

The different feminisms I mentioned above, mainly follow these perceptions. For my study, the most important part is after 1990's, when feminist theory effected by postmodernism. The intersection of queer theory and feminism can be understood with the help of postmodernist approaches to gender.

The intersection between Feminism and Queer Theory was built around the idea of 'sexuality is a social category'.<sup>7</sup> Social sciences (especially sociology) started to include Queer Theory to their field, with contributions of cultural approach to society (postcolonialism). In other words, queer sociology embodied with analysis of how power is produced and resisted in relation to both discourse and material factors.<sup>8</sup> Queer sociology is also helped feminism to recognize gendered differences by analyzing life experiences of the ones who excluded for being 'different'.

Queer Theory is helpful in focusing attention upon how sexuality affects social relations and has been important in developing critiques of normative assumptions about gender and sexuality. It also has the potential to offer feminism further tools through which to theorize the relationship between gender and sexuality. Queer Theory's emphasis on 'difference' may enable feminist theory to analyze power across and between identity categories and offers feminism theoretical tools through which to understand the sex/gender binary.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stein, A and Plummer, K. (1994) Queer Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. *Sociological Theory*, Vol 12 No 2 p 179

<sup>8</sup> Hines, Sally (2008). Feminist Theories. In D. Richardson and V. Robinson (Eds.) *Introducing Gender and Woman Studies* London: Palgrave Macmillan p 27

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p.28

On the other hand, some Feminists have a critical approach to queer studies. When the transgender studies first appeared, second wave Feminists perceived transvestism as accepting feminine role that patriarchy imposed. The idea of 'transgender women are reinforced a stereotypical model of femininity and seek to acquire male power and privilege' caused transgender movement damaged by feminism. Body and gender discussions through transvestism challenged with the critique of Gayle Rubin, saying that 'womanhood is not necessity for feminist identity' (1996). Transgender writers also emphasis on identity is constructed by gender.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that different sexual identities are perceived as minority and excluded from the society in this way. Normativity creates a discourse which produces a gender form for everybody and we should work to destroy these forms. Gender norms determine what is regarded as truth and what is not, thus legitimize gender through body. Although she opposes the idea of sexual minorities; she claims that acceptance of one's sexual minority status brings advantage within legal, politic and language discourse.<sup>10</sup> According to Butler, identity categories operate for oppressive structures. On the other hand, she analyses how these categories are transitional and can change by individual her/himself. The term performativity explores the character of gender and help to relate queerness and identity politics.

Although Queer and Feminist theory diverse in many ways, they both deal with gender issue and regard sexuality not as a 'private matter' of individual 'choice' or 'fate'.<sup>11</sup> Opposing the accepted gender roles deconstructs gender identities and more importantly, displays how forced heterosexism effects individual's life, especially

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<sup>10</sup> Butler, Judith (2008) *Cinsiyet Belası (Gender Trouble)* İstanbul: Metis Yayınları. p 32

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, D.,McLaughlin J. and Casey M.E. (2006) (Eds.) *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory* London: Palgrave Macmillan

in public sphere. Thus Queer and Feminist Theory intersect at the point of introducing how gender and sexuality shapes individual's social life.

Radical feminists consider gender as a social construction. With the contribution of Judith Butler, besides gender and sexuality, also sex as socially and culturally construction opened to discussion. She argues that identity is produced through discourse, with language. Feminism's problematizing of gender relations progressed with postmodernism's deconstruction of gender and identity categories. Postmodernism studies brought a new perception to gender studies and display how identity and gender categories shaped by politics continually.

### **2.1.3. Gender and Difference**

The discussion of gender theories are dominated by biologists, medical researchers and psychologists from 19<sup>th</sup> century till 1960's. This essentialist approach changed with social analysis of gender, social and cultural factors gained importance in the debate. In 1960's and 1970's, women's and gay and lesbian liberation movements made an important contribution to the study of gender. Afterwards, the distinction between sex and gender is defined. Whilst sex referred biological elements of the person, gender to the social construction of masculinity and femininity.

Sex/gender binary has been challenged by the arguments that both are social construction. Body cannot be considered apart from gender, so is sex. Before 19<sup>th</sup> century, people did not pay much attention to differentiate the sexes, but with development of science and medicine, the definitions occurred. Separating male and female biologically, determined social roles for each. Thus science -which is male based- constructed social roles for man and woman through biological elements; body and sex. As a result, gender created a social hierarchy where men have power over women.

Second wave feminism brought critical approach to the study of gender. French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's feminist analysis of gender made a crucial contribution to the gender debates. Her famous assertion that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' emphasized the social character of womanhood as distinct from biological femaleness.<sup>12</sup> Other critics made by following feminist theorists pointed out that gender is something taught through social institutions. In further debates, gender is discussed as while emphasizing the difference between men and women, it rather creates a hierarchy. Some feminist theorists like Christine Delphy and Judith Butler analyzed this hierarchy as constituted by social structure.

Christine Delphy explains the core of gender issue by developing Derrida's term of difference. Things can only be distinguished by opposition to other things.<sup>13</sup> This distinction between 'one and other' creates a hierarchy between them; 'one' can only be defined as what 'other' is not. Thus, while gender defines male and female according to differences, there hierarchy occurs.

By challenging the structure of gender and defining it as performative, Judith Butler includes Queer Theory to the discussion. (There are some criticisms to Butler's approach, as she pays less attention to inequality problem, introduces only an individualized perception. However, her importance for me is displaying the link between feminism and Queer Theory, thus I will not go into the criticisms.) By saying heterosexuality is unstable; she objected the assumption of it is natural. She emphasizes the question of sex/gender distinction and by doing so; she made one of the most important contributions to feminist theory. Butler's Queer Theory approach was taken one step further by transgender studies. Hence the examples of people who have different sex and gender in the same body demonstrated the

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (Eds.) (2002). Introduction: Gendering of Sociology. In *Gender: A Sociological Reader* London; New York: Routledge. p 9

<sup>13</sup> Delphy, Christine. Rethinking Sex and Gender. In *Gender: A Sociological Reader* London; New York: Routledge p 53

difficulty of the sex/gender separation. Thus the distinction between sex and gender was criticized.

Gayle Rubin's approach is also opposing the idea of sexuality causes gender, she instead separates them. She argues that feminist movement needs to aim not only change women's subordinated situation, moreover, change obligatory sexuality and sex roles.<sup>14</sup> Queer writers, who influenced from her approach, developed these ideas in their gender theories. Eve Sedgwick goes one step further and claims linking gender and sexuality allow more complex understandings. Furthermore, considering sexuality without gender gives a possibility of recognizing multiple genders.

With contributions of gender studies and the concept of difference, feminism was considered discursively within the power relations. Although Feminist Theory much more focused on women's civil rights movements previous years, it pays more attention to conceptualizing patriarchy recently. Rethinking gender issues, with the effect of poststructuralism, developed the idea of general view to women's subordination. While women were trying to gain equal rights to men and struggling for it, they rather aimed to reach the 'higher' level of men. Feminist Theory reconsiders the term "difference" and displayed difference is only exists when men are telling what women are not capable of.

The issue of difference is salient for men in a way that is not for women. Those who are dominant have an interest in emphasizing those differences that reaffirm their superiority and in denying their similarity to subordinate groups.<sup>15</sup>

For those Feminists, who state women issue as a system issue, the idea of Feminism embraces whole fields of experiences and practices. On the other hand, some Feminist approaches are lack of issues on homosexuality; because of they have centered women in their theory. Queer Theory, for my perspective, carries

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<sup>14</sup> Corrêa, Sonia. *Why Feminists Should Engage in Queer Theory*  
[http://feministdialogues.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=135](http://feministdialogues.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=135)

<sup>15</sup> Hare-Mustin, R.T. and Marecek, J. Gender and The Meaning of Difference in *Theorizing Feminism*, p 101

Feminism's fulfillment of missing perception one step further. Focusing on heterosexism or heteronormativity, Queer Theory introduces lack of homosexuality perspective in field of theory and practice.

## **2.2. Queer Identity and Theory**

### **2.2.1. What is Queer?**

The word queer means weird, bizarre and was first used for insulting homosexuals in 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term was embraced by gay lesbian movement and lost out its negative meaning over time. From 1980's to present, 'queer' refers to people who reject to live within the heteronormative<sup>16</sup> forms. Queer Theory basically claims that the descriptive identities such as homosexual, heterosexual, gay, lesbian or transsexual are oppressive and they also are not as constant or fixed as they are asserted. The main aspect of Queer Theory is to examine the base of identity construction within the cultural realm and resist against this construction. In this way, Queer Theorists and writers aim to display how norms/normative values are imposed and different identities are oppressed.

### **2.2.2. Emergence of Queer Theory with the Effect of Poststructuralism**

Poststructuralists question the emergence of the concepts like 'truth' or 'power' and argue that there are particular forms of knowledge, rather objective and universal truths or meanings.<sup>17</sup> Queer Theory has emerged with the influence of poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches, especially with the works of Foucault and Derrida. Foucault's works on sexuality accepted as the pioneer of

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<sup>16</sup> Heteronormativity is a term means imposing heterosexual patterns for everybody. Heteronormative view assumes that emotional and sexual relationship can only occur between people from opposite sexes. Heteronormativity also regards heterosexuality is the only norm in sexual relations and assuming that other ways are abnormal.

<sup>17</sup> Sullivan, Nikki. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* p 39

Queer Theory and Derrida's terms difference and deconstruction opened to discussion the main points of gender issue.

Displaying disguised hierarchical relations and power dispersed all fields of our lives, Foucault analyses the structure. In the *History of Sexuality*, he discussed sexuality has been repressed by oppressive institutions (repressive hypothesis). His discursive analyses of how power diffuse through institutions challenged the authority of science and medicine. He claims that psychiatry defines what is norm and labels the different ones as mentally diseased, need to be cured. According to Foucault, power relations occur where there is a difference. Homosexuality, in this sense, is an abnormal activity, a disease and psychiatrist is responsible to fix it using the authority given by science. Introducing historical sources on sexuality, from Ancient Greek and Middle Ages, Foucault also relates denaturalization of the term homosexuality to defining it with modernism. After Enlightenment and developments in natural science, there was a need of categorization of everything. Defining the norms and ideals with normalizing discourses constitute the difference. Thus it is this sort of logic that engenders and legitimates the repression of homosexuality as an aberration from heterosexuality (the norm/ideal).<sup>18</sup> This discourse created sexual minorities.

Derrida introduced hierarchical structured oppositions as the basic element of Western philosophy and science. He derived the 'binary oppositions' referring the self-other relation, and one of these dualities is always privileged, dominates the other one. Deconstruction is a way of undermining this power relation between dichotomies, also provides questioning established meanings behind these dichotomies. Binary oppositions induced us to think everything in dichotomies (begins with Cartesian dualism) and meanings are organized through difference. Thus woman is opposite of man, normal opposes the pathological and homosexual opposes heterosexual, that is to say, each meaning constructed through the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 40

definition of its opposite. A Derridean perspective would argue that heterosexuality needs homosexuality for its own definition: a macho homophobic male can define himself as "straight" only in opposition to that which he is not an effeminate gay man. Homosexuality is not excluded from such homophobia; it is integral to its very assertion.<sup>19</sup>

Foucault and Derrida's works challenge the assumption of modern Western philosophical thought coming from Cartesian dualism, which is individuals are free thinking/acting subjects. Their analyses displayed subjects can not be considered out of their social worlds, rather, they effect from the relations with the structure. They both also see interpretation as an important element to give meanings to the world. Derrida offers deconstruction for breaking the dominance of binary oppositions in our every way of thinking, meaning-making. He points out this double bind: we are always within a binary logic, and whenever we try to break out of its stranglehold, we reinscribe its very basis.<sup>20</sup> Foucault, on the other hand, emphasizes the discourse and explains how institutions legitimize themselves through discourse. In other words, defining the normal creates categorizations of abnormal behaviors, and then homosexuality appears as a construction. Producing homosexuality as a category (gay/lesbian identity), provides maintain a movement for gaining social rights but on the other hand, causes oppression on those who are not claiming their identities. At that point, we can see that struggling for civil rights is not the solution. Sexual minorities need to analyze this construction of discursive systems and deconstruct it. At that point, queer as an identity is a deconstructing method for all gendered forms and institutions.

Queer Theory introduced a different understanding of Feminist Theory's gender and sexual identity approach. Gender and sexual identities are potentially fluid

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<sup>19</sup> Namaste, Ki. The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Jul., 1994), American Sociological Association Publication. p 222

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 223

according to the theory. Displaying gender and sex is social construction; Queer Theory tries to destroy the form of 'normative' categories. Besides, identities such as gay, lesbian, heterosexual lose their meaning, also categorization of man and woman is challenged by the theory.

Queer Theory recognizes the impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of sexuality. We cannot assert ourselves to be entirely outside heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning in relation to the other. What we can do, Queer Theory suggests, is negotiate these limits. We can think about the how of this boundaries-not merely the fact that they exist, but also how they are created, regulated, and contested. The emphasis on the production and management of heterosexuality and homosexuality characterizes the poststructuralist Queer Theory project.<sup>21</sup>

### **2.2.3. Political Identity**

Although there is no definition for what queer is, it comprises a stand against all norms. It is a way of thinking outside heteronormative world. Thus we can claim that being queer as a political position means that one can be a resistance against the whole discursively constructed world via own presence.

In this sense, Queer Theory has a critical approach to gay and lesbian movement, in order to being liberationist. Gay and lesbian movement was marginal at the first place it occurred but time after time it was normalized and become mainstream. This does not mean that individuals are not facing social problems right now, however, LGBT issue perceived as a minority issue and the solution was improving the social rights. Thus they were 'assimilated' and taken their places in heteronormative world.

The first organized action against pressure upon homosexuals was Homophile Movement in 1950's and 1960's. They had to struggle against criminalization of homosexual activities and persecutions, thus few of them claimed their identity. Homophile Movement's primary aim was decriminalization of homosexuality and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p 224

gain basic human rights. However, this was the initial identity claiming of homosexuals. "It is no accident that the homophile movements originate in the same period in which homosexuality crystallized as an identity, when for the first time it was possible to be a homosexual."<sup>22</sup> In 1960' and 1970's, the idea of transforming fundamental institutions of society was emerged. Coming out gained importance and gay pride became the most significant activity of gay liberation movement. Comparing with homophile movement, gay liberation was distinguished with revealing sexual identity in political area, and also conscious rising and activism. At that point, it is possible to say that achieving civil rights, like participating the demonstrations without the threat of being sacked, provided more people to come out and unite in the LGBT organizations.

Both homophile and gay liberation movements were strictly emphasized gay identity and that brings a ghettoization. Homosexual individuals first organized for not being perceived as perverts or sinners in Homophile Movement, and then revealed their sexual identity for uniting against social oppression. Although their achievement brought more liberation to them, it also triggered to become a community. It is because they considered themselves as a minority and request the similar treatment from the state.

Whereas homophile movement had come to advocate assimilation, gay liberation was constructed around the notion of distinctly gay identity. ...It was based on pride in being gay. This is an important distinction and crucial to any understandings of the queer turn in lesbian and gay politics. ...New sense of identity which is problematic in Queer Theory is similar problematic which gay movement had with homophile.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, most of them were adapted to heteronormative system through conceding gender roles, like being family. Distinctly, in queerness, identity is build against what the 'norm' consists from. In other words, everyone, not necessarily homosexuals, can claim a queer identity. While requesting to question our socially

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<sup>22</sup> Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, p 22

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p 34

constructed gender roles, Queer Theory criticize the gay and lesbian identity. Because, gayness is also a categorization which fits the frame of homo/hetero distinction that I mentioned above as dualist logic: gay identity is constructed just as the opposite of straightness and visa versa. Accordingly, as soon as a gay adapts the system; marry, pay taxes, consume, he becomes a ‘normal’ citizen reproduces gender roles and never question them. The fluidity of sexual identity makes identity politics complicated; however, standing against all the constructed social categories is a way of activism that Queer Theory offers. “Queer is not just a resistance to the norm, but more importantly, consists of protesting against the idea of normal behavior.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sullivan, Nikki. (1996) *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press p 51

## **CHAPTER 3: LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) MOVEMENT HISTORY**

The change of identity politics in last decade shaped by New Social Movements caused reconsideration of politics and modernity. The most significant affect of New Social Movements is transformation of class based egalitarianism to individual and community based identity and difference politics. The critique of modernity from the postcolonial theories challenged the welfare society system and brought the human rights into debate. As the most important factor, Feminism accommodated masculinity and patriarchy in the base of the system and defined a struggle against hegemony which excludes women, blacks, homosexuals; those who are identify themselves distinct from the shapes hegemony puts them in. Gay and lesbian movements occurred from repression upon this identity, exclusion of homosexuality and gain importance by movements of 1968, specifically in the turn point of Stonewall riots.

In this chapter, I aim to display the circumstances that gay and lesbian movements appeared, how the resistance to the governments or society and today's conditions of LGBT individuals. My presentation will start with gay and lesbian movements in US and Europe, combining with the identity policies, continues with the contribution of the Queer Theory, and analyzing LGBT movement in Turkey through Kaos GL and other sources.

### **3.1. Emergence of the Term 'Homosexuality'**

Lesbian and gay movement gains a form in Germany in 1896, with the appearance of the first homosexual journal. Towards first German activist Karl H. Ulrich's ideas, LGBT movement leaded on the ideology of 'third sex'. Magnus Hirschfield wrote for the homosexuality: "deep, inner-constituted natural instinct" and as a

gender stage between the extremes of masculinity and femininity<sup>25</sup>. The community's main aim was to abolish the law that convicted homosexuality as a crime. The campaign continued with the signatories including Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, Lou Andreas Salome; and some scholars who contributed debate in theoretic level. However, the repression upon homosexuality maintained as a reaction of German society feeding into eugenic and militarist ideologies of the day that typified homosexuals as a conspiratorial threat to the nation's manhood and birthrate<sup>26</sup>.

The World War I was a hope for the people who expected that socialism brings equality and freedom but German revolution was a failure. While some communities positioned the movement into socialism and human rights, the official perception on their lives tended to see as a group of pleasure or enjoyment. There were cafes, restaurants, bars served gay people and there were everywhere in daily life. But the crucial point is that there were much less women joined to the movement fighting for rights, and lesbians were invisible at that time, till Feminist Theories come into place at 1970's.

Opposing to Germany as discussed homosexuality in academy, the movement developed in art and aesthetic debates. Homosexuality was mostly common in novels and the published world. Although the movement seems to be more liberal in France at 1920's, it never competed with conservative productions. Because of the repression especially upon lesbians, the novels ended with the suicide or another type of death of the homosexual character<sup>27</sup>. As a comparison, the movement organized in public in Germany, while gays and lesbians were enforced to hide their relationship against conservative society in France.

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<sup>25</sup> Adam, Barry D. (1995) *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* New York: Twayne Publishers p 20

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 25

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 32 ( Barbadette and Carassou 1981, 107; Adam 1978 30-34)

Development of capitalism and effect of the ruling class in social life in England shaped the movement around it. The ideology of capitalist state based on protecting the nuclear family and keeping the birth rates high. Therefore homosexuality was a threat for new rising capitalist system. Especially women excluded from the wage labor and defined as mother and wife. Women's economical dependence on husbands made lesbian relationship invisible or not being taken very serious. "It is when women first began to achieve financial independence in wage labor that romantic friends could divest themselves of the constraints of marriage and heterosexuality. Besides, Oscar Wilde who sentenced 2 years jail in order to having homosexual relationship and Edward Carpenter who denies Victorian control over social or private life and creates works on sexual and emotional relationships were very inspiring upon British gay and lesbian community.

Contrary to Europe, gay and lesbians suppressed by official definition of homosexuality as perversion in US. Society was frightened of having same-sex relation by published materials or other ways of media. The effect of British capitalism spread through US; thus masculinity that capitalism needs to maintain the power was constructed. Homosexuality excluded from the men's daily life and repressed violently.

Industrial labor shaped men's experiences and organized a masculine ideology through which men were to understand and direct their lives. The repressive climate "inoculated" most men against homosexual activity and convinced them of its inutility. (...) Even the male gestural repertoire for affection, needed to be dressed in the language of aggression: intermale touching could occur legitimately only as mock punches, slaps, and jabs.<sup>28</sup>

In United States, the control and restraint over homosexuality provided by government and law, allowed no free speech and censored all the movies, books, journals, documents about it. Gay and lesbians defined as perverts and obliged to spend some years or whole lives in some cases in prison, because of this law.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid p 44

During the Nazi invasion of Germany and Europe, gays and lesbians are sentenced, suffered and died in concentration camps, like other minority groups. In the countries which Nazi effect was not so strong, homosexuality seemed as a disease needed to be cured. The most important effect of holocaust upon the movement was extermination of the early gay culture and overspread the perception of homosexuality as sickness, sin or crime.

### **3.2. Stonewall Riots**

After World War II, a project occurred against homosexuals by McCarthy, in US. The government, official language and the media attacked homosexuality. They spread a perception that gays and lesbians are perverts and same-sex relation is a psychiatric disease which threatens the society. Following these ideas, gay and lesbian individuals assaulted, dismissed from the school or work, obliged to remove their houses. Some of them enforced to get cured with some treatments like electroshock, thousands of others imprisoned in jails and mental hospitals.

In Europe, gays and lesbians came together and organized with other minority groups to raise their voice for liberty and equality. The repression on their identity made them act as a group only to survive and decrease the resistance from public. This influence and wartime conditions gained some progress to the movement. Women and black people accommodated in industry when male workers left for war. Therefore minorities had a chance to socialize. With greater independence and access to the public world, women increasingly experienced the opportunities that had long permitted men to create gay places and other supportive environments<sup>29</sup>.

In these circumstances, the gay people who released from the concentration camps and others who live in big cities in public were still seemed as criminal or sick.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p 66

There is a movement called 'Homophile' started in Europe and some small but radical changes occurred. Britain, as having the less effect of Nazi period, abandoned defining homosexual behavior as a crime. Homophile movement achieved to create a small resistance, more like protection, but it was not enough.

Oppression and terrorization policy continued upon gay and lesbians like on other minorities. People who were subjected this exclusion from society maintained to resist by cleaves of the system. There were associations of human rights or civil rights which supported these movements. US's invasion of Vietnam produced a mass resistance of blacks, students, homosexuals; people who questioned the political system.

Stonewall riots started with the police attacks to the urban ghettos where gays and lesbians habited, worked, shopped, entertained. It wasn't an event apart from that epoch's political conditions, and a collective resistance occurred by homosexuals and other minorities who demand civil rights. But Stonewall riot was a symbol for the gay movement and it became a traditional event that celebrated every year throughout the world.

The result of these intense discussions was immense anger, joy, pride, and boiling over of new ideas. People glimpsed the future and fell in love with a utopia far from the bad old days with their repression and terror, hiding and fear. (...) like the New Left itself, which had spawned new social movements, gay liberation ultimately was to produce a larger set of gay and lesbian groups.<sup>30</sup>

The assaults, harassments and violence upon gays and lesbians continued in 1970's but the communities were more organized and reacted with demonstrations, protests and street marches. The movements gain some rights; the most important was the removal of homosexuality as a disease from American Psychiatric Association's official diagnostic manual. Gay liberation groups emerged widespread world and journals founded.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 83

### **3.3. Effect of Feminism on the Movement**

Although the movement appeared as a resistance to the oppression of homosexuality and to gain civil rights, it transformed an ideology critiques the system. Parallel to feminism, gay and lesbian movements produced its own theoretical background and literature. In 1970's, studies of Feminism displayed the subordination of woman, also subordination of the people who are not white, European and male. Mainly, the capitalist system operates for advantaged groups who implement the necessities of masculinity. The others who reject to behave with this pattern are excluded from the society. Not all women but Feminists denied the patriarchal hegemony and gay and lesbians as well.

Feminist movement formed in the conditions of civil rights of women. The roles of women was determined by patriarchal system; being wife, mother or sister without questioning. The ones who prefer to live out of these boundaries would be excluded. Having same-sex relation was not very dangerous if she is still the wife but at the time women refuse to marry, she encountered with obligations. It is threatening the society when a woman refuses to marry because they have to give birth, raise children and provide the permanence of the society. Lesbians organized in the movement and gained to power to resist this ideology. Lately, they separated from the homosexual movements and identified themselves in the movement that they constituted.

### **3.4. Queer Movement**

Homosexuality gain importance in debates leaded by scholars. At the beginning of the movement, gay and lesbians defined themselves as third sex and their actions were aiming to have rights which heterosexuals had. The idea was to show the similarities between both sides and meet at the civil rights. Contribution of feminist theories to the movement is reconsidering the gender roles, subordination and the

system itself. The movement abandoned to fight for liberation, started to fight for structure of the society.

For Foucault, modern gay and lesbian identities and movements could scarcely be simply about 'liberation' because they built on the 'homosexual' category, an invention of western societies to police and contain desire. (...) politics of sexual identities is not about limitation, but also about the generation of new pleasures and ways of living.<sup>31</sup>

Queer is a slang used for insult gays. The term deconstructed and named to the theory that nourished by postmodern scholars like Foucault, Butler, Sedgwick and many others. The main argument is to abandon the binary oppositions that limit the way of thinking, acting or having pleasure (See Chapter 2). Concepts like homosexuality and heterosexuality are the definitions and once a definition come up, boundaries appear. Boundaries exist in the means of controlling the people.

Queer Theory is debated in academic level and criticized about not having direct relationship with the people who are the subjects of it. Also some theorists claim that the movement's primary aim should be interfere the perception of homosexuality in the society and then transform the generalizations and roles. It is not about acceptance of liberation of sexuality, rather Queer Theory provides to critique people's role in society and much more challenges the system that determined the given roles.

### **3.5. LGBT Movement in Turkey**

LGBT movement in Turkey started to organize around associations after 1980. Gay and lesbian people oppressed and bounded to hide their identities until then. Identity and difference policies gain importance in 1990's following the political and ideological changes in world politics. New conception of economy reflected all spheres of life and liberalism effected the social movements. Clarifications of

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<sup>31</sup> Adam, Barry D. From Liberation to Transgression and Beyond: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Studies at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century Richardson, D. and Seidman, S. (Eds.) (2002) *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. London; Thousan Oaks, Calif : SAGE p 18

society with class based ideologies were inadequate; also economic structuring after World War II breed welfare state enforcements. New Social Movements derived from the idea that reductive economic policies exclude minorities' political representation.<sup>32</sup>. The concepts like culture, identity, and minority reconsidered with the context of modernization critique. LGBT movements displayed that the individuals are not economically based; they composed from the elements like race, sex, and culture, religious and so on.

Social movements seem to shift their focus from class, race and other more traditional political issues toward the cultural ground. (...) The crucial dimensions of daily life (time, space, interpersonal relations, individual and group identity) have been involved in these conflicts, and new actors have laid claim to their autonomy in making sense of their lives.<sup>33</sup>

The process that Europe and U.S. experienced reflected to Turkey with many similarities. However, Turkey's experience bounded to squeeze in last two decades. Turkey crated its own local movement and the main distinction is, while homosexuals created their own habitans that drive the movement to ghettoisation<sup>34</sup> in Europe and especially US; LGBT associations work with other minority groups and organizations in Turkey. Also, contrast to Europe, homosexual movement did not derived from feminism even though they have many arguments in common.<sup>35</sup>

Homosexuality recognized at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in West and defined as sickness, sin or crime. Therefore the movement aimed to change firstly, the misperception in society and more importantly, the definitions in law which sentence them in prison, in mental hospitals or conduced to death, because of their identity. Politics operates with disregard of minorities in Turkey, thus there is no

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<sup>32</sup> Toktaş, Ş. and Altunok, G. Yeni Sosyal Hareketler Çerçevesinde Türkiye Gey ve Lezbiyen Hareketi ve Siyasalın Dönüşümü. *Kaos GL, Lezbiyenlerin ve Geylerin Sorunları, Kaos GL Sempozyumu* 23–24 Mayıs 2003. p 40

<sup>33</sup> Melluci, Alberto. *The Process of Collective Identity* p 41

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, V.; Kaminski, E.; Dugan, K. From Bowery to the Castro: Communities, Identities and Movements Richardson, D. Seidman, S. (Eds.) *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies* London; Thousan Oaks, Calif : SAGE p 107.

<sup>35</sup> Toktaş, Ş. and Altunok, G. p 46

definition or rights in law include discrimination for LGBT individuals. They are invisible except transgender individuals. The movement organized around the goal of passing over the public discrimination and gained the law to protect their life. General idea of homosexuality in Turkey is psychological disease or perversion. Especially travesties and transsexuals are the subjects of public discrimination, worse, physical violence from police. There is no job for them thus they need to be sex workers to sustenance; even though being aware of the possibility of got killed by someone on the street. There are also LGBT people who dismissed from work as soon as their identity is disclosed. LGBT movement in Turkey organized to resist on public and official violence, primarily for adding constitution protecting the right of life for homosexual people.

1960's social movements were inefficient for using the concept inequality to explain the social fact. Activists coming from the minorities (women, black, homosexual...and so forth) aimed to display that they could be as 'normal' as most of the society. First, women claimed that they should have same rights with men, in terms of being a citizen. Minorities demanded to be considered as middle class 'normal' individuals of the society. But movements for equal rights made identities invisible. Afterwards, identity politics gained importance and the concept of difference became prominence. In LGBT movement, demanding equality with 'normal' middle class men convey them to ghettoisation. With the effect of feminism and Queer Theory, the movement started to claim existence with differences. New Social Movements is a sphere where different identities express their demands together and struggle against discrimination policies.

The common perception of lesbian and gay movement is to deal with private spheres but the fact is politics is permeated all domains of life, including sexual relationship. LGBT movement is not a group of people's demand of rights; rather, it is a contention against the patriarchal system subordinates people who denies defined roles. Political domain excludes individuals who ineligible to the

masculinity and by defining homosexuality opposite of heterosexuality it creates a repression to control homosexual individuals. The movement intends to transform perception of masculinity.

The LGBT movement developed parallel with Feminism but rather distinct. The critique of gender, historically and cultural constructed roles and the possibility of changing it are the effects of Feminism. But Feminists in Turkey separated themselves from the LGBT movement according to not questioning the male-dominated discourse wholly. And also most of the lesbians were choose to act in Feminist associations for being invisible because of their feeling of male dominance in LGBT associations. However, collaboration of LGBT and Feminist movement leaded LGBT movement radicalized with the questioning roles that defined by masculine hegemony. Their aim is not only showing that homosexuals as a group which fight for their rights, but also deconstruct the definitions of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

### **3.6. KAOS GL Organization**

Kaos GL is the first LGBT organization and magazine of Turkey. Before they founded Kaos GL, a group of homosexuals asked İHD (İnsan Hakları Derneği / Human Rights Association) to help for organizing, the reaction was ‘while there are many political problems in this country, shall we deal with your pleasure?’ Nevertheless the citizens of Turkey’s perception of wholeness crackled with emergence of Kurdish movement in 1990’s<sup>36</sup>. Afterwards, identity politics influenced the development of LGBT movement and the movement gained ideologically acceptance by other organizations.

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<sup>36</sup> Kosova, Erden. (Interview with Ali Erol) Queer Teori: Kaos GL, Türkiye’de Eşcinsellik Yazını ve Örgütlenmesi *Siyahi*, Vol. 5 p 6

The LGBT organization lead by Kaos GL, produce a domain where no class differentiations or homogenizations. For instance, a professor and a worker come together in the same group.<sup>37</sup> They pursued their policy by making close relationships with other antagonistic organizations. They joined ‘May the 1<sup>st</sup>’, ‘Antiwar Movement for Iraq’ and ‘Women’s Day’. Some left associations blame the movement as being west imitation. But the biggest part of the movement is to critique leftist’s perception to homosexuals. Ali Erol argues, ‘there’s no place for homosexuals in power’.<sup>38</sup> Because of the power is masculine. The discourse of power defines binary oppositions (homosexual/heterosexual, women/men, self/other) and controls people by constrict them into definitions. Accordingly, all identities are defined by power; the movement offers to question firstly identities, and mainly the power. Although this argument seems to be a big step for every movement, some argue that the movement needs to gain basic rights for queer people first. In Turkey, LGBT organizations have to deal with trials claiming that the organization is against society’s morality values.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the movement has to gain the right of living, the right of organizing and change the constitution by adding protective laws for LGBT individuals.

The concept of queer is reconciled with every kind of ambiguity, hybridism, complex indicators and spontaneity. Therefore it could be an extremely efficient weapon for individual’s struggle against peremptory and authoritarian systems. In my opinion, every doctrine that explains what are the women and men; is inevitably sexist. Likewise, subjecting different sexual tendencies to unadulterated classifications for producing genealogy is discrimination. Because each individual’s experience is different and unique. If we want to be free, instead of segregating society to categories and classes, we need to segment until only individuals remain. Only in this way, we freed from representations and realize ourselves. The target should be everybody’s become queer in their routes and love each other.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 6

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 7

<sup>39</sup> In May 29, 2008; the judgement decided to closure of Lambdaistanbul Association. The charge was bad effects of Lambdaistanbul’s presence to society’s morality values.

<sup>40</sup> Kinky İmam, “cins(iyet)e ihanet” Siyahi, volume 3 p 65 (the translation is mine)

## **CHAPTER 4: FIELD EXPERINCE**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Making a field research on LGBT individuals is involved many difficulties. LGBT is a closed community that hard to reach for an outsider. Because of facing exclusion and discrimination in most of the area of their socialization, LGBT members are mostly remote. Also when the issue is homosexuality, it might disturb LGBT members as they are only recognized through their sexual identity, instead of their personality. For an outsider, these are the facts that can make the research complicated. Thus it takes time to gain trust and overcome those difficult issues.

Before I decided to make my research on LGBT movement, I have already been in the community. Most of the participants are my friends, and the others are their friends. Thus I use snowball method to reach the participants. Kaos GL employees voluntarily participated in the research for the reason of lack of information in this field. Also they were aware that I am part of the movement as an activist. Under these circumstances, I was not an outsider making a field research on their experiences; but I was rather part of the struggle. Besides, this interaction affected both sides; they understand my standpoint in the movement better and I get more into the struggle through listening to their individual stories.

Essence of this research is about how people can change the others around them by their acts. I try to display this idea through gay/lesbian individual's coming out experiences. While making the research, the research itself turned out to a transition effect. Asking questions about people's coming out experiences and their perception on political action made them reconsider their own strength of change. Thus, in my opinion, the research itself becomes a political act, as Feminist methodology pointed out.

The features of the field, the main information on participants, interviewing and data analysis process will be explained in the next section. Also I will try to mention my experiences on the field, like the connection with the people and interaction through it, and the effects for the both sides; participants and the researcher.

#### **4.2. Entering the Field**

Choosing the research issue, especially for social sciences, is related to researcher's own concerns. For me, deciding to analyze LGBT movement took place after I work in this field as an activist. I joined the group whilst they were trying to establish a student community in METU, we maintained a campaign on anti-homophobia in the campus. When you have that connection to the field, you can get more into the problems. Facing with homophobia in the campus, led me think more about the solutions; what kind of policies we can make to change people's perception regarding LGBT members. Through the interaction with them, I realize that visibility is a crucial issue in the movement. At the beginning, it seemed that no one want to see a gay or lesbian around. They avoid seeing them face to face and making connection with any of them. In time, we got the outcomes of the campaign and the reactions were hopeful. This work which was carried out on visibility triggered people to notice LGBT people around them. Moreover, some people tended to participate in the campaign to defend LGBT individual's rights<sup>41</sup>, when seeing a few of them face to face, maintaining a campaign on their identity. That experience engendered me to realize the importance of visibility in the movement; hence I decided to work on this issue. Before and after the field experience, anybody whom I talked about visibility said; "the pressure is always towards being invisible and it turned out to violence on LGBT individuals".

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<sup>41</sup> At this case, rights means right of organizing. Even if our campaign was very successful for connecting with students, we faced with discrimination by university administration. They did their best to prevent establishing our community in official base.

Working as an activist in the field of your research has many inputs. You can be aware of the ideas and approaches of your friends on the issue better. Also the issue itself, the heterosexist system, pressures anybody, not only LGBT individuals. One feels the pressure much more after sharing their experiences and witnessing their lives. Like having Feminist viewpoint after meeting the Feminist perspective; one develops an approach against heterosexist system after seeing this discrimination. Besides, you can see the impact upon people while working on this sort of campaign. First they are surprised through seeing a gay or lesbian activist, talking about their problems in the campus; that causes a crash upon their perception. Second they react; by ignoring them, by hatred speech or by being curious and coming to talk. Seeing all these reactions shape my attitude towards the people, and also my prejudices are changing constantly as well. Being activist, especially interaction with the people on the street is a teaching-learning process that one can improve her/himself. Spending this process in the area of struggle with the people, who are the subjects of the issue, provided me to gain an approach from inside. Thus, I became a member of the community and got closer to see the issue from their eyes.

The connection that was occurred between us provided me to look at myself through their eyes. Within the talks, discussions and meetings are always a sphere for change. Both sides transformed each other through discussions, and helped to break own prejudices. Through this process, I realize how my perception is shaped by constructed thoughts on homosexuality. Also the labels and stereotypes internalized by LGBT individuals themselves. In the movement, I realize all the labels that are stuck in my mind and behavior, and try to change them together.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate that academia is inadequate for being feed from the base of social movements. The critics directed to the academia emphasizes that the abstract structure of theoretical studies produce a gap between people and academia. Also, it limits the access to the sources. Working on a study reinforced

by activism may help to remove that gap. For that reason, I think the field experience that includes one's participation in movement can create a different perspective to the study. In other words, I try to transfer my experiences in LGBT movement activism to the academic sphere. That can be seen as a minor effort to remove the distinction between street activism and academia.<sup>42</sup>

### **4.3. Description of the Field and the Participants**

On the purpose of analyzing personal perception of gays/lesbians/bisexuals on being political actor through 'coming out' act, I made a qualitative research with 19 women and men. 10 women and 9 men were reached through snowball sampling method, but also all of them are the people I knew from social circle. I did not prefer to separate them as gay/lesbian/bisexual, thus I use women and men. There are 2 bisexual women in the group<sup>43</sup>. While choosing the respondents, I paid attention to some of them being visible activist in the movement and others being invisible in public sphere. But, at that time I try to distinguish these two groups, I realized there is no certain distinction between being visible or invisible. Some of the activists are invisible to their families but come out in public sphere; on the contrary, some who come out to their families are invisible in public life. Thus, I determine the difference according to defining themselves as activist, the Kaos GL employees (current or former) whom I interviewed are all in this group naturally<sup>44</sup>. Eventually, 10 of all defined themselves as activist, 6 men and 4 women.

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<sup>42</sup> For a critical analysis of academic texture see the thesis of Alpar, Danende Zeynep; "The Format as in Iron Cage: Writing in Sociology and Anthropology".

<sup>43</sup> As I consider defining a person according to identity is very hard, I choose not to ask their sexual orientation. Two of the respondents mention their bisexuality.

<sup>44</sup> If one is working on LGBT issues related organizations, s/he is considered as activist automatically. Working in the association, in general, does not cause to be an activist but in the identity related issues like LGBT movement, the association becomes the place that one appears with own identity. Thus, they are naturally visible to other institutions or organizations which they are in relationship.

The general profile of the 19 respondents is given in Table 1 in Appendix A. All of them have university degree or are studying, the ages between 22 and 40. All are living in Ankara but some of the families are living in another city. Six of them living with housemate, 5 of them living with their partners, 3 of them living alone, 2 of them are living with their parents and 2 are staying in a dormitory. Six of the respondents are only visible to their close friends and not visible anybody from their nuclear family. Nine are visible to at least one of the member of their family. Other 4 define themselves as visible in any spheres of life.

When examining their participation in the movement, 5 of them are working professionally in Kaos GL, 5 other are/were actively volunteer in Kaos GL or other organizations (Pembe Hayat<sup>45</sup>) and communities (TCVKC or ODTU-LGBTT<sup>46</sup>) in LGBT movement. It is observed that although they do not define themselves as activist, some individuals from the other group joined the marches related to the issue ('March 8; women's day' or 'March Against Homophobia'). Also 3 of them from the second group making their own academic study on LGBT issue and consider that as another way of activism.

As I mentioned before, coming out experiences are diverse among this group. First of all, coming out to a friend and coming out to the family has many dimensions. Coming out to a friend is a process comes spontaneously; without saying 'I'm gay/lesbian' for 10 people of the group; 2 men, 8 women. The number of the gays, who told their friends that they are gay is 7, and 1 lesbian. But this numbers are given only through the first coming out experience. The ones, who have a coming out experiences with their friends at the beginning, in time they prefer to not saying directly but mentioning or not hiding on purpose. Thus it is really hard to make a

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<sup>45</sup> Pembe Hayat is an association struggling to protect transgender individual's rights.

<sup>46</sup> TCVKC: Gender and Woman Studies Community, is an initiative on gender issues in METU. ODTU-LGBTT: is an underground group for communication between LGBT individuals in the campus for fight against discrimination.

distinction between telling it directly, implying it, introducing partner to the friends or mentioning their desire to same sex.

Coming out to at least one member of the family is seen in 15 people, 8 male and 7 female. From this group, 4 of them are visible to their sisters or brothers (3 lesbians to their sister and 1 gay to his brother), 3 of them came out to their mother (1 gay, 1 lesbian, 1 bisexual), 3 lesbians and 1 gay were disclosed to their family, through their relationship. Six of the respondents who come out and faced with harsh reactions from their families managed to change their parent's approach in time. Two of them choose to not mentioning the issue afterwards. A male respondent was excluded from his family because of being gay.

#### **4.4. Interviewing Process**

The interviews are made between February and March. They lasted from 20 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes. Women's speaking time, in general is less than men. They were made in Kaos GL, coffees, houses and university canteens or on meadows. While I was making interviews, there were not any problems but a few technical obstacles like finding hard to talk to the recorder. Most of them were talkative and seem to enjoy telling their personal experiences to another person. Some of them cited that they never thought about these issues before and it makes them think more.

Following the snowball sampling technique, first I asked the people I know from Kaos GL to make an interview, then my friends from the university, and after, I asked to the people I only knew as friend of friends. Because of I have personal relationship with first circle, I never rejected by their friends. In my opinion, trust is very important in this kind of research and I gain it spontaneously. If I were an ordinary student trying to make a research on this issue without making any connection, the field research would be very tough for me. They did not hesitate to

make interview with me when they see I am taking part in this struggle as an activist. I displayed that this is also my issue that I am dealing with.

The questions that I asked are given in Appendix B. They are easy to understand and none of participants avoided answering any of them. Interviews proceeded like chatting. Sometimes they wondered away from the questions while telling their personal stories but I did not intervene. Thus I have a wide data composed from the stories of coming out processes and other experiences. I used small part of the stories and ideas. They may be used for another research. Besides their personal stories, some of them mentioned their friends' experiences. Also some of Kaos GL employees gave examples from the people they provided consultancy in the association or the people they meet in daily work routine. Even if some of them can not apply to all spheres of their lives, they stated the importance of coming out. Thus their ideas on the issue are also valid data for the research. I used thoughts as much as their experiences.

#### **4.5. Data Analysis Process**

The main concern of this study is whether respondents consider themselves as a political actor or not. First their opinions of coming out is explored, then it is questioned that, can coming out be an effect in social transition. Although they all have diverse coming out experiences, it is observed that their perception of coming out is stating at that exact point. Data analysis started at that common pattern.

All the interviews are sorted according to common points. Classification is made through firstly participating in the movement or not and secondly gender categories. The questions are formed through asking their own coming out experiences and opinions on coming out act, and then perception of political act analysis is read through these two dimensions. While asking the good and bad reactions of their act, I paid attention to get their coping strategies. Coping strategies for me also

show if they see the strength of affection in themselves or they prefer to regress. A few of them choose to regress after they face with bad reaction of their coming out, the rest choose to take action<sup>47</sup>.

#### **4.6. Limitations and Lessons Learned**

The people I interviewed are having diverse coming out experiences. Although I could catch some patterns, it is really hard to make categorizations among them. Most of the diversities do not derive from working in the organization or being gay or lesbian. Thus one can easily come to the point of saying individualist factors are very effective. Besides, coming out is a process, thus, people have different attitudes in their lifetime. One could think that s/he is sick in early ages, then become conscious about their sexuality and stand for it afterwards. But this process is not applicable for all respondents. These are the main limitations that I face with, while analyzing the data.

While preparing the questions, I focused on their coming out experiences in general. I realized it is a process and it changes in lifetime, afterwards. Thus, I did not form the questions as understanding the one's approach to change of her/his coming out experience in time. In other words, I did not distinguish one's first perception of being homosexual from her/his current perception. Hence, asking their ideas on coming out experiences caused me to record only their present opinion. From their current opinion, I could not analyze their first feelings, fears, and approach to the issue. If I asked them to tell about their first influence on being homosexual, I could make a comparison between first coming out experiences and recent approach to coming out. The interpretation that I make on their first experiences derived from the stories that they told. Detailed questions might provide me to analyze the first reactions and the gender difference better.

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<sup>47</sup> Here, taking action means emphasizing their visibility in every sphere of life.

Before I go to the field, I assumed that everybody have similar type of coming out experiences. After discovering their emotional and sexual desire towards the same sex they feel guilt because of the carrying general ideas on homosexuality. They tell their families or friends in shame and try to deal with the bad reactions. Encountering examples as having no problem with their sexuality from the time they discover it, was a new point for me. For sure I did not have any prejudices about it, but that information has changed my approach. It overlaps to the idea that I constructed my study perfectly. On the other hand, that brings the question of personal reasons. It is impossible to search the reasons of accepting that as a natural feature of oneself at the beginning or reach this consciousness after sharing it. At that point, I can only state that social constructed perceptions are effective in somehow on one's approach to oneself. They all aware of being different since their early ages but some embrace themselves as they are and some other experience conflict, maybe even trauma because of social stigma.

Furthermore, I have difficulties in distinguishing being activist. I separated the respondents as activists and non activist at the beginning. Participating in protests, joining the marches or writing and publishing on the issue were my criteria. While I was planning to interview the ones I named as non activists, they joined 'March 8 Walk'. Then I decided to change my questions and add 'do you see yourself as a part of this struggle' 'what this struggle does mean to you'. After that I defined activism depending on their statement.

I regard this study as learning and changing process. The relationship that I made with my respondents and also the study itself caused many changes in my perception through the issue. Especially, since I get involved in LGBT movement and struggling against homophobia, I discovered rooted judgments in myself and made an effort to get rid of them. The most important experience for me was facing with constructed ideas in myself. Each individual and experience was a changing effect to my sight.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The subject that I choose for my study and field research process could be seen difficult from many perspectives. Making a research on LGBT individuals have many adversities depends on the reason of being invisible community. But I chose nearly half of the group from LGBT movement and I made connection with the others through them. Taking part in LGBT movement means one is visible to some spheres of life. In my study, I have the advantage of participating in the movement. This situation caused me both to access into the field easily and made sincere relationship with the respondents. I sort of managed to see the issue from their eyes, in my opinion.

Looking at coming out experiences, for me is for searching individual's perception of their own changing impact through their act. Thus it was important for me that one's opinion on coming out as a political act. I tried to understand their ideas on coming out and analyze them even if they are not consider themselves as a part of the movement. I choose not to interview with people who are regarding homosexuality as a personal issue that should not be mentioned except from finding partner.

Activism is an important term for this study. But I never expect from the respondents to define themselves as an activist. This was a categorization that I defined. The ones, who do not consider themselves a part of the movement, carry the idea that they have a changing effect upon their environment. As being an activist in LGBT movement, I also believe personal acts can affect others around us all the time. Thus, this field research influenced my thoughts on being personal actor in life.

## CHAPTER 5: COMING OUT EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT OF COMING OUT

In this chapter, I analyze the interviews on coming out experiences of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Each individual is a political actor and in LGBT issues, claiming their sexual identity to themselves and others makes them visible to the world. Some of gays/lesbians/bisexuals become part of the movement after or via coming out process, some of them prefer not taking part. It is a question of accepting their sexual orientation as an identity and to struggle for this. The ones that I interviewed from the movement, when they get in touch with the political issues, they realize that the problems of LGBT movement is somehow comes to the point of coming out. Not all of them need to define themselves as political actors in their lives. But the point that distinguishes LGBT activist from the others (the ones that keep themselves away from the movement) is struggling against discrimination on institutional level. The others maintain their struggle in daily life praxis. In both cases, their existence does not fit the role that society or system gives to them. Thus coming out is a performance that intervenes to the stigmatization produced by the society.

The coming out process is diverse among individuals. Some of them discover themselves at very early ages and never thought this is a problematic situation. When they realize they are different in the heterosexual world, the conflict occurs. There are different coping methods. In some cases individual represses her/his desires and tries to behave 'normal'<sup>48</sup>. Some others never experience conflict because they are aware of being different from the beginning, not only through the sexual orientation, also having a different viewpoint to the life. I can say that one's realization of not fitting the norms brings questioning to the system. However the

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<sup>48</sup> Normal is used for accepting socially constructed values. For instance, a heterosexual individual is accepted as normal and homosexual is abnormal. Here I try to emphasize the changeability of the norms and perception of abnormality.

handling methods can be different. Those who are not carrying a political approach<sup>49</sup>, handle with the issue with the idea of ‘this is my personal life and nobody needs to know’. On the other hand, most of the interviewers mentioned that ‘coming out is getting existence’. The main difference between these ideas, in my opinion, is embracing the identity. By questioning themselves and the others around them, they come through that this is a system issue. Thus they object the oppression, by expressing themselves. Because the system, heterosexism, force them to hide it, to make them invisible.

### **5.1. Description of Coming Out**

Coming out is not a momentary event, it is rather a process. The individual first realizes that s/he have emotional or sexual desires to same sex. Within the socialization process, individuals comprehend that their experience contradicts the norms. The school, friends, family, television, all the everyday life praxis tell them sexual or emotional desire can be only towards the opposite sex. With the effect of these constructed norms, the individual started to think that s/he is abnormal, or even sick. S/he can choose not to tell anybody and keep that as a secret. Thus, individual pressured her/himself and tries to live a normal life without being oneself.

Self consciousness is the key element in coming out. When the individual realizes s/he is different, s/he can choose the other way; no matter what this is me, I have to live with that. After decided to declare it and tell to other people, afterwards is shaped by the reaction of the others around the individual. However, the main point is weather one embrace the identity or not. Political approach comes after claiming the identity. Not all the gays, lesbians and bisexuals taking part in the struggle but claiming the identity can be seen as a political act as well.

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<sup>49</sup> I used political approach as one’s considering oneself as a political actor in life. The ones defined themselves as not participating in the movement perceive their coming out action brings change to their environment. Only 1 respondent stated that she is not interested in carrying this kind of role.

In this research, political identity defined as perceiving LGBT issue as a system issue and all the acts, including daily life praxis, determine one's position against the constructed norms. In other words, whether taking part in the movement actively or not, individuals try to change their family, friends and others around them. On the other hand, those who call themselves gay or lesbian but consider LGBT issue as only a bedroom action, are not included my definition of political action. In my opinion, they have no belief to change anything around them and their perception shapes around privacy<sup>50</sup>. Besides, I have to mention that this is a life-long process; the individuals who seem non-political can take part in the movement somehow in the future, with the effect of the movement itself.

Coming out, for me, is important at the point that one's making connection between her/his identity and the movement. Not all the respondents in my research are connected with the movement but they all carry an idea of their existence can break the constructed norms. Thus, the ones within the movement declare their identity and join the struggle. And the ones who are not in the struggle, see the others fighting for all LGBT individuals rights and come out. Every individual that I spoke (except one) says this is my existence and we need to break the wrong idea in people's minds. By coming out, you show them a 'normal' person can be gay or lesbian.

## **5.2. Perception of Homosexuality in Turkish Society**

As I mentioned above, the LGBT individuals discover themselves in very early ages. That is not engendering a problem until one claims that as an identity. The parents or friends know something's going on but unless naming it, it is invisible. When one mention the name gay or lesbian, the others immediately make

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<sup>50</sup> Here I refer the people who experience a hidden gay life. Pretending like heterosexual in their social life and searching for a same sex partner for only having sexual relationship. Some of them could be married and even have kids.

connection with the images that they saw under that name. The reason they react so harsh is they do not know anything else but stereotypes.

The stereotypes are created and reproducing by popular culture instruments. In Turkey we only know one transsexual; Bülent Ersoy, and our gay images are limited; Zeki Müren, Cemil İpekçi, Fatih Ürek, Aydın. There's no visible lesbian celebrity in Turkey but being male-like, having short hair, playing men-dominated games (football) rudeness are the general stereotypes for perception of lesbian woman. Those stereotypes are reproducing everyday by television program, movies, news and so on. With the effect of all these facts, the people encode these characters as homosexual individuals. Because the real LGBT community is invisible, one need to be interested in these issues to have more knowledge about it. On the other hand, coming out of the intellectuals like Murathan Mungan and Yıldırım Türker made a contribution to the movement. However, the idea of gay changes from singers to intellectuals, but stayed in the same circle: artists and elites. The most important effect to the movement recently was a referee's disclosure (Halil İbrahim Dinçdağ). According to general idea, artists can be gay/lesbian but people from the other professions are never expected to be homosexual. Within this invisibility, people always approach to others assuming that they are heterosexual. That engenders this invisibility turns to be systematical violence and force LGBT individuals to be more invisible. In addition, bisexuality is an unknown field that people have almost no idea about it.

In LGBT movement, some people are out but they do not force others to come out. They think this process must be developed within the person's life experiences. If the person thinks hiding is a problem and questions own existence in the society, s/he eventually comes out. In this sense, coming out means tell to the parents because the most important reaction comes from the family. Besides, some activists continue their work in the movement without telling their parents, thus it is not essential. But most of them emphasize the importance of telling the parents, because

it may bring a huge support. When your parents say ok, I love my daughter/son in the way s/he is; you can continue safely your fight against the world.

Bireysel açılmanın yanında aileye de açılmak önemli. Bi eşcinselin annesinin çıkıp da buna sahip çıkması, evet benim çocuğum budur, böyledir ve böyle mutludur dediği noktada her şeyin farklı olacağını düşünüyorum.<sup>51</sup>

Besides coming out individually, it is important to come out to family. I think that everything will be different when a homosexual's mother protect her daughter/son, and says yes this is my kid in her/his own way and s/he is happy in this way.

On the other hand, usually the harsh reaction comes from the family, namely, Ahmet Yıldız case. He was murdered by his father after his coming out to his family. This case showed us that how family is important in LGBT individual's lives. Although, his biological family refused to take his body from the mortuary, his friends protect his memory. His partner and friends founded an initiative to follow his trial<sup>52</sup>. Ahmet Yıldız's murder affected many people as reconsidering the difference between their biological family and the LGBT community that they called 'family'<sup>53</sup>. Specifically that case displayed the importance of being minority without family support. The main distinction between LGBT community and the other minorities is basically alienation from the family. Accordingly, one respondent said;

Az olmak, azınlık olmak çok zor bişey. Ama bütün azınlıklara bakıldığı zaman, bi bebek dünyaya geldiğinde azınlıkla ailesiyle birlikte azınlık oluyo. Ama eşcinsellik öyle değil. Benim bu hayattaki en değerli varlıklarım ailem, ve onların bilmediği hiçbir şey yok, sadece bu var. Hem azınlık oluyosun hem de tek başınasın. Bu çok zorlu bişey. Diğer azınlıklara bakıldığında ne kadar güç şeyler yaşadıkları ortada. Ama aileleriyle yaşıyorlar bunu, sen aynı sıkıntıları tek başına göğüslemeyebilirsin, göğüslememeyi seçebilirsin.<sup>54</sup>

Being a few, being minority is very hard. When we look at all the minority groups, if a baby is born as minority, s/he becomes minority with his/her family. But homosexuality is not like that. My family is the most precious thing in my life and

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<sup>51</sup> Birsen

<sup>52</sup> <http://ahmetyildizismyfamily.blogspot.com/2009/01/hello-i-am-put-your-name-here-i-am-from.html>

<sup>53</sup> <http://bianet.org/biamag/toplumsal-cinsiyet/117410-ahmet-yildiz-i-kim-oldurdu-ailesi-kim>

<sup>54</sup> Öykü

there is nothing that they do not know except for this. You are both minority and on your own. This is something very hard. It is obvious that the other minority groups experience very tough stuff. But they experience these with their families. You would not be able to or choose not to resist all the difficulties on your own.

The ones who are not in the movement directly, perceive coming out as transformative act. All of the respondents mention the importance of known as who you are. They think displaying their sexual identity can change other people's mind in the way of breaking the situated perceptions. Being an activist in the movement is not essential to break the norms, one can do that in their personal life praxis.

If homosexuality is hidden, experienced silently and not mentioning the name gay or lesbian, there's no big issue. People, when they find out, perceive that as private life, thus one gain acceptance from the others. But the main problem is embracing homosexuality as an identity. Then the pressure, discrimination and all the violent reactions starts. Being gay or lesbian is referring a specific image that has never been accepted by the society. In other words, there are certain types, roles and images that one supposed to fit in, when you claim that you are not one of them, you immediately face with exclusion and discrimination, because you intervene to the machines of the system. One of the respondent mentions that;

Bi toplum var ve bu toplumun ulus devlet politikaları üzerinden bi hattı var, homojendir yada homojenleştirilmek için çaba harcanır, yekpare bi yapıymış gibi görünür onun tanımladığı alanlar dışında kalanlara yer yoktur. Bu resme uymadığında sana yer yoktur. Gündelik hayatta böyle bi kabulleniş var. farklı yaptırımlarla dışlanır, itilirsin. Doğrudan bi eşcinselliğe yer yoktur. Mahallenin ibnesine, sapkın davranışlara yer vardır, yaşanır, herkes tarafından bilinir ve ana resme dahil edilmez. Coming out, toplumsal hayatın tam da merkezinde, resme dahil olan bi alanında, çalışma hayatı, aile, okul, sosyal çevre gibi, ağın içinden bütüne müdahale etmiş oluyosun. Ben eşcinselim diye ortaya çıktığında bu resmin, bu sahte bütünün parçalandığını da görüyoruz. tam da tersinden, bu sahte bütün senin açılmana karşı bi reaksiyon geliştiriyor.<sup>55</sup>

There is a society and this society's line through nation state politics. It could be homogeneous or endeavored to be homogeneous. It seems like an entire structure and there is no place for the ones who stand outside of its definitions. There is no place for you if you don't fit this picture. There is this espousal in daily life, you are excluded and repressed with different enforcements. There is no place for homosexuality directly; there is a place for fag of the neighbourhood or perverse

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<sup>55</sup> Aykut

behaviors, it is experienced and known by everybody and is not included to the entire picture. Coming out is in the very center of social life, in a space that is inside the picture. You intervene through the very center of this network, in the places like work life, family, social environment. When you appear as saying 'I'm gay', we see the fragmentation of this picture, this fake whole. Adversely, this fake whole develops a reaction towards your appearance/coming out.

According to the history, homosexuality existed in pre-modernism period, and as he mentioned above it turned out to be a discrimination element within the nation-state building process. Murat Bardakçı explains in his book "Sexuality in Ottoman's" that how homosexuality was common in Ottoman society.<sup>56</sup> Writers of the period like Enderunlu Fazıl Bey, Emir Keykavus and the narratives like Zenanname or Hubanname explains homosexual relations within men and women in detail. Bardakçı compares Ottoman and Turkish society's perception towards homosexuality and he points out the difference comes from modernization<sup>57</sup>. Not only Ottoman society experience this change, it occurs in the West in similar way. As I explained in Chapter 2, differentiation and otherization of homosexuality starts with modernism. The movement begins and changes after that.

Turkey already has problems with modernization process. 1923 is a breaking point that vanish all the formal elements from Ottoman Empire. As an impact of language change, the information about social life praxis has been forgotten. Besides, nation state, by its very nature has to be homogenous, that means all the diversities should be domesticated. Nowadays, in the age of globalization, these diversities emerge as identity politics, all over the world. In these circumstances, Turkey's conflict between Western modern life style, secularism and Islamic moral values displays itself in LGBT issue as well. (Also we shouldn't underestimate the effect of AKP in upwarding conservatism in last 10 years.) This conflict reflects to the people as

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<sup>56</sup> Bardakçı, Murat; *Osmanlı'da Seks* İnkılap Kitabevi, İstanbul, 2009

<sup>57</sup> According to Bardakçı, the reason of homosexual tendency is the pressure upon women. Women was not able to attend social life, they rather stayed at home and was supposed to looked after the children, seen as only for reproductive activities and that was the foremost reason. He also mentions bisexuality, instead of homosexuality, and lesbianism as well. The most remarkable point in his book is the decrease of homosexuality after modernization process of Ottoman Empire; Tanzimat.

being against everything comes from the Western ideology. In this sense, homosexuality is perceived as a Western value that enforces the society to accept it. Even though it existed in Turkish society's history, it is presented as Western life style. There are many reasons determine that fact; one of them, for me is homosexual/anti-sodomy movement's starting in Western countries. After the movement began, people called themselves gay or lesbian and from Turkish society, they seem like morally corrupted society. Especially Turkish society's moral values shaped by Islamic culture<sup>58</sup> are another important factor on opposing homosexuality. According to a very common interpretation of Quran, homosexuality is sin. It constitutes a very serious threat to the maintenance of the family and indirectly, to the society, to the future generation and mankind.

LGBT movement in Turkey today is proceeding in the frame of adoption of the European Union Law and Human Rights organizations. Within all the facts I mentioned above, both institutions seem Western based. Also the leftist movement in general, which supposed to defend basic lively rights, approaches to the issue from the conservative side. Recent debates on LGBT movement showed that the ideology divides people as conservatives and liberalists. Some main-stream leftist organizations reflected that they perceive LGBT people as corrupted and declared that they do not want to involve any solidarity with the LGBT organizations. Also Minister in charge of Women and Family, Aliye Kavaf, announced homosexuality is a disease and some conservative human rights organizations and other foundations supported her speech.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For further information about homosexuality in Islam history :  
[http://tr.queer.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=82:oetekiler-ecinseller2&catid=9:koe-yazlar&Itemid=30](http://tr.queer.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82:oetekiler-ecinseller2&catid=9:koe-yazlar&Itemid=30)  
<http://www.kaosgl.com/content/turkiye-escinselligi-suc-olmaktan-cikaran-ilk-ulkelerden-biri-mi>

<sup>59</sup> While I was making interviews, that debate on minister's words was lasting and most of the respondents mention that. They consider the discussion as a huge step of the movement, in the way that people started to speak about LGBT movement.

However, LGBT movement moves forward under these circumstances. The development of the movement affects other LGBT individuals in good and bad ways as well. Many organizations founded and the ones who organized are more powerful against the pressure coming from the society. On the other hand, while their noises getting higher, the pressure is getting harsher. And the ones who are outside of this organization circle are facing with the most violent reactions. The way of reducing this clash is keeping connection with the people. As I mention before, the more people get to know each other, and realize their friend, neighbors, sons or aunts can be homosexual, and the more people can be tolerant to LGBT individuals. Thus, coming out has a crucial role in breaking down the invisible social walls.

The respondents from KAOS GL consider visibility as an important element of the struggle. When people appear with gay/lesbian identity and voice the problems of the community, people would realize that there is a huge amount of LGBT individuals. Thus they notice it is not a few pleasure-seeker's amusement request, rather it is basic living rights demand. Coming out and becoming visible provide individuals to display the difficulties that they encounter every day. When people see other's coming out and struggle for their rights, and gain some step, even if just a bit, then they would participate and the movement gets stronger. Besides, the visibility of LGBT activists made them organize under the association; KAOS GL and the association carry the movement to institutional level, for instance meeting with other NGO's or politicians and negotiating the right issues<sup>60</sup>.

The most important obstacle for coming out is lack of the rights that suppose to protect LGBT individuals. Most of the respondents mention that they can loose their jobs if their identity is found out. If one gay or lesbian works as government

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<sup>60</sup> There are a few politicians accepts KAOS GL's meeting demand, the majority refuse their request or ignore.

official, they are possibly fire in case of disclosure because of the law 657<sup>61</sup>. Hence, gay or lesbian individuals who experience violent actions from their partners can not apply to the police and make a claim against this action. They forced to live a secret life. In some cases, the company sacks the individual beneath other reasons like decrease of performance or coming late, but the real reason is always disclosure of individual's sexual identity. On the other side, as one respondent mentioned, this effort for hiding their identity and lifestyle brings much more burden to individual.

Şimdiye kadar saklı yaşayıp da dingin, sosyal huzuru, aşk ve arzu tatmini açısından hayatı dengeli birini tanımadım. Sen bi yerde bi geri adım attığında bu geriye gidişin sonu olmuyo. Hele ki senin geri adım attığını karşıdaki kişi fark ettiğinde o kişinin özel olarak zalim olmasına, ayrımcı olmasına gerek yok. Bu hayatın dengeleri açısından, onunla ilişkilendiğinde sen otomatikman adım adım geriye gitmek durumunda kalıyosun. Örneğin, sen gizlisin, niye gizliyosun, anlaşılırsa ailenle, çalışma hayatında, soyal arenada, sokata sorun yaşıycanı düşünüyosun. Paradoks zaten tam burada, senin gizlediğini anladıklarında zaten bu alanların hepsinde sorun yaşıyosun. Bununla kalmıyosun, can ve mal güvenliğın de tehlikeye giriyor. Normal koşullarda senin bi tokatla yere sereceğın çocuk sana kolu kanadı kırılmış güvercin gibi davranabiliyo. Bi taraftan hayatını korumaya çalışırken aslında başka bi taraftan her seferinde bugün değilse yarın maddi manevi bi zararlar karşılaşağın düşünüyosun. Bu sana çifte bi yük getiriyo, hem ruhsal anlamda bi yük getiriyo, hem de günlük hayatını kurma sürecinde maddi bi yük getiriyo.<sup>62</sup>

Hitherto, I have never known someone who lives a hidden life and who is quiet, calm has socially peaceful life and lives a balanced life in terms of love and desire satisfaction. When you step backwards, this going backwards never lasts. Especially when the other person realizes that you are going backwards, s/he does not necessarily have to be cruel or discriminatory. In terms of balance of the life, when you involve in a relationship with her/him, you automatically have to step backwards. For instance, you are invisible, why you are invisible because when you are known, you think that you would have troubles in your family, in your work life, in social sphere and on the street. The paradox is right here, when they notice that you are hiding, you experience troubles in these spheres anyhow. Moreover, your life and property safety runs a risk. A boy who you can knock down in normal conditions, can treat you like a pigeon with a broken wing. When you try to protect your life on the one hand, on the other hand you think, today or tomorrow you will face with physical and moral injury. That brings a double burden to you, both in mental sense and in material sense while constructing your daily life.

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<sup>61</sup> Government Employee Law that prohibits membership of any association and especially convicts homosexual officials under the name of 'actions conflicting Turkish moral values'.

<sup>62</sup> Aykut

Furthermore, another adversity that gays/lesbians/bisexuals face with in their work place is keeping their performance always better than others. They carry the risk of getting fired all the time thus they make more effort to prove their performance. Besides keeping their life away from the bad effects of being homosexual, they need to compare themselves with the others and try to be better. One respondent stated that issue from own experience.

Şöyle bi gerçek var, eğer senin yaşadığın ilişki toplum tarafından kabulleniliyorsa daha rahatsındır, enerjinin bi kısmını buraya aktarman gerekmez, kapalı tutmak için. O zaman işine aktarırsın. İş hayatında da böyledir daha fazla koşman, daha fazla yorulman, daha başarılı, daha iyi olman, işinde iyi değil, daha iyi insan olman. Bi taraftan kabullenilmesi zor bişey sunarken bi taraftan onu şık bi ambalajın içine koyman gerekebiliyo. benim eşcinselliğim sizin için önemli olmasın çünkü, şirket için söylüyorum mesela, ben size bu kadar fayda getiriyorum. Tek bi insanın getirdiği faydanın biraz üstünde bişey üretmek gerekiyo... eğer performansı iyi gidiyorsa eşcinselliğinden iş ilişkisi kurduğu insanlar bundan rahatsız değil demektir bu. Ama kötü gidiyorsa belki bundan rahatsız olabillerleri düşünerek o noktada daha vazgeçilebilir olabilirim.<sup>63</sup>

There is this fact, if your relationship is accepted by the society you are more at ease, there is no need to transfer a part of your energy to keep it as secret. Then you transfer it to your work. In work life, you need to run more, get more tired, be a more successful and better person. From the one hand you offer something less acceptable, on the other you need to put it in a classy package. My homosexuality is not necessarily important to you because, for the company for instance, I bring these benefits to them. I need to produce more benefit than one person can make. If one's performance is good, the people who are working with her/him are not uncomfortable with her/his homosexuality. But if the performance is worse, I need to think that maybe they can be discomfort of that, than I would be more dispensable.

Visibility and struggle for gaining basic rights has to be carried out together. It is not possible to expect each gay or lesbian to come out. In Turkey's circumstances, people face with many problems even life threat, in case of claiming their identity. But distinguishing the right place and time can change something. One does not have to come out in work place, s/he can affect their friends or family by not hiding who s/he is. If people from different professions with high prestige, like doctors, lawyers, teachers, ministers and so forth come out, homosexuality may be recognized. It may be considered as a system issue rather than a minority

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<sup>63</sup> Birsen

community<sup>64</sup>. The crucial point here is to act together. By coming out, one can not fight against the pressure from the society by oneself, the more people come out, the more movement getting stronger.

Eğer biz görünür olmaya vurgu yapmazsak ve insanlar görünür olmaya başlamazsa, hak alamayız, bu bi gerçek. Sadece birkaç kişinin görünür olması, dergide çalışan olması, bu işle uğraşması, bi bütün olarak düşündüğümüzde karşımızda bi sistem var. Bunun birçok halkası var. Baktığın zaman, herkes biyerlerde bi şekilde görünür olmaya başlasın ki kırılabilin. İktidarın sonu yok. Aile var, toplum var, çevre var, böyle düşündüğün zaman, kimi eğitim alanında çalışıyo, kimi sanat alanında çalışıyo, herkes bi yerlerde görünür olmaya başlamalı ki, hem homofobiyi kırma adına, hem o heteroseksist erkek anlayışını kırma adına hem de çok basit, anayasal hakları alma adına. Tüm bunları yapabilmemiz için görünür olmak şart. Görünür olmadan, sen bunları dile getirmeden, ben buradayım demeden, sonuç olarak kimse bu hakları da vermez, kimse homofobisinden de vazgeçmez.<sup>65</sup>

If we do not emphasize being visible and people do not become visible, we cannot get our rights, this is the fact. Just a few people are visible, are employees in the magazine, dealing with this issue; when we think about it, there is a system against us. It has many circles. It could only be breakable when everybody becomes visible in somewhere and somehow. Power has no limit. There is family, society, environment, some are working on education, and some are in art. Everybody has to begin to be visible for both breaking the heterosexist patriarchy and very simply, gaining the constitutional rights. For managing all these, we have to be visible. Unless you are visible, without voicing these issues and saying that I am here, nobody gives you these rights, and nobody quits their homophobia.

### **5.3. The Effect of Coming Out**

In coming out this process, individual influenced from the people whom s/he comes out or the others effect from the individual. This interaction is diverse; it is experienced in the family, within the friends or social/public life in different ways. Surely, the most important impact made by the family because of the complexity of the relationship. One can change friends, job, partner, even social life but can not change parents or relatives. At worst, one can choose remove the family from her/his life but it may probably cause a life-long trauma. I will try to analyze this

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<sup>64</sup> Hoping people to realize homosexuality is not different from heterosexuality is a naive dream that impossible to reach.

<sup>65</sup> Sedat

interaction through my interviews and explain it in three parts, family, friendship and social life.

### **5.3.1. How Family Effect the Coming Out Process and How Coming Out Process Affects the Family?**

Most of the respondents are visible to their family. Many of them mentioned their conversations with their mother but a few mentioned the father. After they discover their identity, some thought it is wrong and try to fight with it. They tell to their families and first reaction is taking them to psychologist. But the way of telling is important. If individual thinks this is wrong, s/he reflects it and the family tries to help. If individual develops a conscious on the issue, in some cases this comes by the involvement with the movement, then stand for own existence and defend oneself. The ones who are known by their family weather gain that consciousness by interaction with the movement or not, can stand against their family's approach. In each case, family's approach was shaped by individual's way of coming out.

Kendisiyle barışık olmayan bi insanın gidip de eşcinselliğini anlatması şöyle oluyo: anne, ben sana bişey söyleyicem, ben eşcinselim. Böyle söylersen annen seni psikologa götürür. Tamam kızım, tamam oğlum der, ben iyileştiricem seni der, sen dimdik ayakta duramadan gidersen böyle şeyler yaşarsın<sup>66</sup>

A person who is not comfortable with her/his identity tells her/his homosexuality in this way: mum, I need to tell you something, I am gay/lesbian (homosexual). If you say like this, your mother will take you to the psychologist. Says ok, I will cure you. When you go and say it without standing straight up you will experience these.

At the time that I made interviews, most of the respondent's relation with their family is fragile. One's coming out or family's finding out that they are gay or lesbian, damages the normal parents-children relationship, and produces more pressure upon individual. Thus they choose to limit the relationship. The others who did not come out to their parents think that they can not have an intimate relationship with them without telling it. Their communication is limited as talking about school or work, nothing personal. This also damages the relationship too. All

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<sup>66</sup> Olcay

of them stated that for having an intimate connection with anybody, they need to appear as a whole; with their sexual identity.

LGBT movement has 15 years history in Turkey. When we consider the previous generation, they have no or very few information about homosexuality, not even a bit on the movement. They faced with the issue suddenly when their sons/daughters appeared as gay or lesbian. Thus their reaction could be worse than their children's expectation. However, encountering that fact change them, depend on the effort of the children. Some respondent mentions their parent's change after their coming out. All the parents that be acquainted with their children are gay/lesbian began to interested in the movement. They started to read KAOS GL magazine, follow the news on LGBT issues, thus they develop awareness, their approach and perception changed. This change comes with the help of their children, after coming out, they bring leaflets<sup>67</sup>, magazines to their parents to read.

Besides, some parents or relatives who have been in a relationship with a gay/lesbian somehow in their lives are more tolerant. Because getting know and noticing that person is no different then themselves makes them understand the boundaries are in our minds. Popular culture apparatus create an image on homosexuality and people believe what they see without getting to know them. When they crate a connection, get into their lives, they realize the feelings are the same, only bodies are different. Maybe it is really hard to change one's own parents or relatives within their stable lives and thoughts. But it causes others around them to change as well.

...en azından açılmış olduğum arkadaşlarımın gözünde bir örnek olmuş olucam ve hayatları boyunca, şunu değiştirdiğime inanıyorum, o insanlar bugün ilerde çocukları kalkıp da karşısına geldiği zaman geçmişte bi arkadaşları olduğunu bilecekler. Benim annemin bana verdiği tepkiyle onların çocuklarına verdiği tepkinin aynı olmayacağına eminim. Çünkü benim annemin hiçbir tecrübesi yok, hiçbirşey bilmiyo, televizyondaki tiplerden ibaret sanıyo. Ben arkadaş çevremde, bazı önyargıları en azından bir tecrübeyle bile olsa kırılabileceğini düşünüyorum.

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<sup>67</sup> Kaos GL's leaflet on coming out to the parents

Bi nebze olsun tepkilerini algılarını deęiřtirmeyi umuyorum. Ve olduęuna da inanıyorum aslında.<sup>68</sup>

...at least I will be an example on my friends whom I came out and all of their lives, I believe that I've changed that, when their children come to them, these people will know that they used to have a (gay) friend. I am sure that their reaction to their kids won't be the same with my mother's reaction. Because my mother does not have any experience, knows nothing but the characters on the TV. I think I can break the prejudices in my friends even with one experience. I hope I change their reactions and perceptions a little bit. And I believe I've managed.

### 5.3.2. How Friendship Relations Effect by Coming Out Experience?

At very early stage of one's discovering her/his sexual orientation, s/he needs to tell to someone. One can not figure out what is going on, is it something wrong and coming out process starts here. The reactions are not always positive, but the remarkable point is, all the respondents expressed this idea: 'if somebody is my friend, s/he supposed to accept me as who I am; and this is a part of my existence, my identity.' Some of the respondents mentioned they trigger to change of perception. Mostly one's coming out breaks the situated judgements.

Lezbiyenleri sadece futbol oynayan kızlar olarak görüyorsa düşünceleri baya deęiřti. Bilmedikleri bi dünyaya benim gözümünden baktılar. O yüzden kafalardaki şeyler kırıldı. Alsında daha renkli, deęiřik bi dünya olduęunu gördüler, sandıkları gibi itici olmadıęını gördüler. Zaten öyle düşünüyolardı ama o çok maskülen yada çok çirkin kadınların lezbiyen olması gibi şeyleri deęiřti.<sup>69</sup>

If they see lesbians as only girls playing football, their ideas have quite changed. They looked into a world that they don't know, from my eyes. So their prejudices are broken. Actually they realized a more colorful, different world, it is not as repulsive that they assumed. They already think in this way but their prejudices such as masculine or ugly women are lesbians have changed.

On the other hand, some individuals stated that their friends requested not to talk about their relationship; 'we accept you in this way but keep your private life out of sight'. This is another side of discrimination and called 'transformed

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<sup>68</sup> Sait

<sup>69</sup> Beste

homophobia'<sup>70</sup>. While individuals are not able to talk about their personal, emotional life, they see no reason for maintaining their friendship. Moreover, the negative reactions from their friends make LGBT individuals live in bounded space. After they come out, their -heterosexual- friends' approach changes and turns into invisible discrimination. Thus they prefer to spend more time with friends from LGBT community. That causes ghettoisation.

Coming out also provides one to reach other LGBT individuals then s/he leaves the idea of being alone. When they realize that others express themselves easily, share their emotions or relationships, the process become normal for them. In fact they notice they do not need to claim their identity to others. Instead of saying 'I'm gay/lesbian' they rather avoid to hide. The idea is, 'that is not a necessity for heterosexuals to tell their sexual orientation, why we need that?' In some situations claiming sexual identity is only for not being considered as heterosexual. Because there is a common opinion that everybody is heterosexual and to break that idea is only possible by saying that I'm gay/lesbian.

### **5.3.3. The Effect of Visibility in Public Sphere; Workplace, Social Life and Street<sup>71</sup>**

Some of the respondents argued that being visible in every spheres of life makes individual stronger against the pressure. Surely they face with many problems in Turkey's circumstances; there is no legitimate arena that protects one from the violent actions. However, one faces much more problems in case of hiding. For improving LGBT rights in legal level, example cases should exist. For instance, if one gay take a discrimination event to the court and win, this could be the example case for further applications on similar issues. But that would be a long process that

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<sup>70</sup> This term started to used in METU, among LGBT activists.

<sup>71</sup> One of the questions was asking the effects of being visible on the street, holding hands, hugging...etc.

damages one's all life praxis thus individuals tend to not to take that risk. The danger of losing job, not to be able to find another because of being marked, and also threat of death are the reasons for keeping themselves away from this struggle. I think this is the question of not considering themselves strong enough to fight, and we can not expect them to be.

Yasal haklarımızın olmaması LGBT aktivizminin en zor kısmı. İnsanların apolitik olmalarının, bu konudaki, temel nedeni bu. Ben bile belli noktalarda kimliğimi tam olarak ifade edemeyeceğim yerler var diyorum, devlet memurluğundan bahsettim. Çünkü bütün hayatını bir kenara atamıyorsun açılmak adına yada bu mücadele adına. Hayatını idame ettirebileceğin şeylerin yine sana kalması gerekiyo ve orda o klozette kalması gerekiyo işte bir takım şeylerin. Haliyle, belki kaybedebilecek çok fazla şeyi olmayan insanlar için açılmak çok daha kolay.<sup>72</sup>

The hardest part of LGBT movement is lack of constitutional rights. This is the main reason why people are apolitical. Even I say that there are some places that I cannot express my identity, state employment for example. Because you cannot leave your whole life aside, in order to come out or for this struggle. The things that you need for continuation has to remain with you, so something need to be kept in the closet. Thus, maybe it is easy to come out for the people who don't have many things to lose.

Others who are visible in the workplace, expressed that they do not hesitate being known by colleagues but they are cautious about that constitutes a risk. If a higher situated person or a colleague finds out, s/he might use it against the individual. Also, if one designates her/his own working conditions (for example a lawyer who has a law office) the risk of encountering with a problem decreases.

Social life, namely street is the most dangerous area that one could face with the violent attacks. Through the example of holding hands, most of them express that is a high risk. They all accept it is necessary for the normalization process, to walk holding hands like heterosexual couples but they also mentioned that the threat comes from anywhere in anytime. For lesbians the threat is seen as an object of fantasy, because of the pornography. For gays, it is a reason of violence at first, because of masculinity. Besides, there is always a risk of to be seen by a family

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<sup>72</sup> Oktay

member or relative and sometimes it could be worse than the reactions from the outside.

Küfrederlerse duymazdan geliriz, önemli değil, canımız sıkılır ama. Esas bizi sıkın taraf şu, tanıdık birileri tarafından görülmek, benim artık böyle bi derdim yok ama sevgilimin var. Ondan dolayı da ankarada mekan içerisinde biz böyle bişey yapamıyoruz, çünkü birileri görebilir. Sevgilimin çizdiği bi profil yerine başka bi profille karşılaşmaları hoş olmaz. Mesela kendi memleketinde, bütün arkadaşlarının takıldığı bir caddede, elele gezemeyiz. Çünkü arkadaşlarının görme ihtimali çok yüksek.<sup>73</sup>

If they swear, we ignore, it doesn't matter, but we get annoyed a little bit. The main thing that annoys us is to be seen by someone familiar. I don't have this problem at all but my partner has. Hence we cannot do these stuff in Ankara because somebody might see us. It wouldn't be pleasant if my partner's family come across with a profile different from the profile that she draws. For instance we cannot walk hand in hand in her own town, on a street where all of her friends hang around. Because the possibility of her friends' seeing us is very high.

#### **5.4. Meaning of Coming Out**

For all the respondents, coming out means existence, being oneself, not to hide who you are or your identity, define oneself, relieve. Living by hiding a part of your identity is not a proper way of living, one can never achieve oneself in this way. The main difference between respondents is considering their sexual orientation as their identity or a part of their identity. Especially the ones who are connected with the movement stated that this is their identity and all the presence is politically constructed around it. Others mentioned, they do not want to known only with their sexual identity but this is an essential feature that they can not ignore.

Constructing consciousness and claiming oneself as a political actor is a process that shaped by meeting with the movement. KAOS GL has a crucial factor. Besides people working there, it has an effect on the ones who do not connect to the movement directly. They are aware of somebody working for protect LGBT individual's lives, that provides a secure area. Even if they are not able to involve

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<sup>73</sup> Öznur

because of daily life concerns or lack of time, they support the struggle. The ones who are not participate in the movement; also experience the struggle in their lives. Coming out experience made all the participants a political actor in different ways. For the second group, being a political actor comes with the transformation of the people around them. KAOS GL employees and others outside of the organization circle both think coming out is an act which can trigger a transformation in the society. They all aware of their presence and their identity as gay or lesbian can destroy the structured norms in people's minds. People start to realize that homosexuality is not a feature of a typical group, who are immoral, corrupted and fun loving. Or it is not a disease emerging due to instabilities within the family; divorce, lack of one parent, incest, rape and so on. It is an orientation like heterosexuality and people can only understand this fact when they get to know LGBT individuals. Coming out can break the constructed norms that reason LGBT individuals incur discrimination and violence.

The expression 'coming out of the closet' associates a different dimension according to a respondent. As I explained in introduction chapter, the expression is used for emphasizing the pressure from the society and has a reversing factor. Which means, do not accept heterosexist society's stigmatizing you and claim that this is your identity. One respondent stated that the expression should be used for the people who maintain their lives in hypocrisy. They pretend like heterosexual in their social life, but they find partner via internet or gay clubs, only for having sex. He thinks the term coming out of the closet is appropriate for them, because their life is like in the closet.

Biraz daha olgunlaşmış, yaşını başını almış eşcinseller için olsa gerek. Belli bir işte çalışan, toplumda saygın bi yeri olan insanlar için olduğunu düşünmüşümdür hep. Biraz daha sanatçı camiadan, mühendislerden doktorlardan, durumları iyi, evleri arabaları güzel olan, insnaların parasından dolayı saygı duyduğu insnalar, bu insnalar o hayatı genç oğlanlar yaşlı adamlar şeklinde onları evlerine getirip seks yaparak yaşıyorlar.bi ilişki yaşamaları durumunda da bunu gayet gizli yaşıyolar, hiçkimseye söylemeden, sevgilisini tanıtmadan, 2 arkadaşmış gibi dışarıya lanse etmeleri bana klozetin içindeymiş gibi geliyor. Ben hiçbi zaman kendimi klozetin içindeymiş gibi lanse etmedim, ne hiçbi zaman kendimi yadırgadım bu konuda, ne de farklı cinsel kimlikleri duyduğumda, sadece eşcinsellik değil, farklı fetişlerle

ilgili şeyler duyduğumda, onlar da bi tür klozetin içinde olma durumu. Bunu çok da sorgulamıyosan, yadırgamıyosan, ben niye bunu yaşıyorum niye benim başıma geldi demiyosan zaten klozetin içinde değılsindir Klozetten çıkma durumu burda insanların öğrenmesi gibi bişeymi değılmi tam bilmiyorum. Bana ifade ettiğı, temel olarak toplumda saygın olan insnaların eşcenselliklerini açıklamaları ve halkın bununla artık yüzleşmeye başlaması gerektiğı. eşcinselliğın bunlara engel olmayacağı, bi hastalık olmadığını daha iyi gösterecek bişeydir gibi geliyo bana.<sup>74</sup>

It must be for matured, elderly homosexuals. I've always thought this for people who are working in a specific job, have a respectable place in the society. From artist community, engineers, doctors, have good conditions, have beautiful houses and cars, the people who esteem them due to their wealth. These people live this life in a way that young boys and old men, take them to their home and have sex. In case of having a relationship, they hide it, without saying to anyone, without introducing and pretending like they are only friends, this comes to me as in the closet. I have never introduced myself as in the closet. Not I found myself odd or when I hear different sexual identities, it is not only homosexuality but also different fetishes are a kind of being in the closet. You are not in the closet if you don't question it, don't find it odd, don't say that why am I experiencing this or why did it happen to me. I am not sure that coming out of the closet here is something that people need to know or not. It means to me, basically, the ones who have a good position in life expressing their homosexuality and people need to start facing with that. Homosexuality cannot prevent that and it seems to me this is something that can show better that it is not a disease.

### **5.5. Gender Differentiation among Gays and Lesbians through Coming Out Experiences**

Gays and lesbians are subjected to different ways of exclusion and discrimination in the society, because of their sex and orientation both. For lesbians, invisibility and being perceived as an object of sexual fantasy (thanks to pornography) are the main issues. On the other hand, because of their visibility compare with women, gays seem to face more physical violence in daily life. However, we should not fall into the mistake that considering life is easier for lesbians; on the contrary, invisibility is the most important kind of violence, according to them.

Yani mesela ben en büyük şiddetin yok sayılmak olduğunu düşünüyorum. Çok ciddi bir psikolojik şiddet bence, yok sayılıcağıma, en kötü şiddeti görüyim daha iyi. Mücadele edebilirim çünkü onla, ama yok sayılırsam ortada mücadele edebilecek bişey olmaz.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Erol

<sup>75</sup> Olcay

Well, for instance I think the worst violence is ignoring. This is a serious psychological violence, its better to face with the worst violence instead of being ignored. I can struggle with that, but if I am ignored, there is nothing left for struggling.

Espousal process for lesbians is experienced easier than gays. Trauma occurs because of the social pressure upon homosexuals in general but gays subjected more as a result of stereotypes. Lesbians, in contrast, face with the problems resulted from being a woman. Being a woman is considered as a natural disadvantage and lesbians suffer from that first. Secondly, they suffer from the invisibility of lesbian identity. Gays known as men act like women, thus they exposed to the similar subordination with women. Being a lesbian, in general, is seen as women behave like men and considered as a better attitude compare with men behave like women. The reason behind that lies in gender roles that are shaped by masculinity. Because of the masculinity, sexual relationship between men is perceived as insulting. Lesbianism on the contrary, seems harmless. These common ideas constructed through sexual usage of the body (hymen, related to the honor issue and anal sex related to religious beliefs and morality). One statement that a respondent said is striking: "...instead of being a prostitute, its better to be a lesbian"<sup>76</sup> said one lesbian's father.

Living conditions produces also a difference between gays and lesbians. Regarding situation in the family, bring a friend for overnight is more possible for girls than boys. Families consider a relationship between girls as friendship and tend to accept it. Receiving a boy as overnight is not a common behavior for boys thus it stands out. It is mostly related to homophobia, namely the fear of their son's being gay. Accordingly, the coming out process proceeds through that. The fear of being gay causes them experience that period under feeling guilty. While they are coming out to their family, they think there is something wrong with them and reflect that to their families, and the conflict emerges.

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<sup>76</sup> Olcay (Orospu olacağma lezbiyen olsun)

Within the coming out process, the most important discomfort for the lesbians is considered as object of the sexual fantasy. Most of them mentioned that issue. The common idea of lesbians is taught from pornography, the woman have sexual relation with other woman but always need a man eventually. Thus they encounter with the reaction of 'bring your girlfriend and let's make sex together' from the men whom they say they are lesbian. From the political point of view, they stated that it is necessary to show that they are not an aperitif of men's sexual fantasy.

Şu anki durum özellikle görünürlüğü çok büyük önemi var. Lezbiyen olarak bütün dünyada pornografi nesnesisin. Bunu kaldırmak istiyoruz. Politik kimliğimizle birlikte eşcinsel biseksüel kimliğimizle var olmaya çalışıyoruz.<sup>77</sup>

In the situation right now, visibility is highly important. As a lesbian, you are an object of pornography over the world. We want to remove this. We try to exist with our political identity, with our homosexual, bisexual identity.

Lesbian means woman who likes/loves other women so men have nothing to do with that. Also they come up with the constructed categories of homosexuality. Such as; not being able to find a boyfriend, ugliness, being grew up like boy by family... so on. Also being feminist is considered as equal to being lesbian through misandrism. All these prejudices are constructed by the dominant idea on homosexuality and reproduced through stereotypes.

Furthermore, lesbians in general stated that they can express themselves in women movements and feminist movement better than LGBT movement. Like all social area, men's domination exists in LGBT movement as well, they indicated.<sup>78</sup> In spite of most of the KAOS GL employees whom I interviewed is woman, some of the other group stated that they prefer to take part in a movement that utters the problems of lesbians.

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<sup>77</sup> Selma

<sup>78</sup> Because of that problem, Kaos GL decided to change the board of directors recently and assigned a board that has women majority.

The most important gender difference seems as perception of being homosexual. Women tend to take this as natural more than men at the beginning. Most of them expressed that there is no need to mention it, they just behave natural. When I asked the meaning of coming out, they stated that there is no point to especially indicating. They don't make any effort for hiding; prefer to tell when it is asked. Usually people do not ask this and there is a common opinion that asking one's sexual orientation means wish for having sex with her/him. "Birin cin sel yönelimini soruyosan birlikte olmak istiyosundur"<sup>79</sup> Lesbians choose live it naturally but prefer hiding from only the people who seem homophobic. On the other hand, most of the gays I interviewed mentioned that they felt guilty and try to change it at first. However, this difference might not be regarded as a gender difference<sup>80</sup>. A few gay said they accept their sexual identity at the time they discover it and a few lesbian said they had some troubles on being lesbian.

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<sup>79</sup> Selma

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 4, limitations and lessons learned.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The essence of this thesis is *'the personal is political'*. The issues assumed to be personal, like sexuality, family relations and other things we hesitate of getting known by outsiders, are the issues that social structures enforce us to keep invisible. For example, it's better not to mention or not to tell the others if there is domestic violence in family, because of the bad reputation. Feminist approach reverses this general opinion and claims that accepting this opinion reproduces power relations that oppress the others who have not access to this power. The issues which are claimed as personal are indirectly related to the social structure that reproduces man's hegemony upon woman. Dallas Cullen explains how she and her students understood the phrase in her essay on 'The Personal is Political':

The personal is political to me means 'the problems I face as a woman are due to patriarchy, not my personal inadequacies', implying women as a group need to work collectively to change the patriarchy, for my students, the personal is political means 'I self-define as a feminist; feminism is a political stance; therefore, any and all of my actions have political import and significance.'<sup>81</sup>

After I met with feminism, the idea of being an actor in every area of life developed on my mind. One's revealing with her/his identity is stand against all the oppressive structures in social life. In this thesis, I have tried not to consider LGBT community as a minority group that struggling for reaching basic rights. Rather, I have tried to display all the hostile approaches towards homosexuality emerge due to the system's binary structure. Queer Theory explains how marginalized categories are constructed by this binary opposition discourse and are reproduced through state's apparatuses. Thus the question is not being gay/lesbian; the question is rather labels that squeeze one into this gender role structure.

The first step of deconstructing those roles is claiming identity. When one says that 'I'm gay/lesbian', it starts a rupture in the structure. Because of expressing

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<sup>81</sup> Cullen, Dallas *The Personal is Political: Third Wave Feminism and the Study of Gendered Organizations* CMS Conference, 2001

her/himself in the center of the sphere that carries her/him exclusion. Claiming sexual identity brings many difficulties in her/his life but trying to hide only brings more oppression, not only individually, but also for the other members of the group. One's reveal with her/his sexual identity also provides strength to the other hidden members of the group. Thus, this is a political act that might change one and the others around.

As we look at the situation of LGBT community in Western countries, we can see that they gained basic rights and most of them maintain their lives in this heterosexist system. They also adopt gender roles to their same-sex relationships. The movement which emerges from marginalized identities is domesticated by the system itself and standing against this structure is removed. At this point, Queer Theory tells us this is not the issue of gaining basic rights (like partnership, marriage and so on) and live 'normalized' lives. The gender roles that make us part of the system should be criticized and moreover, should be demolished, according to Queer Theory.

On the other hand, we can not consider the issue in the same way in Turkey. LGBT movement in Turkey has different concerns; because we still do not have the law protects LGBT members from discrimination, violence, and murder. Even though I and many people from the movement believe the necessity of breaking down the gendered structure, the movement here is carried out for gaining the rights first. But we, as political actors, always have the opportunity of changing our environment through questioning the gender roles, moral values and settled prejudices.

In this thesis, I tried to make distinction between individualistic political act and activism. Being activist in the movement, means one need to deal with the institutions as much as the people. Carrying out the struggle to the institutional level provides legitimacy to the movement. Hence, LGBT organizations perform the struggle with NGO's, ministries, and state institutions. Activists who are not

connected to the organizations (in this case KAOS GL), try to lead the movement through network by solidarity, or on the street. The others, who do not define themselves as activist, consider themselves as an effect of change. They are aware of their visibility which can open other people's perceptions and break their prejudices. Nevertheless, either call themselves activist or not, they all see themselves as agents that can influence other's life.

*Coming out*, in this sense, stands in the base of political act. I did not consider coming out as a psychology term that analyses one's individualistic experiences that come after a trauma in her/his life. Accordingly, my analysis of coming out is not depending on just LGB individuals' coming out experiences.<sup>82</sup> Rather I tried to take it as social fact that might cause change in social structure. Thus, I address the issue from the perspective of LGB individuals', hence, how they perceive themselves as agents in their lives. Coming out, at first place, is an action that provides a relief to the people but over time it turns out to be consciousness act. I focused on this consciousness as a stand against patriarchal, heterosexist system. One's claiming sexual identity reverses gender forms that impose heterosexual relationship. Also it affects the other people as changing their perception to homosexuality.

Considering the phrase '*the personal is political*' through coming out experiences, claiming the identity itself is a political act. I had the categorization among LGB individuals according to their perception of political act. There are three main groups of LGB individuals. The first group composes from the individuals, who relate their identity with social fact and transform the struggle into a way of life. They are in the center of the struggle as working in LGBT organizations or dealing with LGBT related issues. The second group is the ones, who are not in the struggle directly but join some part of it. They do not call themselves activist but aware of the system's oppression upon themselves and have a viewpoint to change this. The

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<sup>82</sup> De Welde, K. Hubbard, E. "I'm Glad I'm not Gay!: Heterosexual Students' Emotional Experiences in the Collage Classroom with a 'Coming Out' Assignment"

third group's perception of homosexuality is only a personal issue. Although their action is political while they call themselves gay/lesbian, their perception of the world and the system is like ordinary people, without questioning the gender roles and patriarchy. Thus, I made the separation according to individual's perception of the social structure that they are living in and built the questions through searching the critical point of view.<sup>83</sup>

All the respondents, except one, were constructed their own coming out experience from that viewpoint. Through the questions that I asked, they indicated the change that they managed in their environment. One of them said that *'this is my personal life and I don't care about going to the street and screaming about my sexual life'*<sup>84</sup>. She was important for understanding the idea of the ones that I did not include in this study. Her perception is not considering her orientation as an identity and she claimed that *'this is one feature of my character and I don't want to known through only this feature'*.

As I mentioned before, the categorization that I made is not stable. There can be transitions within these different groups. The LGBT community is a sort of closed network and everybody might know each other through friendship connections. Thus, the ones who seem not to be interested in fighting for LGBT rights can participate in some events somehow and then start to consider themselves as political actors. It is rather a process that only the individual can decide to participate or not. It is question of how one constructs her/his identity within the social life.

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<sup>83</sup> I did not choose the respondents according to their thoughts; I did not know their ideas before interviewing. The ones that I found from the social network were all having this perception by chance. But in my opinion, the other LGBT people who are not interested in political issues are out of this social circle that I can reach. Because, I made the connections starting from KAOS GL, which stands in the center of political action.

<sup>84</sup> İlknur

The coming out process is different for all the respondents. Some of them realize that their standpoints are against all norms, homosexuality is only a part of it. Maybe they realize it through their homosexuality, by questioning the constructed norms through their presence. The experiences and thoughts change from person to person or within person's life in time. I tried to explain the coming out process through how people construct it in their socialization. For both the ones who accept their difference from the beginning and the ones construct their identity after having problems by experiencing bad reaction from their environment, their own presence is a standing against the system. Not all of them said that in this way but they think their coming out is an effect for a change. Construction of homosexuality as an element of exclusion is a problem regarding the system itself.

A person's coming out to the family and change their prejudices is related to what extent person's consider her/himself as political actor. Similarly, coming out to the friends has an effect upon those friends and also the individual her/himself. When I asked 'how coming out effects society' they all indicated that claiming identity is crucial. Living a hidden life brings much more burden to one's own life and in this kind of life one cannot wholly exist. Also coming out is one of the most important points of social transformation on LGBT issue.

Family is the most important institution where social norms and categories are reconstructed and reproduced. For all the respondents, coming out to the family is a harsh process. Most of the family react their kid's coming out by trying to change them (by make pressure upon them or taking them to psychologist). Even some of the LGBT members managed to change their family's approach; this is a traumatic stage for everybody. Another crucial point that participants mentioned is being minority without the support of the family. When we consider all ethnic minority groups, they experience exclusion and discrimination with their families. LGBT individuals, because of this problematic relationship with their families, experience all the bad effects of being minority alone. That makes LGBT individuals build

intimate relations mostly within the community. Most of them are closer to each other than their families. On the other hand, taking the support of the family makes individual stronger and gives a huge strength in life. Even more, when one is protected by her/his family, s/he gains the strength of struggling for the rights. Besides, when individual cannot oppose the pressure coming from the family, and obliged to get married, s/he has to hide her/his desires and sexual identity. That leads individuals to unsatisfied life.

Turkey's social structure has many limitations for LGBT community. LGBT individuals never feel totally safe and cannot express themselves. People cannot come out to their families and in their workplace because of the threat that they face with in any spheres of life. The violence might come from the family (there are people who are murdered by their families) or from the work by getting sacked. Also LGBT individuals face with different kinds of violence in their daily lives, on the street. Lack of the laws in the constitution that could protect LGBT individuals is the reason behind these violation attacks. The only way of changing that is, organizing, getting stronger and voicing the issues that LGBT individuals experience. There is a paradoxical situation here; without coming out, one cannot fight for gaining rights and when they come out, they face with the risks that I mentioned above. But the solution, in my opinion, can be organizing and acting together.

Being homosexual is not a choice but living as a homosexual is. This is a question of whether one wants to live a hidden life by keeping her/his sexual identity as secret or embraces her/his identity and gain self confidence. In hidden life, one can never reach self actualization and never be happy about her/him. This also brings a burden by trying to cover it. The ones who are visible to every spheres of life mentioned that whatever they come across; they need to fight against it because if they don't, the others will encounter with the same issue.

Coming out has an impact upon both organized movement and social structure. Within the movement, LGBT individuals struggle for gaining basic rights which protect them from any kinds of violence; including discrimination, stigmatization, getting unemployed, psychological and physical violence. When they appear and demand the rights for all the LGBT community, the individuals might think they are part of this struggle and feel responsibility of participation. In other words, they see some people defend LGBT rights and these issues are their concern as well, they could also start supporting the movement.<sup>85</sup>

The effect of coming out on social structure is breaking the prejudices. As I explained in Chapter 5, homosexuality is represented through some means in mass media and the people assume that all the LGBT individuals are like these characters. When one claims her/his identity to other person, the other person can think out of these stereotypes and that can break the prejudices on homosexuality.

Sex and sexuality is constructed through gender norms and Queer Theory emerges as a standpoint against this structure and its reproduction. Queer Theory emphasizes on fluidity of the identities and labeling the people under the name of gay, lesbian, bisexual and so on is incarcerating people's sexual and social existence. By examining LGBT individuals and mentioning the identity politics, I use these labels. From that point, my research contradicts with the Queer Theory's perspective. On the other hand, refusing all identities and becoming an actor to destroy the gender structure is the concept that I use in my thesis. I believe, whether participating in the movement or not, the individuals that I interviewed were all made a minor impact on the social structure. By saying that they are gay/lesbian, they somehow break the gender norms in people's minds. Besides, in Turkey's current circumstances, the movement for gaining basic rights is carried out through

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<sup>85</sup> Participating in the movement is not only LGBT people's concern, but also regards the ones who consider gender issue as system issue.

identity. Thus, I tried to combine both the identity issue in LGBT movement and queer perspective in this study.

The frame of this study is determined by coming out experiences. I examined the reactions of the people when they find out that their kids, friends or colleagues are homosexual. In other words, for me the transformation emerges from the point that a person assumes her/his friend is heterosexual and this friend tells s/he is not. For transgender individuals, coming out turns into an image in time and they face with different kinds of problems because of that. Thus, I limited my study with only lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Transgender people's coming out experiences could be an independent subject for another study.

In Chapter 3, I made an analysis of LGBT movement history from the Western literature, comparing with Turkey. As culturally feeding both from East and West, Turkey has elements from both sides. But the access to the Eastern resources is not as easy as Western ones. Firstly, the language of the thesis directed me to the English language resources. Secondly, emergence of LGBT movement in Western countries (because of the Enlightenment and modernism as I discuss in Chapter 2) leaded me directly to that literature. And last, the modernization project of Turkey destroyed all connections with Ottoman Empire and limits our access to the information about Ottoman social life. Through some professional Ottoman researchers, we could only reach the second hand information about homosexuality in Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, there are limited information on LGBT issues, comes from Middle Eastern countries. This information mostly comes through Western resources which analyse the human rights abuses in that area. Thus, this study would have been different if I can reach the Middle Eastern resources. Either another study would be conducted on the information from there, with the comparison to Turkey.

The aim of this thesis is to display how individually actions effect the social environment. As an agent, everybody has this potency to make minor changes. I, as a part of LGBT movement, tried to analyse it through LGBT individuals. According to the phrase ‘the personal is political’, all LGBT individuals are political actors when they claim their identity. First, I tried to examine their perception of being a political actor. Second, I analysed the effects of their coming out experiences upon themselves and upon their environment. And at last, I tried to introduce how coming out process of individual effects her/his relation to the LGBT movement. In all these stages, coming out is the key element. I consider the coming out experience as individual’s constructing her/his own presence despite to the world.

As conclusion, the coming out process looks like an individual experience but considering it within the LGBT movement’s frame, it is a political action. The experience itself can cause person’s participation to the movement or keeping her/himself away from that. On the other hand, being homosexual itself and embracing it, is raising voice against gender norms. LGBT individuals, who perceive their existence as a stance, can consider themselves as an actor of a transformation. The most important point here is not accepting homosexuality as a minority group and giving their legal rights. On the contrary, it is trying to display how and where this discourse of disease, sin, immorality is constructed. Even though homosexuality seems as a minority issue in this picture of Turkey, anybody can be homosexual. What is more, sexuality is a field that can never be squeezed into the limits of homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality.

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**APPENDICES**  
**Appendix A: Table**

PERSON	SEX	IDENTITY	AGE	EDUCATION	PROFESSION	POLITIC	LIVING	KNOWN BY	COMING OUT FAM	COMING OUT FR	WORK
aykut	male	gay	40	sociology american culture and literature	KAOS GL employee	activist	partner	anybody	naturally	naturally	kaos gl
arda	male	gay	22	business administration agricultural faculty	x		dormitory	friends and family	disclosure	coming out	
beste	female	lesbian	30	industrial engineering	cafe owner		partner	friends and sister	no	naturally	
birsen	female	lesbian	33	specialist			alone	friends/family/colle.	disclosure by being asked coming out / reaction	naturally coming out	volunteer
erol	male	gay	26	faculty of law political sci.+ public adm.	lawyer	activist	housemate	friends and brothers		naturally coming out	volunteer
esin	female	lesbian	35	research asistant			housemate	friends and mother	no coming out / reaction	naturally coming out	academic
gökçen	male	gay	22	unknown american culture and literature	x thespian	activist	dormitory	friends	coming out / reaction	coming out	academic
haydar	male	gay	26	KAOS GL employee	activist		family	friends and mother	disclosure	naturally coming out	kaos gl
hale	female	lesbian	23	philosophy	teacher education consultant	activist	alone	friends and family	coming out	coming out	pembehayat
ilknur	female	lesbian	30	food		activist	partner	anybody	coming out / coming out / political	coming out	volunteer
neslihan	female	bisexual	24	engineering	x KAOS GL employee		partner	friends		naturally	
oktay	male	gay	28	philosophy	employee KAOS GL	activist	partner	friends	disclosure coming out / reaction	naturally coming out	kaos gl
olcay	female	lesbian	31	teaching english language and literature	employee	activist	housemate	friends and sisters		coming out	kaos gl
öykü	female	bisexual	26	research asistant			alone	friends and family	coming out / reaction	coming out	academic
öznur	female	lesbian	24	reconstruction	x KAOS GL	activist	housemate	anybody	coming out	coming out	volunteer
selma	female	lesbian	31	social services	employee	activist	housemate	anybody	coming out	naturally	kaos gl
sait	male	gay	29								
sedat	male	gay	25								
utku	male	gay	33								

## **Appendix B: Questions**

### **Individual Coming out Experience**

As you know, homosexual's espousal of their identity and express it to another person is described as 'coming out'. there are different stages of coming out, coming out to a friend or friends circle, coming out to the family, coming out in workplace or public sphere. I would like to talk about your experiences on these.

1. What 'coming out' does mean to you?
2. The term 'coming out' comes from the phrase 'coming out of the closet' and expresses the things which need to be kept hidden, far away from eyes has to go visible. In LGBT movement, it is used for emphasizing the necessity of claiming sexual identity. What the term coming out means to you?
3. Which areas did you come out that I mentioned above? Can you talk about it?
4. What was the reason of your coming out?/ how did you decide to come out?
5. What reaction did you come across when you first came out?
6. How this experience effected you?
7. After your coming out, did you experience a bad situation, did you feel regret?
8. How coming out effected your life, did it become a landmark in your life?
9. Do you feel different after coming out?
10. How your coming out effected your friends and the ones you love?
11. (If s/he comes out to near people) do you consider coming out in work place? Why?
12. What kinds of benefits and disadvantages of hiding your sexual identity?

### **LGBT Movement and Coming out:**

Taking part in a struggle for gaining basic constitutional rights for LGBT individuals and LGBT identities to be recognized, means being at least partially visible, different from other spheres of struggle.

13. How did you decide to take part in this movement?
14. What does this struggle mean to you?
15. After participating in the movement, what kind of changes you experienced in your social life?
16. What kind of changes occurred on your viewpoint towards the movement?

### **The Connection Between Coming out Experience and the Movement**

17. After you come out, is there any change of your viewpoint towards the movement?
18. How your coming out effected your connection with the movement?
19. Did your connection with the movement affect your coming out experience?
20. In LGBT movement, is there any emphasis on especially the necessity of not hiding the sexual identity? Why?
21. How the visibility of your sexual identity in the movement effect you?
22. How being visible out of the area of the struggle effect the struggle? (not only in political sphere but also in daily life praxis)

### **For the ones who mentioned that they are not a part of the struggle:**

23. Do you consider yourself as a part of the movement? (If s/he joined an event) What was your motivation of participating?
24. Do you have a belief that you can change anything when you come out?
25. How visibility effects the struggle?
26. How do you see/consider current LGBT movement? What it means to you?
27. Does being visible in daily life praxis cause a transformation? How?
28. What can one do for provide a transformation?