

GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION:
THE CASE OF A PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN IN ANKARA

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ABSTRACT

GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: THE CASE OF A PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN IN ANKARA

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This thesis investigates gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education in Turkey. The aim of the thesis is to understand how heteronormativity operates in childcare institutions and how children are socialized into social roles of gender and sexuality in early childhood education. This thesis also seeks to understand how children internalize and resist to/challenge gender and sexuality norms that are being imposed on them. The thesis is based on two and a half months of ethnographic field research conducted in a private kindergarten in Ankara. The data analyzed in the thesis is based on observations, interviews with early childhood educators, surveys completed by the parents of the children, and text analysis of the official curriculum used in the kindergarten.

The thesis shows that heteronormative gender and sexuality are predominant in the kindergarten and that children are not given access to alternative gender and sexuality social roles. Therefore, although children have agency to resist to/challenge gender and sexuality norms, heteronormative gender and sexuality is largely reproduced in early childhood education.

Key words: gender, sexuality, heteronormativity, identity construction, and early childhood education.

ÖZ

OKUL ÖNCESİ EĞİTİMDE CİNSİYET VE CİNSEL KİMLİK İNŞASI: ANKARA'DA BİR ÖZEL KREŞ ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu tez Türkiye'de okul öncesi eğitimde toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşasını araştırmaktadır. Tezin amacı heteronormativitenin çocuk bakım kurumlarında nasıl işlediğini ve okul öncesi eğitimde çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik rollerine nasıl sosyalleştiklerini anlamaktır. Bu tez ayrıca çocukların kendilerine empoze edilen normatif toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine nasıl direndikleri ve/veya karşı koyduklarını anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Bu tez Ankara'da özel bir kreşte iki buçuk ay süren etnografik saha araştırmasına dayanmaktadır. Tez kapsamında incelenen veriler gözlemler, okul öncesi öğretmenleriyle gerçekleştirilen görüşmeler, kreşteki çocukların aileleri tarafından doldurulan anketler, ve kreşte kullanılan resmi müfredatın metin incelemesinden elde edilmiştir.

Bu tez heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinselliğin kreşte hakim olduğunu ve çocukların alternatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine erişimlerinin olmadığını göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, her ne kadar çocuklar cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine direnebiliyor ve/veya karşı koyabiliyor olsalar da, okul öncesi eğitimde heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik büyük ölçüde yeniden üretilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: toplumsal cinsiyet, cinsellik, heteronormativite, kimlik inşası, ve okul öncesi eğitim.

To all children who have suffered, will suffer from, and fight against
heteronormativity...

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CHAPTER I

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problems

The society we live in, Turkey is gendered and heterosexist. Those who claim non-heterosexual identities are called LGBTI individuals and those who do not obey normative gender roles and sexuality are either marginalized or labeled as abnormal due to the normative gender and sexuality understandings in society. In this sense, Butler (1988, p. 5) states that *'those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished'*. Heteronormativity poses heterosexuality as the legitimate, normal, and unique form of sexuality (Ingraham, 1994); therefore heterosexuality has been seen as what is normal and what people should practice (Jackson & Scott, 2012; Jackson, 2006). Although normative boundaries of institutionalized heteronormativity have been dislocated through certain woman and gay right acquisitions, institutionalized heterosexuality continues to be regarded normal and normative form of sexuality in many contemporary societies (Jackson & Scott, 2012, p. 145). Constant reinforcement of compulsory heterosexuality through gender socialization is among the most important moments of heteronormativity and therefore marginalization of LGBTI individuals in society.

This study, which is based on an empirical research lasting for two months in a private kindergarten in a middle class environment of Ankara, Turkey, investigates the gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education. I mainly seek to understand how heteronormative gender and sexuality understandings operate and how children are socialized with heteronormative gender and sexuality norms while also discussing how they negotiate with these norms in early childhood education institutions

in Turkey. Early childhood is a crucial period for the formation of children's gender and sexual identities; and although socialization in terms of gender and sexuality starts at very early ages, even before birth, I believe this research is able to explain children's socialization into heterosexist norms in childcare institutions in Turkey.

Society's being heterosexist is a kind of cycle because both institutions and individuals somehow reproduce heterosexist practices and understanding in society. In this regard, Asan (2010, p. 4) argues that gendered norms given to children are maintained in the culture of that society for long years. Thus, this is highly related to how individuals – males and females– are socialized into gendered roles. People are born into a world which has already been organized in gendered and heterosexist ways. When the sex of a fetus is learned, the environment into which it will be born is decorated according to its sex: everything starts to be either pink or blue. The baby will be raised either as a girl or as a boy based on its sex. Therefore, the seeds of heterosexism and dichotomy between males and females are planted in early childhood. Male and female individuals are expected, encouraged, and forced to learn heteronormative gender roles. Although gender socialization starts in the family (Witt, 1997; Bigler, Hayes, & Hamilton, 2013; Patricia, Kless, & Adler, 1992), researches conducted in this area show that schooling has a significant role in the construction of gender and sexual identity (Blaise, 2005; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson & Davies, 2008).

Schools are sites where children are socialized in a gendered world because education institutions impose not only gendered roles but also *compulsory heterosexuality* by ignoring the existence of non-heterosexuality. Besides, it is argued that through schooling children learn what it means to be a boy and a girl in a normative way as they are given gender specific roles. Besides, through schooling, children learn sexual division of labor (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), which they are expected to perform throughout their lives.

Although there may not be a direct education for gender and sexuality in the kindergarten, this research shows that hidden and indirect messages for gender and sexuality are given in almost all areas. These messages impose heteronormative gender and sexuality realities on children. However, I do not claim that children immediately internalize these imposed norms, on the contrary, children may and do resist/challenge these norms. In this sense, peer socialization in the school setting is crucial in order to understand how children resist/challenge imposed gender and sexuality norms.

Nevertheless, early childhood education and school settings are crucial in constituting gender and sexual identities of children, for which the fact that children spend large amount of time in kindergarten is one of the reasons. Although children have agency to resist/challenge gender and sexuality norms, heteronormative gender and sexuality is likely to be reproduced in early childhood education.

1.2. Research Questions

In this research, heteronormativity and heterosexist world order are problematized and their origins are sought in gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education. Consequently, this research mainly seeks to answer *how gender and sexual identities of children are constructed in early childhood education in contemporary Turkey*. To do so, this research examines how early childhood educators perceive gender and sexuality, what kind of factors affect their perceptions, through what kind of tools gender and sexuality norms are imposed on children, what children do with these imposed roles and norms, and whether there is room for children having non-conforming gender performances in early childhood education. Through this interrogation, the thesis explains how heteronormativity is (re)produced in early childhood education.

1.3. Literature Review

Gender and sexuality in education have attracted the attentions of many feminist researchers for decades, thus the literature on this research area is very wide. However, there are differences between earlier feminist researches on education and later ones in terms of the subject they examine (Asan, 2010; Skelton & Francis, 2005). Initially, sexual orientation, compulsory heterosexuality, femininities, and masculinities in education were not questioned by feminist researchers which I prefer to call classical feminists. Rather, they focused on social justice issues such as gender inequality, discrimination of female students, schooling of female children, and so on (Asan, 2010; Skelton & Francis, 2005). Here, I will not go in detail into these earlier researches because the focus of the thesis is different.

The subject matter of my thesis research is related to the discussions of gender socialization, masculinities, femininities, and gay and lesbian studies which have come to the fore later. Researchers studying gender and sexuality in the field of education agree that schooling has a significant role in the construction of gender and sexual identity of young individuals (Blaise, 2005; Connell, 1996; Jordan, 1995; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Özkazanç & Sayılan, 2008). In other words, those researchers regard education institutions and schools as gendered places which *attempt* (my emphasis) to masculinize, feminize, and heterosexualize, and therefore “normalize” young individuals. However, some studies emphasize that children themselves play an active role in *doing gender* through their masculinities and femininities performances (Connell, 1996; Davies, 1989; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Riddell, 1989; Jones, 1997). This means that children are not passive receivers who directly accept gender and sexuality norms imposed on them in school settings; but rather they (may) resist such impositions and develop their own gender and sexual identities.

Despite the existence of a wide range of literature on gender and sexuality in the education context, studies focusing on gender and sexuality in early childhood are limited (Bigler, Hayes, & Hamilton, 2013; Blaise, 2005; Clarke, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2005a; Robinson, 2005b; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson, 2008).

Moreover, although the literature on gender and education in Turkey is wide, studies on *the construction of gender and sexual identity* through schooling are also limited; and studies focusing on early childhood education in terms of gender and sexuality are very few.

In the following, I will discuss existing studies on gender and sexuality, especially heteronormativity, in early childhood education in different national/ social contexts in more detail. Then, I will review the most relevant studies conducted in Turkey, in order to demonstrate the significance and particularity of my thesis research.

1.3.1. Studies on Gender and Sexuality in Early Childhood Education in Abroad

Early childhood education occupies a significant position in gender and sexuality discussions. I will first summarize the findings of key studies before I turn to an overall interpretation of their insights.

Firstly, conventional childhood understanding presumes that childhood and gender and sexuality are not interrelated issues; on the contrary childhood and gender and sexuality must be separated. In this view, children should be prevented from the knowledge of sexuality. Some feminists, especially poststructuralist feminist researchers studying gender and sexuality in early childhood education, reject such assumptions (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson, 2008). Thus, Glenda MacNaughton rejects the conventional understanding that gender and sexuality has nothing to do with childhood. In her book, *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education*, she criticizes and refutes what she calls myths about early childhood such as the innocence and naturalness of childhood, children's being too young, and children's being asexual which are claimed to exist in the Australian social context by arguing that gender does matter for children starting from very early ages. In her book, she also shows that many early childhood educators in Australia have such perceptions of gender and childhood. Moreover, she also criticizes the idea of binary social construction of

male and female children by rejecting the understanding that male and female children are naturally distinct from each other. Although she focuses on Australian case, her findings are likely to be valid also for other social contexts.

Similar to MacNaughton (2000), Kerry Robinson and Criss Jones Diaz (2006) state that early childhood educators perceive children as too young and too innocent to deal with and to understand gender and sexuality issues in their case, which is the Australian social context. They also say that it is adults, teachers and parents in this case who decide what children can learn. In this sense, they also argue that authoritative knowledge operates for children. However, what this authoritative knowledge contains differs in different societies. In other words, children in different societies are allowed to learn different things about gender and sexuality. In this sense, Robinson and Diaz (2006) argue that children and childhood mean different things across different cultures and in different historical stages. Therefore, what is allowed to take place in “children’s world” and what is excluded vary in different cultures. For instance, Mindy Blaise’s research (2005) could be seen as an example for how childhood lives of children might vary in different social and cultural contexts. Blaise (2005, p.85) investigates “*how gender is created and sustained in an urban kindergarten classroom*” in the US context by adopting a feminist poststructuralist perspective. She outlines five gender discourses, which are *wearing femininity*, *body movements*, *make-up*, *beauty*, and *fashion talk*, in order to show how normative gender and sexuality understandings operate in that kindergarten classroom. By doing so, Blaise also shows how children do gender and how they resist gender and sexuality norms. She also explains how different forms of masculinities and femininities are located in relation to each other in the classroom.

Comparing her study with my own research data, it appears that the children in this US kindergarten classroom are more aware of adult issues such as beauty, fashion, having boy/girlfriend than the children in my case. For instance, Blaise discusses how girls can wear sexy rather than childish and frilly clothes, and act from time to time in a sexy way. Possibly, this indicates that the line between children and adults in the social context of

the US is not as rigid as in Turkey. Furthermore, Blaise indicates that while some children adopt heteronormative gender roles, others are trying hard to resist these gender rules and roles. Still, Blaise concludes that heteronormative gender discourses operate in that kindergarten classroom.

Additionally, Kerry Robinson (2008) also criticizes the conventional childhood understanding by arguing that childhood is a social construction just like gender and sexuality in her article which is based on a research examining the media representations of moral panic in Australia toward a “*Play School* episode, the *Learn to Include* booklets, and the *We’re Here*” (pg. 114). She also challenges the idea of immaturity and nonexistence of children’s sexuality (p.4). She argues that children’s access to sexuality knowledge including the existence of homosexuality is prevented with the excuse of children being innocent. In this sense, Robinson highlights a huge contradiction: children are too young to understand homosexuality, but they are given heterosexual desires and figures in everyday life. Thus, her study is also important to understand how nonconforming gender and sexuality is excluded from children in the Australian social context.

Furthermore, Robinson and Davies (2008) examine the construction of the notion of the child and children’s knowledge of sexuality in early childhood education. While doing so, they mention the existing perception of two separated childhood and adulthood entities in Australia and in many western societies as well. They argue that this perception makes people consider children as a biological entity growing and maturing through time rather than a social being with multiple identities.

Following these approaches (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson and Diaz 2006; Robinson, 2008), and Robinson and Davies (2008), I have thus paid attention in my study to how early childhood educators perceive gender and sexuality in relation to childhood I have tried to observe whether early childhood educators perceive children as too young, innocent, asexual in the social context of Turkey. Keeping the findings of Robinson

(2008) in mind, I have also tried to observe whether and to what degree nonconforming gender and sexuality figures or discourses are available to children in the kindergarten by also paying attention to heterosexual discourses and figures that exist in the kindergarten.

Secondly, the existing literature on gender and sexuality in early childhood education abroad shows that early childhood educators generally have normative gender and sexuality perceptions (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson and Davies, 2008; Robinson, 2002). In this sense, MacNaughton (2000) has shown that early childhood educators in the case of Australia think that gender of children are biologically determined; and for them, these biological differences are the reason of social differences between male and female children. However, she criticizes the idea of binary social construction of male and female children by rejecting the understanding that male and female children are naturally distinct from each other.

Robinson (2002) moreover discusses how early childhood educators perceive sexuality and gay and lesbian issues as irrelevant to children's lives in the Australian social context, despite the existence of some early childhood educators who believe in the importance of children's understanding of sexuality. Related to this fact, Robinson finds that how, when and where sexuality constitutes a problem varies for different early childhood educators. For instance, for some the crossing of boundaries of normative heterosexuality would be a problem, while for some even talking about homosexuality would be problem. Robinson moreover shows that there is a relation between dominant religious and moral values in society and the hegemonic perception of children as asexual, innocent, and too young for sexuality issues.

In addition to what MacNaughton (2000) and Robinson (2002) have argued regarding to gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators, Robinson and Davies (2008) also state that sexuality is not regarded as a part of children's identities in the education curricula by criticizing this understanding. In their research, they use "docile

body” concept of Foucault in order to show how children are normalized, regulated and how they become self-surveillant subjects normalizing their own desires and bodies; therefore, how heteronormative subjects are constructed in early childhood.

Considering the findings of MacNaughton (2000) and Robinson (2002), and Robinson and Davies (2008), I have paid attention to see differences and similarities between early childhood educators in my research. I have also tried to observe whether children in the social context of Turkey might become heteronormative subjects who might control their and peers’ gender and sexuality performances and comments.

Lastly, the studies on gender and sexuality in early childhood education that have been conducted abroad show that the school setting should be taken into account while discussing gender and sexuality in early childhood (Robinson and Diaz, 2006; Francis, 2010). Kerry Robinson and Criss Jones Diaz (2006) state that the school setting plays a significant role in gender identity constructions of children; however, children do not immediately accept gender and sexuality norms, but rather they resist the norms that are imposed upon them. In this sense, children’s resistance to social norms of gender and sexuality becomes possible through discourses that are available to them. Lastly, they also state that all elements of education such as teachers’ perceptions, curriculum, and books play a role in gender identity construction. Importantly, they also say that these elements are the reflection of social, cultural, and political institutions of a society. Therefore, the education materials given to children are important in understanding what kind of messages are given to children.

Francis (2010) similarly discusses the roles of toys and other play resources in terms of how they gender children. She agrees that toys and other play resources presume that male and female children have distinct social features and that they lead male and female children to have different features. In her research, Francis examines toys and DVDs that are available to 3-5 year old children. She argues that even though they do not give didactic messages about gender, they still contribute to the construction of

gender identities of children. Francis also says that “learning by doing” is provided to children, which makes them learn and practice social roles of gender and sexuality (p. 339). She moreover discusses how normative heterosexuality is embodied in toys, cartoons and other play resources. In this sense, Francis argues that through these toys and other play resources, children are given the message of how romantic relationship ought to be- heterosexual and depending on a normative gender dynamic. Consequently, I have been aware of the importance of school setting including toys, plays, games, and cartoons in terms of the formation of children’s gender and sexuality perceptions and in construction of their gender and sexual identities. I have also tried to observe how and what kind of messages children are given through toys, plays, and cartoons in the kindergarten; and whether children are provided with figures having alternative gender and sexuality messages.

Regarding to alternative gender and sexuality figures and discourses, Robinson (2005a) shows how moral panic arises as a reaction to nonconforming gender and sexuality messages and figures that are available to children through several recourses such as cartoons in Australia. She also discusses the possibilities of anti-homophobic and anti-heterosexist attitudes in early childhood education. Her discussions show that homosexuality and heterosexuality can be talked about with early childhood educators in Australia, whether or not they confirm homosexuality. Robinson (2005a) also argues that social, political, and economic issues have an impact on and capacity to influence general perceptions regarding (homo/hetero)sexuality in early childhood. This implies that each society constitutes a particular case for the discussions of gender and sexuality in early childhood. Thus, my thesis research focuses on the case of gender and sexuality in early childhood education in Turkey, which has as yet not been studied adequately.

To sum up: Scholars investigating gender and sexuality in early childhood education thus show that it has direct impact on the construction of gender and sexual identities of children (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2005a; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Francis, 2010). Through schooling, children are imposed normative

gender and sexuality messages via multiple resources: the official curriculum, toys, games, plays, DVDs, teachers' practices, performances of peers and so forth. Generally, curriculums are composed of traditional and conventional gender figures which represent heterosexuality simultaneously, thus; curriculums are gendered and heterosexist (Robinson, 2005). In fact, even though there may not be direct messages for gender and sexuality in the curriculum, there are invisible and hidden messages reinforcing heterosexuality and normative gender roles (Robinson & Davies, 2008). Moreover, what children are provided in school such as documents, stories, and songs naturalizes heterosexuality (Francis, 2010; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Robinson, 2008) through, for example, representing only heterosexual family figures. In this sense, Francis (2010) argues that girls and boys are provided with different toys and plays which cause them to develop different and distinct identities. On the other hand, she also states that while there may be challenging figures for gender roles, this is not the case for sexuality.

Discourses around gender and sexuality support what Butler calls a 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990), therefore they have an important role in the construction of gender and sexual identity in early childhood education. Talks of early childhood educators in the classroom about gender and sexuality implicitly or explicitly control and regulate children's understanding of gender and sexuality (Surtees, 2006). Furthermore, the sexuality knowledge that children are provided in early childhood education are regulated and limited according to hegemonic discourses (Robinson & Davies, 2008; MacNaughton, 2000). These discourses that are mainly analyzed in the Australian social context try to prevent children's access to sexuality knowledge by emphasizing the "nature of childhood": young, innocent and asexual as I have discussed above. I purposefully put "nature of childhood" in quotation marks, because I do not agree with this understanding of childhood, just like many poststructuralist feminist scholars (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2008; Robinson & Davies, 2008), because childhood is a social construction constituted by adults according to their perceptions

and norms (Robinson, 2008). According to these discourses, children are too young and innocent to understand gender and sexuality and sexuality is irrelevant to children. However, this argument brings a contradictory and challenging question: if children are too young and innocent to understand gender and sexuality, particularly homosexuality, then why is their everyday life full of heterosexual figures and normative gender messages (Robinson, 2008)?

Although documents and discourses in early childhood education that are available to children are very important in construction of gender and sexual identity in early childhood, children should not be regarded as passive in this process. Individuals-children- do not directly accept gender and sexuality norms that are imposed on them; rather they make and remake their gender through masculinities and femininities performances (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988; Connell, 1996; Robinson & Davies, 2008). In this sense, Francis (2010) states that children grasp the importance of gender categories through their social relations with their families, teachers, and peers, so they start to “do gender”. Children moreover resist and challenge the social roles of gender and sexuality through what is available to them in their social and cultural settings. Social roles and norms of gender and sexuality that are available to children vary in different social and cultural contexts. Thus, how and to what degree children resist and challenge the social roles of gender and sexuality is likely to be different in the case of Turkey, as the socializations of children are particular in different social and cultural contexts.

1.3.2. Concerned Studies Conducted in Turkey

Studies on gender and sexuality in the education field conducted in Turkey deal with gender inequality, gender discrimination, or the content of textbooks and high school environment for doing gender (Gümüšoğlu, 1996; Asan, 2010; Sayılan&Özkazanç, 2009; Özkazanç&Sayılan, 2008; Rankin & Aytaç, 2006).

From a historical comparative perspective Firidevs Gümüšođlu (1996) examined a range of textbooks in two periods: 1928 to 1945 and 1945 to present. Gümüšođlu argues that there are significant differences between these two periods in terms of the status of woman and man, and gender discourses. In this sense, she claims that unlike the second period in which textbooks used in schools are full of gendered figures and discourse and promote gender inequality, the textbooks in the former period are not gendered, on the contrary, women are presented as equal to and in collaboration to men. According to Gümüšođlu (1996), the differences between textbooks from two different periods are the results of hegemonic social and political ideology in these periods. Furthermore, she argues that textbooks contain covert gendered figures and messages even if these books indicate the wrongness of gender discrimination. Therefore, in a general sense, Gümüšođlu highlights that the textbooks are gendered and that children are being provided with unequal social roles of gender.

Hatice Tezer Asan (2010) similarly examines the textbooks that are used in primary schools in terms of gender and investigates gender perceptions of teachers working in primary schools. She analyses primary and secondary characters in texts, pictures, examining with whom, where, how, when and with which objects individuals are located in the textbooks regarding to their genders. In this sense, Asan (2010) argues that through figures and texts in the textbooks used in primary schools, female children are taught to be “mother” while male children are taught to be “father” with an active role outside. Thus, she finds that male and female children are provided with normative gender roles through textbooks that are taught in primary schools. In general, Asan (2010) argues that the reflections of hegemonic gender dynamics and relations that exist in Turkey are found in the primary school textbooks and teachers’ perceptions.

Following what Gümüšođlu (1996) and Asan (2010) have said regarding the content of the textbooks, I have presumed that official curriculum and stories that are used in the kindergarten would contain normative gender and sexuality figures and discourses. In addition, I have also considered cartoons, songs, and toys as a kind of text which

contains social messages. Therefore, throughout the field research of my thesis, I have paid attention to see what kind of gender and sexuality messages are given to children through stories, cartoons, songs, and toys in the kindergarten.

In the same research, Asan (2010) moreover conducted surveys with teachers in order to understand their gender perception. Her findings confirm the hegemonic gender relations existing in Turkey. In her research, Asan (2010) finds that male teachers have more gendered perceptions than female teachers. She also says that school settings contain gendered figures. Similarly, I have aimed to understand gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators in my thesis research. I have also paid attention to observe how early childhood educators reflect their gender and sexuality perceptions in their social relations and interactions with children in the kindergarten.

Regarding the gender aspect of education, Sayılan and Özkazanç (2009) presume that the education system in Turkey has always contained gendered dimensions from the very beginning of its foundation. Following this approach, they investigate the relationship between power, resistance, and gender in their research which is based on an ethnographic field research conducted in 2005 in a high school. Sayılan and Özkazanç argue that the school is characterized by masculine authority. The school is also described as a disciplinising setting where teachers have various forms of authority over students to chasten them. As a result of this authority, the authors state that marginalization and discrimination among and of students emerged in the school. Özkazanç and Sayılan (2008) state that neo-liberal transformations have caused a change in the functions and aims of schools, which have become to “*tame ‘unruly’ people*” (p.3). Thus, such a school culture discriminates and excludes deviant students. Students moreover developed different forms of resistance to authority over themselves that is constructed by teachers (Sayılan and Özkazanç, 2009). In this sense, they state that gender has a crucial and multi-dimensional role in the formation of authority and resistance in the school. In general, they argue that the school as a gendered place has a significant role in the reproduction of unequal gender relations; and gender is a

determining factor in terms of how students resist to authority of teachers. Following their approaches and findings, I have paid attention to understand whether kindergarten setting contains gendered dimension. To be able to do so, I have observed the spatial organization of the kindergarten such as toilets. Additionally, I have also tried to observe whether and/or children challenge and resist to normative gender and sexuality social roles and rules in the kindergarten.

In another article, Özkazanç and Sayılan (2008) investigate how multiple schoolgirl femininities are constructed within a school culture and in relation to hegemonic masculinity; and to my knowledge, this study is the most related study to my thesis research in Turkey. Özkazanç and Sayılan (2008) have found that different types of femininities are located by and within hegemonic masculine culture in school. In other words, femininity identities of girls that exist in the school are constituted in relation to the masculine culture that operates in the school setting. Regarding to formation of femininity identities of girls, the authors also state that attitudes and comments of teacher have an impact on femininities of girls in the school. Özkazanç and Sayılan discovered four types of femininities which are “*‘tough girls’, ‘whores’, ‘teacher’s pets’ and the rest’*” (p.6). The degree of tension and relation between these femininities and masculine culture vary. For all forms of femininities, limits of romantic relations and sexuality are strictly drawn for girls; and those girls who cross these limits are faced with the risk of being stigmatized as “whores” (p.5). This study contributes to the literature of the construction and gender and sexual identity in Turkey. However, in this study how masculinities operate in the school is not discussed in detail. Different from Özkazanç and Sayılan (2008), I have also tried to understand masculinity performances of children in the kindergarten. Moreover, I have also paid attention to observe what kind of attitudes early childhood educators adopt toward children having different femininity and masculinity performances.

The reviewed studies were conducted in the primary to high school setting. To my knowledge, the only research on gender and sexuality in early childhood education was

conducted from the department of early childhood education of Middle East Technical University (METU) (Erden, 2009). This research however is different from the approach of this thesis, as it focused on the attitudes of early childhood educators in terms of gender equality rather than the construction of gender and sexual identity. Thus, Erden (2009) investigated whether there occurs a change in the gender equality perceptions of students in the early childhood education departments in a university in Ankara after taking a course on gender equality. She states that students who participated in this research ignore gender equity issues in the first place. Erden found that there was a difference between the perceptions of participants before and after taking the gender equality course. She has come up with the result that there is an urgent need for gender equality courses for educators. Similarly, I have observed that early childhood educators are likely to disregard gender equality issue among children and they generally have normative gender and sexuality perceptions. Therefore, I believe in the necessity of gender equality courses and/or seminars for early childhood educators.

Hence, gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education in the social context of Turkey has not been studied from a sociological perspective. My thesis research thus contributes to filling this gap in the literature. In the next subheading, I will outline the significance of my master's thesis.

1.3.3. Significance of the Research

The literature on the construction of gender and sexual identity through education, particularly in early childhood education is really wide abroad, especially in Australia. There are also studies on gender and sexuality in early childhood education conducted in the social context of US. However, the literature in Turkey needs to be improved because there is not an adequate number of research in gender and sexual identity construction through schooling in the social context of Turkey. Furthermore, heteronormativity and nonconforming gender and sexuality, a significant social issue,

have not been questioned in the existing studies conducted in Turkey. Thus, different from previous studies, this thesis research discusses heteronormativity and nonconforming gender and sexuality in education, particularly in early childhood education in Turkey.

In fact, to my knowledge *gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education* has not been studied in Turkey. In this sense, the researches conducted in other countries may not be able to fully grasp the situation in Turkey as the socialization in the context of Turkey is different from those societies. Social roles of gender and sexuality in Turkey are more restricted than that both in the US and Australia. Moreover, the relevant literature shows that the degree and density of homophobia is different in Turkey from the societies in which respective studies have been conducted (Asan, 2010; Blaise, 2005; Erden, 2009; Francis, 2010; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2005a; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson, 2008; Robinson & Davies, 2008; Sayılan & Özkazanç, 2009; Özkazanç & Sayılan, 2008). Thus, I realized that early childhood educators perceive homosexuality differently in the US, in Australia and in Turkey. It seems that the authors of existing studies could speak of homosexuality issues with early childhood educators with ease. In contrast, I could not use terms such as gay, lesbian, homosexuality in the field, but rather had to covertly refer to homosexuality issues through using different terms such as “weird”.

As Lorber (1994) argues that each culture has its own peculiar hegemonic social roles and rules of gender and sexuality (as cited in Blaise, 2005, p. 86), there is a need for a research investigating gender and sexuality in early childhood education in the social context of Turkey.

Consequently, the significance of this research arises firstly from the literature deficiency in the concerned field in Turkey. It complements the literature through investigating gender and sexual identity construction in education in Turkey. Secondly, examining the construction of gender and sexual identity in *early childhood education*

makes this research significant, because early childhood education in terms of gender and sexuality in Turkey has not been investigated. Lastly, the methodology of this research makes it unique and distinctive. This research is based on ethnographic field work that I have conducted for about two months in a private kindergarten, which enables me to become a partial insider and to see unspoken dynamics in the kindergarten: there are differences between what the respondents, early childhood educators in this case, say and how they act and interact.

1.4.Theoretical Perspective

I adopt a poststructuralist feminist perspective in examining the construction of gender and sexual identities in early childhood education for the following reasons. Firstly, a poststructuralist feminist perspective pays attention to diversities and differences in gender and sexuality, which, I believe, enables the researcher to not reproduce the dual gender positions such as girls and boys through being aware of such differences and diversities between masculinity and femininity performances of children. Further, the poststructuralist feminist perspective allows to think about the “*contradictory and multiple ways in which children experience and negotiate the gendered category ‘girl’ and ‘boy’*” (Renold, 2005, p. 3). Unlike classical feminist theories which imply the existence of homogenous and universal “woman”, *gender* (my extension), poststructuralist feminist theories reject such gender categories: “woman” versus “man”. Secondly, according to the feminist post-structuralist perspective, subjectivities of individuals including gender and sexual identities are socially and culturally constructed, which is the focus of this research, and they vary contextually and historically (Blaise, 2005; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988; Butler, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Jones, 1997). Although classical feminist theories criticize biological and physiological explanations for gender differences, they are often criticized for being essentialist (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990). Thirdly, poststructuralist feminist perspective deals with “*the process of subjectification (construction of the self- who you are)*” (Robinson & Diaz, 2006), which is the very

subject matter of my thesis. In contrast, as Skelton and Francis (2005) state too, classical feminist perspectives do not focus on gender and sexual identity construction, but rather they engage with social justice issues. The fourth and the last reason of my adopting a poststructuralist feminist perspective is related to the importance of agency in constructing identity. Poststructuralist feminist theories argue that individuals are active in doing gender and developing their gender and sexual identities through their performances of femininities and masculinities (Butler, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Robinson & Diaz, 2006). In other words, although external factors are very crucial in constructing the subjectivities of individuals, this does not mean that individual subjects are passive or powerless; on the contrary, individual subjects have agency. This implies that individuals can resist and negotiate with what is to be imposed on them within the limits of their socialization.

1.4.1. Gender and Sexuality

“One is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman”¹, said Simone de Beauvoir. As she implies too, gender is not something naturally ascribed, but rather, it is an achieved identity. Gender is socially and culturally constructed (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988); and it varies historically and geographically (Jackson, 2006). Consequently, gender is a historical and cultural product that has come to be collectively shared in society. Despite the fact that gender is a social and cultural construction, it has been considered natural. Then, the question of how gender has become naturalized rightfully may rise. Gender is constructed through repetitive performances of masculinity and femininity. This is why Butler calls gender a performative act (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988). According to Butler (1990; 1988), gender is performatively constructed and it is the continuous repetition of these performances that provides regularity and persistence to gender. Therefore, it has come to be seen as natural (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988). Further, these acts have become shared experience that almost everyone more or less adopts and performs. Besides,

¹De Beauvoir, S. (2012). *The second sex*. Random House LLC.

societal sanctions and taboos contribute to normalization and naturalization of gender. It is through sanctions and taboos that normative gender roles maintain their supremacy.

Gender is not stable or fixed, on the contrary, there are multiple, and contradictory positions of gender. Accordingly, gender is not composed of man and woman categories which are claimed as having binary oppositions. Unlike the commonsensical view which claims the existence of such given man and woman categories, I think man and woman, gender categories, are constructions. Indeed, forming woman and *man* (my inclusion) categories are problematic because these categories are not and cannot be inclusive and universal but exclusive (Butler, 1990). In this sense, it is difficult to conceive gender identities outside the heteronormative boundaries for people (Butler, 1990); and those who are not included are marginalized and discriminated. For instance, trans individuals are highly discriminated and marginalized because their gender does not suit the normative man and/or woman categories.

In contrast to conventional understanding which claims a direct relationship between sex and gender, origins of gender should not be sought in biology or physiology. Being male or female cannot and should not be regarded as the basis of being boy or girl, man or woman, and masculine or feminine. Further, gender is not reducible to sexuality, because there is no direct relationship between gender and sexuality. They are neither parallel nor identical. One's gender does not determine one's sexuality, just as one's sexuality does not determine one's gender. Similar to gender, sexuality is also socially and culturally constructed; thus, there is no given sexuality (Butler, 1990). However, heterosexuality has become the dominant and visible sexuality, and it occupies such a position in our society, Turkey, as in many other societies as well, that other forms of sexualities are considered pathological, abnormal, and something that must be cured or suppressed. Since heterosexuality is norm(al), homosexuality is abnormal.

Unlike the common understanding, I do not consider homosexuality and heterosexuality as opposed to each other; but rather, I problematize heteronormativity which can be

described as the institutionalized and normative (hetero)sexuality which controls and regulates individuals both in and outside its boundaries (Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Scott, 2012); which means heterosexuality affects lives of both homosexuals and heterosexuals. Further, heterosexuality is not only about sexuality, but rather it is the intersection of gender and sexuality. In this sense, Butler (1988) states that regulation of gender has always been related to heterosexism. Indeed compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced through gendering or '*cultivation of bodies into the discrete sexes*' (Butler, 1988, p.7).

Masculinities and femininities are the integral components of gender and sexuality discussions. They are so common in society that almost every identity carries certain traces of masculinities and femininities. Masculinities and femininities are relational but they do not occupy opposite or contradictory positions. Masculinities cannot be associated with only male body, just as femininities cannot be associated with only female body. Besides, masculinities and/femininities should not be linked with any sexed body. Masculinities can signify both male and female body (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995); and this is applicable to femininities. Accordingly, masculinities and/or femininities are not identical to man or woman.

Furthermore, there is no one or true way of masculinity and *femininity (my inclusion)*, on the contrary there are multiple masculinities and femininities (Butler, 1988; Connell, 1995), which form the multiple hierarchies in a gender order. Hegemonic masculinity, which is associated with power, authority, aggression, protection etc., causes the subordination and exclusion of other masculinities, generally gay people (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, Connell and Messerschmidt also add that there is no universal single hegemonic masculinity (p. 19). On the other hand, emphasized femininity is regarded as in a subordinated position to hegemonic masculinity, similar to other masculinities.

To sum up, gender and sexuality are not fixed or stable, but rather they are changing and fluid. There are multiple hierarchal positions in a gender order, and they are relational to each other. Women and those males who do not obey the heteronormative gender rules are located in the bottom of this gender hierarchy. Besides, there are multiple masculinities and femininities which are performed by both male and female bodies. Repetitive performances of masculinities and femininities make them appear natural.

1.4.2. Early Childhood

Early childhood is accepted as the period from birth to primary school age in international literature (Bowman, 1993). Very similar to gender and sexuality, childhood is also socially and culturally constructed in accordance with a particular time and society (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2004; Robinson, 2008). For instance, children are considered to be “*too young*” and “*innocent*” to deal with certain “adult” issues such as sexuality (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2008; Robinson, 2002); therefore, their access to the knowledge of sexuality is regulated and prevented (MacNaughton, 2000). Based on my observations and experiences in the field, I can say that the same or similar argument is also valid for the case of Turkey. However, some post-structuralist early childhood educators state that children are not unable to understand and deal with these issues. This idea that children are unable to deal with certain issues is the result of a modernist understanding which created arbitrary binary opposition between childhood and adulthood; and which considers children as inferior (MacNaughton, 2000). Another assumption that is rejected by post-structuralist researchers studying early childhood is children being “*asexual*” (Surtees, 2006; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2008). Thus, the idea of children’s being asexual is another reason for preventing children from access to the knowledge of sexuality in early childhood education, and ignoring their having sexual identity.

In conclusion, from the feminist post-structuralist perspective gender and sexuality are socially and culturally constructed; and which is not fixed but fluid and changing. There are also multiple positions in the gender hierarchy. Similarly, according to the post-structuralist feminist researcher studying early childhood, childhood is socially and culturally constructed which varies depending on time and society/culture (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2004). This means what is called childhood is constituted by the adults of that society accordingly their norms, which is, I believe, one of the factors why gender and especially sexuality is excluded from the childhood in Turkey.

1.5.Methodology

The primary aim of this research is to understand how gender and sexual identities of children are constructed in early childhood education; therefore, I need to understand the gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators, to see the social relations and interactions between the individuals, especially that between teachers and children in the kindergarten, and observe the spatial organization of the kindergarten. This can only be realized through ethnographic research which enables a researcher to grasp unspoken and hidden dynamics in the field that could not be grasped through other research methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Consequently, I have conducted an ethnographic field research in a private kindergarten in a middle class neighborhood of Ankara. The research lasted approximately two months apart from the pilot researches that I conducted as part of my thesis.

1.5.1. Finding the Kindertartens

Apart from the extended field research, I visited three other kindertartens in Ankara between May 2013 and December 2013. The first private kindertarten I visited was located in a middle-upper class neighborhood of Ankara. I spent a day in that kindertarten interviewing teachers, the psychologist, and the manager, observing the

spatial organization of the classes and the kindergarten, social interactions between teachers and children, and examining materials used for the purpose of training of children such as toys and crayons in the classrooms. Besides, I participated in the lunchtime of children in their dining hall. In this kindergarten, I observed and heard more than I expected. For instance, I had never thought that one issue would be “masturbation problem.” I purposefully put “masturbation problem” in quotation marks, because I do not consider it as a problem, but this is the way how the school psychologist and teachers used it.

Through the end of the August 2013, I contacted another private kindergarten in Ankara via one of my friends. Initially I talked to the teacher, who is the friend of my friend on the phone and mentioned my general research area, and this teacher said I could visit the kindergarten. When I went to the kindergarten, she met me at the door with the manager. I was not invited into the kindergarten; instead, we talked in the garden of the kindergarten. The manager of the kindergarten kept a distance to me, and she indicated in a polite manner that they could not allow me to spend time in the kindergarten. At that time, I started to worry about my research and question whether I would be able to conduct the research and complete my thesis.

Later, again through one of my friends, I contacted the private kindergarten in a middle class neighborhood of Ankara which accepted me as a researcher and allowed me to conduct an ethnographic research. While conducting an ethnographic research in that kindergarten, I visited another kindergarten located in an upper middle class neighborhood of Ankara in order to interview early childhood educators. I explained my general research interest to the head of the kindergarten. I mentioned that the research was about gender and gender roles in early childhood education, but I did not mention the sexuality part of the research at first. I thought and still think that if I had shared my real research subject, people might have reacted negatively because gender and especially sexuality is a problematic issue in Turkey as well as in many other societies.

1.5.2. Researcher's Position

Before the field research, I had aimed to trouble the gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators in the kindergarten. I wanted to make them question what is taken for granted as regards gender and sexuality. I had wished to cause a change in their attitudes toward those children who do not obey normative gender and sexuality categories. In other words, I wanted this field research to have a consciousness raising aspect. However, during the research, I realized that this is not an easy task. Unfortunately, although I did want to raise the consciousness of the educators in terms of gender and sexuality in order to decrease children's being socialized according to normative gender and sexuality categories I could not realize it. Still, although I could not discuss homosexuality and transsexuality in an adequate way, I believe they started to believe in gender equality through the end of the field research.

I think there are two main reasons why I could not achieve the consciousness raising task: being a young researcher, and coming from another discipline. Although I was older than the teachers in the kindergarten, they treated me as if I was younger than them, which affected the validity of what I said. My being a university student put me in a lower position in their eyes; so for them there were lots of things that I needed to learn. Secondly, the teachers treated me as if I do not know anything with regard to children and early childhood education, about which they were partially right. I do not know anything about how to educate a kid, and how to react to them, but I do know that gender and sexuality are integral components of their identities. However, since I am not in early childhood education discipline, but sociology, the teachers generally tried to legitimize their behaviors by telling the features of early childhood education.

Moreover, during the first days of the field, I was feeling a stranger which prevented me from talking with teachers during the sleeping time of children, but this feeling decreased as time went on. Besides, the head of the kindergarten made me give a

promise that I would not talk to children and would not confuse their minds. Actually, I did not aim to talk to children with regard to my research. However, I had the difficulties of being restricted by the head in some cases. For instance, in the five age class, I was sitting near a male kid who was holding a small car steering wheel. I told the lyrics of the traffic song they had learned. He reacted to me and said “*girls cannot be a police, boys can be a police; girls can be sister and mother, boys can be father brother and police*”. I wanted to explain to him that there can be female police too, but I could not do that because of what the head of the kindergarten told me. I believe my position in the kindergarten as a researcher and being restricted by the head of the kindergarten affected the data collection process.

1.5.3. Data Collection and Method

The ethnographic field work that I conducted for my thesis began on 19th December 2013 and ended at the end of February 2014, therefore the field work lasted for approximately two and a half months excluding the pilot researches. I had spent two full days-Thursday and Friday- a week in the first month of the field, and four full days- all week days except Monday- a week in the second month of the field in the kindergarten. I used to arrive at the kindergarten at about 8 o'clock in the morning and leave 17.30 o'clock in the evening. Throughout the field, I gathered more than one type of data through observations, interviews, surveys, and analysis of the curriculum of the kindergarten.

I had the chance to observe respectively the five age class, six age class and four age class in the kindergarten at different times. First, I observed the five age class 8 days in total throughout four weeks by going two days a week. There were two female and ten male children in the classroom, and their age was between 48 and 60 months. Then I moved to the six age class where I observed sixteen full days. There were five female and four male children whose age varied between 60 and 72 months. They were the

oldest children in the kindergarten. Last, I participated in the four age classroom with eight female and eight male children between 36 and 48 months of age. In each classroom, I was with the children all day in order to observe the social interaction between them and the teacher and within their peer groups. Moreover, I watched the cartoons they watched, listened to stories and songs they were provided, and observed their games. Consequently, the observation part of the data is composed of games, plays, cartoons, songs, paintings, attitudes of the teachers and social relations among children. Initially, I did not take notes in the kindergarten in order not to disturb children and teachers; instead, I was typing my memories when I arrived home. However, as Emerson et. al. (1995) state, fully remembering what happened in the field, kindergarten in my case, was difficult at the end of the day if a researcher spends long hours in the field. Since I could not recall my memories adequately, I started to take firstly semi-structured notes which would turn into detailed notes toward the end of the field because of the lack of time.

The interviews I had conducted are the second element composing the data. I interviewed the head of the kindergarten, four age teacher, five age teacher, and six age teacher in the kindergarten. Besides, dialogues and small chats on gender and sexuality with the staff throughout the field research are to be integrated into interviews. The interviews were conducted at the very end of the field work because of two reasons. Firstly, teachers might understand my research interest and my position from the interview questions which might cause a change in their attitudes; therefore the observation part of the field would be influenced. Secondly, interview questions might disturb the head or the teachers; therefore it would be better to conduct interviews toward the end of the fields. Besides, by conducting interviews at the very end of the field, I was able to see the contradictions between what teachers say and what they do. I prepared different semi-structured and open ended interview questions for each teacher and the head based on my observations throughout the field. The interview questions are attached in the Appendix of the thesis. Apart from the interviews conducted in the

kindergarten, I had interviewed 9 other early childhood educators and one psychologist working in a kindergarten whose responses will be integrated into the analysis in order to show similarities and differences in different contexts.

Furthermore, I prepared a survey in order to have a sense of the social-economic backgrounds of children and gendered division of labour in their household. The questions in the surveys start from personal information including the number of family members and their genders, occupation of the parents, what kind of activities each parent does in the home and outside, who and how much role each takes in caring for the child. The surveys were put in the bags of each child to be answered by their parents toward the end of the field research. I had given forty five surveys and thirty four of them returned. A copy of the survey is attached in the Appendix. Lastly, I also analyzed the official curriculum used by the kindergarten. This curriculum, the Preschool Education Program, is prepared by the Republic of Turkey The Ministry of National Education with the cooperation of Unicef and funded by the EU and Republic of Turkey². It was released in the September of 2013 to be used in the 2013-2014 education year.

The data gathered for this study is analyzed through qualitative research methods. When the field work ended, I typed the observation notes and interviews, and translated them to English. Then I read and re-read them. Continuously reading field notes is helpful in terms of recalling memories and finding out themes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). While reading, I categorized the themes that I came up with in order to analyze them under certain headings which I will be discussing throughout the thesis.

1.6.The Thesis

This thesis investigates the construction of gender and sexual identity in early childhood education in contemporary Turkey. As indicated in the *Research Questions* subheading, this research also aims to give answers to minor questions such as how early childhood

²The program is available at <http://tegm.meb.gov.tr/dosya/okuloncesi/ooproram.pdf>

educators perceive gender and sexuality, what kind of messages in terms of gender and sexuality are given to children through education materials existing in the kindergarten, and so on. Each chapter of this thesis serves to understand and explain the main question of this thesis through discussing the minor questions. Although in each chapter I try to analyze and give answers to different questions concerning the gender and sexuality in early childhood education, the content of the chapters of the thesis might overlap time to time, because each chapter is related to one another.

In the second chapter, I will introduce the broader context of the research by mainly explaining gender and sexuality dynamics and early childhood education in Turkey. While discussing gender and sexuality, and early childhood education in Turkey, I will also give place to what kind of factors are affecting them. Then, I will describe the kindergarten in which I conducted the extended field research of this thesis. After that, I will touch on the discussion of family institution which is based on a survey filled by the parents of the children in the kindergarten. I will be arguing that family institution has a considerable role in the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and therefore the construction of gender and sexual identity, not only because children see heterosexual couples in a family, but also they generally observe gendered relations including gendered division of labor in their families.

The third chapter will be discussing the question of how early childhood educators perceive gender and (hetero/homo)sexuality. Based on my observations and interviews with early childhood educators both in and outside the kindergarten, I can say that the majority of the early childhood educators have conventional gender and sexuality perceptions. More particularly, they tend to reproduce the dichotomy between male and female children, and to regulate and control children's behaviors and desires in terms of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, early childhood educators have heterosexist worldview which makes them treat all children in the kindergarten as if all of them are heterosexual; and I will argue that the existence of non-conforming individuals, children, are ignored. Accordingly, how compulsory heterosexuality operates in the kindergarten

will be also discussed. However, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the early childhood educators have gendered and heterosexist views, there are also some early childhood educators who accept the fact that some children may be homosexual.

The fourth chapter focuses on the effects of hidden curriculum on the construction of gender and sexual identities of children. I argue that hidden curriculum, which is operationalized as set of underlying and/or unintentional messages given to children through education materials such as cartoons, toys, and stories, peer socialization among children, teachers' interventions in and comments on children's plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten, have a significant role in the construction of gender and sexual identity of children. Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the education materials such as cartoons, toys, songs etc. are full of heteronormative gender and sexuality messages, there are also some challenging, therefore hope promising figures in terms of gender and sexuality. Examining the peer socialization among children is meaningful in order to understand how children are learning gendered categories, how they affect each others' perception of gender and sexuality, and how they control each other. Besides, examining peer socialization is also crucial in understanding how children negotiate the imposed gender and sexuality norms. I argue that children have power to control their peers' behaviors and shape their ideas in terms of gender and sexuality.

In the last chapter, I will conclude the thesis by providing firstly the summary of the thesis and the possible research avenues that my thesis research could open. This thesis in general will show how heteronormativity is pervasive and how it is reproduced in the kindergarten.

CHAPTER II

2. Broader Context of the Research

In this part of the thesis, I will first give detailed information about the background of the research, and secondly, I will introduce the field. Under the *Background of the Research* subheading, gender and sexuality dynamics and early childhood education in Turkey will be discussed. Then, under *The Field* subheading, I will describe the context of the kindergarten in which I conducted the field work of this study. Lastly, I will point out the roles of families in the construction of gender and sexual identities of children and the emphasis on family in the kindergarten under the *Family Issue* subheading.

2.1. Background of the Research

2.1.1. Gender and Sexuality in Turkey

Although there are many further issues to mention in terms of gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire, I prefer to not to give that much space to this discussion because the subject matter of this research is much more related to the gender and sexuality dynamics in contemporary Turkey. What is important in the discussion of gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire is that normatively defined gender and sexuality practices and rules are said to be in dominant despite the existence of non-conforming gender identities and performances in the Ottoman Empire, which are rarely mentioned in the official history literature of Turkey. Some of the gender and sexuality norms existing during the Ottoman Empire have maintained their existence in Turkey.

From the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, many new laws have been legislated and scholars have argued that many reforms were oriented to enhance the status of women in society (Selek, 2011; İlkaracan, 2008a; İlkaracan, 2008b; İlkaracan, 2003). While some researchers claim that all of these reforms were from above (as cited in Kandiyoti, 1997, p. 68), some argue that such reforms and changes concerning the status of women in Turkey are the result of certain demands and struggles of women (Altınay, 2000). In fact, Altınay states that women movements have started during the Tanzimat era of the Ottoman Empire and there were many women journals and organizations during that period (Altınay, 2000, p. 20).

The new woman identity, called *the republican woman (cumhuriyet kadını)*, was created in the first years of the republic. This new woman identity is associated with a woman figure representing the modern, educated, and well-dressed woman in a Western sense. Regarding to these reforms, it is argued that the reforms for “modernizing” women were not done with the purpose of empowerment of women and enhancing the status of women in society; on the contrary these reforms were only one part of tools for the goal of Westernizing and Modernizing (*Muasırlaşma*) the new Turkish state (Kandiyoti, 1997).

Furthermore, the attempts to modernize and westernize the woman in Turkey were not inclusive. In other words, although the reforms made in order to enhance the status of women in society are regarded as having had positive consequences, they generally focused on women living in the urban areas. Consequently, women in rural areas were not encapsulated by the efforts to modernize women in Turkey (Rankin & Aytaç, 2006, p. 6). Additionally, I think the efforts to modernize women in the early years of the Republic of Turkey should not be considered as pure attempts. As Selek (2011, p. 91) also states, the boundaries of this new woman identity were drawn by the ruling class men, and it is a forced and/or given identity. Moreover, “mother and wife identities of women” were emphasized through discourses, because women were considered as raising new generations (İlkaracan, 2003, p. 21). Accordingly, women’s *namus (honor)*

was associated with the homeland's honor, both of which should be protected by men. In this regard, Najmabadi states that the notion of *namus* is closely tied to nation's being male and homeland's being female (Najmabadi, 1997, p. 444). Therefore, nationalist discourses have been intensively used to regulate gender and sexuality in Turkey. (For detail discussions see Altınay (2000) and Selek (2008)).

The sexual identity of women was and still is excluded from the new woman figure. In fact, women's bodies and sexualities, which are "moral threats to social order", were seen as the issues of men, family and society (İlkkaracan, 2008a, p. 12), and notions such as honor, purity, chastity, and shame were/are used in order to control and police women's bodies and sexualities (İlkkaracan, 2008b, p. 44).

Gender(ed) and sexuality policies and discourses developed by the state show differences through time. In this sense, Connell (1990, p. 509) argues that we should consider the state not as a thing, but a process which is always changing and transforming. Discourses and policies oriented to enhancing the status of women in Turkey have decreased throughout time, and gendered discourses and policies have increased. Such discourses have become dense especially during the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government which is a religious conservative party putting Islam at the centre of its ideology. The AKP, which has been in power since November 2002, has been known to develop oppressive policies for gender and sexuality (İlkkaracan, 2008b). In this sense, Acar and Altunok (2013, p. 1) state that "*patriarchal and moral notions and values, often framed by religion*" have become dominant in the political agenda of the AKP, the current Turkish government party, especially after 2007. Speaking of the gendered policies of the AKP, the attempt to re-criminalize adultery in 2004, the insistent demand of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for at least 3 children, ongoing abortion law debates, and mixed-gender student houses are the ones coming to one's mind as examples for the AKP's gendered discourses and policies aiming at controlling and oppressing gender and sexuality in Turkey. Thus, honor, virginity,

sexuality of youth and sexual orientation, which are critical issues in Islam, are the issues that the AKP produce oppressive policies and discourses.

I think the LGBTI issue is more complicated and troublesome than the woman issue in Turkey for several reasons. Firstly, all sexual relations including same-sex sexual relations too are considered in society to embody gendered division and gendered hierarchy between couples in Turkey (Bereket & Adam, 2006). While the passive party is expected by people in society to perform feminine behaviors and is associated with the “woman”, the active party is expected to be masculine, therefore “manly” in same sex relations between men. In a sense, man’s having feminine attitudes is considered a threat as it disobeys gender hierarchy in which heterosexual and masculine man is at the top. I believe making such distinction between gender roles in female-female sexual relations is difficult, because female homosexuality is less visible. However, non-conforming gender performances of women such as masculine attitudes are not considered as a threat in society in the way that that of men are seen. In fact, females having masculine manners and attitudes are generally named as “*erkek Fatma*” (tomboy) in order to imply their being strong, and this phrase does not carry a negative meaning as in the case of non-conforming male behaviors. Nonetheless, this does not mean that female to male transsexuality would be approved too; on the contrary, transsexuality, whether male to female or female to male, is considered a huge moral threat to honor of family and society in Turkey and in many societies as well. For instance, a seventeen year old trans man committed suicide by hanging himself because his family did not accept his gender identity recently³. In the news it is reported that his father told him “*hang yourself and we shall get rid of this*”⁴; thus his family put an extreme pressure on him and forced him to die.

³<http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=17011>

⁴<http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=17014>

In the male to male same sex relations, the passive, feminine party is regarded as worthless by people in society, whereas the active party, the masculine one, has a higher reputation just because it is associated with manhood. Selek states that any kind of attitude and behavior that are associated with woman and/or womanhood are regarded as a threat to masculinity and manhood in eastern societies (Selek, 2011, p. 90). Similarly, Chauncey shows in his book, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, that male homosexuals having feminine expressions and being “passive” were considered deviant, however, those males who are active in same-sex relations were not regarded a threat to social order in western societies. Consequently, he shows that those males who deviate from normative manhood are discriminated and marginalized in western societies too (Chauncey, 1994), just as Selek (2011) states for the case of Turkey. As a matter of fact, this argument explains why the passive and feminine party in male-male sexual relationship cannot be accepted, while the one who is active and masculine can be “tolerated”.

Secondly, there is a significant degree of criminalization and denial of LGBTI individuals despite their (in)visible existence, and the struggles of the LGBT rights organizations in Turkey. There are many non-governmental organizations which have publicly declared their aim of protecting and achieving the recognition of the human rights of LGBTI individuals in Turkey (İlkkaracan, 2008a, p. 9). Despite the existence of ongoing rights movements, LGBTI individuals are denied and criminalized in Turkey. Selek (2011, p. 94) argues that homosexuality experiences in Turkey vary depending on social status and cultural features. There have been several male transvestite celebrities in Turkey, and they are/were not discriminated; on the contrary, they are being/have been accepted by society. Bülent Ersoy, Zeki Müren, and Fatih Ürek, are good examples illustrating how non-heterosexual individuals can be accepted or rejected according to their social status and occupation. However, public opposition to non-heterosexuality has continued despite the visibility and publicity of non-heterosexual popular singers and artists in Turkey (İlkkaracan, 2008a, p. 8)

Regarding the criminalization issue, trans individuals constitute the most vulnerable and suffering group among LGBTI individuals. The Misdemeanor Law with 5326 Law Number⁵ (accepted on 30th March 2005) enables the police officers to fine trans individuals with the excuse of “protecting social order, public morality, public health, environment and economic order”. Additionally, the Turkish Constitutional Law, which promises to treat each individual equally regardless of their language, race, ethnicity, gender, political view, religious belief, religion sect, and so on, does not include the sentence of sexual orientation. This causes and increases the systematic discrimination and physical violence against LGBTI individuals in Turkey.

Lastly, homosexuality is represented as a “western” practice which has been imported from the western societies and is a huge threat for “social and moral values of Turkish society” (İlkkaracan, 2008a, p. 1). What Melih Gökçek, who has been the Metropolitan Mayor of Ankara, the capital of Turkey for twenty years, said in a TV show two years ago proves this statement. He argued that ‘homosexuality belongs to Europe culture and is not appropriate for the moral values of Turkish culture’, therefore, he continued, “there is not and cannot be a place for homosexuals in Turkey”.⁶ Consequently, non-heterosexuality is not only represented as “a western practice being a threat to the moral values of Turkish society”, but its existence is also denied in Turkey.

In conclusion, sexuality has been, as Weeks states (1995, p. 4), “*the magnetic core that lies at the heart of the national political and cultural agenda*”, thus, many policies and discourses have been produced in order to regulate and control sexuality in Turkey. Patriarchy moreover has been very strong and institutionalized in Turkey (Bereket & Adam, 2006; İlkkaracan, 2008b), and its existence has continued despite the women’s

⁵<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5326.pdf>

⁶<http://alkislarlayasiyorum.com/icerik/73652/bizim-neden-gay-baskanimiz-yok-okan-bayulgen>

The original version of his speech: “*Şimdi her toplumun kendisine göre ahlaki değerleri vardır. Özellikle bizim Türk toplumu olarak Avrupa’daki gey kültürüyle bir arada bulunmamız mümkün değil ve bunu tasvip etmek de mümkün değil. Yani bu bizim yetişme tarzımız, ahlak tarzımız, anlayış tarzımız biraz değişik. İnşallah bizim Türkiye’de gey olmayacak ve olmamalı.*”

and LGBTI movements in Turkey. It exists in all aspects of life and oppresses especially women and LGBTI individuals. Patriarchy has been reproduced through Islamic, nationalist, and cultural discourses. All these discourses contribute to the regulation of gender and sexuality in Turkey. I believe that the intersection of Islamic, nationalist, and cultural discourses operating in Turkey is needed to be analyzed in order to fully grasp their impact on gender and sexuality in the contemporary Turkey.

In this part, I have mentioned gender and sexuality dynamics in Turkey. My main purpose of giving place to the themes discussed above in terms of their relation to gender and sexuality is that I think these discussions can be a clue to understand gender and sexuality dynamics in Turkey, especially for those who are stranger to social context of Turkey. I also believe that having sense of general gender and sexuality dynamics in Turkey will help us to understand in what kind of gender and sexuality perceptions and relations gender and sexual identity construction, which starts at very early ages, is occurred.

2.1.2. Early Childhood Education in Turkey

Having basic information about the education system in Turkey, I believe, will be helpful for the better understanding of how early childhood education operates in Turkey. For this reason, I will first briefly describe the education system in Turkey. Secondly, I will focus on early childhood education and early childhood education institutions among others by indicating to which state institutions they belong. Lastly, I will discuss the principles and goals of early childhood education in Turkey.

The education system in Turkey has undergone important changes in the last few years. The new education system, known as 4+4+4 Education System was accepted in March 2012, and it has been implemented from the beginning of the 2012-2013 education year,

September 2012⁷. According to the new education system, compulsory education is mainly composed of three parts, and each part lasts four years. The first four years is primary school education, the second four years is secondary school, and the last four years of the 4+4+4 compulsory education system is high school.

Children who have turned 66 months old in September are supposed to register to primary school. There can be exceptions for certain cases. Children between 66-68 months of age can go to pre-school education or their compulsory primary school education can be postponed to the next year with the petition of parents. Parents have to present a medical report indicating the child's being "physically and psychologically unable" to start primary school if they want to send their children between 69-71 months of age to pre-school for one year before starting primary education. Thus, children between 66-68 months with the petition of the parents, and children between 69-71 months with a medical report can also attend to pre-school education by postponing primary school. As the focus of this research is on early childhood education, I will not go into detail of the new education system adapted in Turkey.

2.1.2.1. The organization of early childhood education

Pre-school education institutions in Turkey belong to two different state institutions, which are the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Child Services. Under the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education, there are both public and private pre-school education institutions. "Anaokulu (*playschool*), Ana sınıfı (*nursery class*), and Uygulama sınıfı (*practice class*)" are the public pre-school institutions in Turkey. Anaokulu (*playschool*) is a school that is opened for the purpose of schooling of children between 37-66 months. Ana sınıfı (*nursery class*) is a

⁷<http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/04/20120411-8.htm>

class which is opened within the structure of regular schools giving formal education that accepts children between 48-66 months. Uyguluma sınıfı (*practice class*), on the other hand, is a class opened within the vocational and technical education institutions having pre-school education programs, and it aims to give education to children between 37-66 months. Additionally, private pre-school education institutions under the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Basic Education are called “özel anaokulu” (*private playschool*). The özel anaokulu gives pre-school education to children who are 37-66 months-old⁸.

In turn, private kindergartens (*kreş*) and day care centers are connected to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Child Services in Turkey. Children below the age of compulsory primary education age, 66 months, can attend these private kindergartens and day care centers. The private kindergartens and day care centers are institutions which provide the “development, care, protection, and nutrition of 0-66 months-old children”⁹ and of those children postponing their compulsory primary education for one year. Children can stay in these institutions for a day or a half-day depending on the preferences of parents. Children are grouped according to their ages and developmental features. Each group is supplied with distinct education tools such as toys, stories, and daily activities in separate classes. Furthermore, there is a sleeping or resting time for children in these institutions.¹⁰

For my research, I have chosen private kindergartens among other early childhood education institutions, as I thought this would allow me to observe a broader age range. However, I could observe children age between 36 and 72 months in the kindergarten. I could observe children younger than 36 months only during breakfasts, lunches and when different age groups are integrated.

⁸<http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/07/20120721-13.htm>

⁹<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.4428&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=>

¹⁰<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.4428&MevzuatIliski=0&sourceXmlSearch=>

Fees of these early childhood education institutions are determined by a commission which is to be established in a city at the beginning of each year. Fees determined in the commission are submitted to Governor's approval. After getting the Governor's approval, the application of fees enters into force. However, fees can be re-considered during the year if the conditions necessitate so. The fees of the institutions are determined by considering the socio-economic conditions of the neighborhood, the salaries of the personnel, renting, heating, and other current expenditures with amortizations. Hence, the neighborhood where the early childhood education is located affects the fee of the education.¹¹

2.1.2.2. The principles of early childhood education

The general purpose of "Turkish National Education" that is also listed at the beginning of the Early Childhood Education Program prepared by the Ministry of National Education is identified with the aim to raise a reasonable *Turkish* citizen (*makul Türk vatandaşı*). According to these purposes, this reasonable Turkish citizen must be an individual

who is dedicated to Atatürk's Principles and Reforms, and Atatürk's nationalism; who adopts, protects and develops the national, moral, human, spiritual, and cultural values of the Turkish nation; who loves and always tries to aggrandize his/her family, nation (*vatan*), and people (*millet*)...who has a personality and characteristic that have been balancedly and healthily developed in terms of body, mind, morality, spirit, and emotion...(T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, 2013, p. 9).¹²

¹¹<http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/25486.html>

¹²The original version of the principles: " *Türk Milli Eğitiminin genel amacı, Türk milletinin bütün fertlerini, Atatürk İnkılap ve İlkelerine ve ... Atatürk milliyetçiliğine bağlı; Türk milletinin milli, ahlaki, insani, manevi ve kültürel değerlerini benimseyen, koruyan ve geliştiren; ailesini vatanını, milletini seven ve daima yüceltmeye çalışan ... yurttaşlar olarak yetiştirmek; beden, zihin, ahlak, ruh ve duygu bakımından dengeli ve sağlıklı şekilde gelişmiş bir kişiliğe ve karaktere, ... sahip ,... bireyler olarak yetiştirmektir.*"

Accordingly, Turkish National Education, firstly, turkicizes individuals living in Turkey in order to make all individuals fit to the definition of “Turk” who obeys the moral values and norms, loves his/her family, nation and who is “healthy”. I think, this definition excludes many people, and LGBTI individuals are one of them. Therefore, LGBTI individuals just as other excluded people such as Kurds, Alewis, and Armenians, are implicitly to be “normalized” through education.

These general aims are also valid for early childhood education in Turkey, but the early childhood education has particular aims and principles too. The Purposes of the Pre-school Education are listed as “supporting children’s body, mind, and emotional development, and make them gain good habits; preparing children to the primary school; creating a common growth medium for those children coming from inadequate environment and families; and supplying children with the proper usage of language” (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, 2013, p. 10). Consequently, general aims of early childhood education are akin to preliminary preparation for compulsory education, and therefore the realization of the general purposes of the Turkish National Education. Pre-school education aims to support cognitive development, language development, social and emotional development, and motor development of children in accordance with the general goals of Turkish National Education and Early Childhood Education.

According to the basic principles of early childhood education in Turkey, the pre-school education period is considered as the basis of life (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, 2013, p. 11), therefore those who are engaged in the early childhood education are aware of the importance of early childhood education. Based on the early childhood education curriculum provided by Ministry of National Education the early childhood educators intend to teach children appropriate abilities and knowledge based on their age features for each age group (pp. 19-36). This implies that children are considered to be developing through age, thus as a biologically developing entity. In this regard, biological explanations for children are prior to social ones.

Furthermore, the basic principles of early childhood education that are listed in the Early Childhood Education Program prepared by the Ministry of National Education indicate that individual differences and the needs of children must be considered, and the attitudes and treatments injuring children's personality, oppressions, and restrictions should be avoided in early childhood education (p. 11).

However, based on my observations in the kindergarten and interviews with early childhood educators, I argue that there is a contradiction between theory and practice. Although the principles of early childhood education which are promoted in the Early Childhood Education Program prepared by the Ministry of National Education give promise for considering and recognizing diversities and differences among children in order to provide a learning and growing medium which suits the democratic education understanding (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Talim ve Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı, 2013, p. 11), I observed that children can be oppressed and restricted because of "their inappropriate behaviors" such as feminine expressions of male children, and masturbation.

2.1.3. Gender and Sexuality in Early Childhood Education

Reflections of patriarchal practices and ideas that have already been discussed in the previous subheading exist in early childhood education in Turkey. Male and female children are provided distinct gendered toys, roles, and figures that make them develop different gender identities, girl/woman or boy/man (Francis, 2010). Moreover, I think gender and sexual identities and performances of the teachers and other personnel working in the kindergarten have been formed under the existing patriarchal structure, thus, their discourses around and about gender and sexuality, and their masculinity and femininity performances in the kindergarten setting reproduce the normative gender and sexuality understanding. Importantly, reflections of these normative gender and sexuality are observed by children. Hence, the existing patriarchal and heteronormative

gender and sexuality practices and discourses in Turkey are to be reflected in the early childhood education. Accordingly, I could observe that there is a significant attempt to socialize children within the normative gender and sexuality boundaries in the kindergarten. I prefer not to go in detail how patriarchal practices find place in the early childhood education as they will be discussed in the following chapters.

Throughout this research, I have raised several questions regarding gender and sexuality in early childhood education. When children start to know gender, what children know about gender and sexuality, in fact, whether there are really certain periods through which children start to learn gender and sexuality as educators argue, and/or whether they learn gender and sexuality in every moment once their socialization started, are some of the question that preoccupied me. I still do not have a definite answer for these questions, but I believe the answers of these questions would change depending on the perspective one adopts. For instance, someone adopting sex role theory may claim that children learn “appropriate gender roles” accordingly their sexed bodies through time, whereas from the constructionist perspective, one may argue that gender and sexual identities of children are constructed throughout their socialization. Further, post-structuralist feminist approach enables one to give room for the negotiations of children with gender and sexuality norms. I think gender and sexuality, socially and culturally constructed categories, are imposed upon individuals from the very beginning of their existence in this world; which is how they learn gender and sexuality norms. However, I also believe that children do negotiate with gender and sexuality norms which they encounter every day.

The early childhood educators that I have interviewed agree that children do not and cannot know their gender until they are two and a half or three years old. Based on my observations and interviews with the teachers, after three years (36 month), children generally start to tell their gender. Children aged between 36-48 months are expected to tell their gender according to the child development understanding in Turkey. It is thought that children in those ages can also recognize and identify the gender of the

people around them. In this regard, I think mother and father portrayals are crucial for the gender understanding of children, because through performances of their parents children start to differentiate who can be a “mother” and who can be a “father”, and this forms the basis of their understanding of who is a girl /woman, and who is a boy/man.

There are contradictory and challenging ideas with regard to gender and sexuality in early childhood education. Although gender and sexuality is one of the core issues of early childhood education (Robinson, 2008), educators might reject the fact that gender and sexuality, especially sexuality is a part of children’s identity, because sexuality is generally regarded as *“a physical sexual act rather than an integral part of a person’s identity”* (p. 116). Besides, early childhood educators in the kindergarten consider children as a chronologically developing entity rather than a social being having multiple identities, which is explicitly understood in their statements such as *“we don’t see such things in that ages, they start have romantic feelings at six ages, but not earlier”* and so forth. On the other hand, early childhood educators think sexual identity is something innate, therefore all individuals have sexual identity which is normative and heterosexual, thus, for them every individual is naturally heterosexual and has a normative gender. The early childhood educators I have interviewed also argue that children discover, as they put it, their sexuality as their age develops. Hence, according to the common understanding of early childhood educators, each child is born either as a girl or as a boy, but they only become aware of their gender after a certain age. However, based on my experiences in the field and interviews, I can say that there are some early childhood educators who think gender roles are taught to children.

2.2.The Field

2.2.1. *The Context of the Kindergarten*

The kindergarten in which I have conducted an ethnographic field work is located in a middle class neighborhood which is short of one and a half hours by bus from the city

center, Kızılay. Building estates with ten or more stories are in majority, compared to juxtaposed but independent apartment buildings in the neighborhood. Additionally, there is a primary school, grocery stores where basic needs can be met, stationers, and a park around the kindergarten. There are also bigger super markets and shopping malls in 10 minutes' distance to the kindergarten.

The kindergarten is composed of a ground level and first floor flat of an apartment building, and these two flats are united through inner stairs. On the ground level, there is the head of the kindergarten's room, the kitchen, two dining tables for five and six year-old age groups, and toilets for adults and children. In upstairs, there is a common play area, classrooms of each age group, a sleeping room for children under four years, the dining table for the four year old age group and younger children, and toilets for children. Except the entrance flat and the adults' toilet, there are cameras in all spaces in the kindergarten. Despite the prohibition of cameras in classrooms by the Ministry of National Education, there were cameras in each classroom as well. The head of the kindergarten was used to watching teachers, children and other personnel from these cameras which put pressure on teachers and other personnel in the kindergarten. The existence of cameras and the awareness of being observed by the head of the kindergarten moreover put a pressure on me which prevented me from behaving freely in the kindergarten. After a certain time, I started to consider cameras as living objects with which I avoided having eye contact. However, one day towards the end of the field work, the cameras in the classrooms were removed on the order of the head of the kindergarten, but I could not learn the reason.

In the kindergarten, there were seven employees apart from the head of the kindergarten, her husband, and her daughter who also work in the kindergarten. The head of the kindergarten, Seda¹³, is a retired early childhood educator. She has work experience in both public and private early childhood education institutions. She is very nationalist and

¹³The real names of all individuals who are mentioned in this research are changed for the anonymity of the participants.

dedicated to Atatürk and his ideas. She is also a Muslim, and she explicitly expresses her being a believer. For instance, once we were talking, she said “*I am talking to Allah but I am talking to Atatürk too, because I love both and they mean a lot to me*”. Reflections of her being nationalist and Kemalist can easily be seen in the kindergarten. There are many posters and words of Atatürk on the walls of classrooms and shared areas in the kindergarten. She expects the personnel and teachers working in the kindergarten to be nationalist and loving Atatürk, and she wants teachers to teach “nationalist values and Atatürk” to the children. For instance, once she states that “*children in our kindergarten are taught to respect and love Atatürk*”. Besides, I observed that children in the kindergarten are taught songs of Atatürk and they sing these songs at least two or three times each day. In this sense, the kindergarten’s being secular makes it particular in the contemporary social and political context of Turkey. For Islamic ideology is dominant in the political and social agenda of Turkey; and the reflections of this Islamic ideology can be seen in various areas including early childhood education. Based on searches I made online, I can say that there are many child care institutions which define their mission to teach children moral and religious values of society by also teaching the doctrines of prophet Muhammed.¹⁴ Thus gender and sexuality understanding operating in the particular kindergarten in which I conducted an ethnographic research is likely different from those having Islamic missions, because Islam puts very strict gender and sexuality roles and rules. Islam moreover provides several justification grounds for unequal gender dynamics and sexuality (Helie, 2012). However, I do not mean that secular people do not have normative gender and sexuality understanding; but rather I claim that social roles of gender and sexuality attributed to man and woman by Islamic and secular ideologies are different. In that sense, I presume that what male and female children are taught about the social roles of gender and sexuality in those Islamic kindergartens might be different. For instance, the spatial organization of the kindergarten including toilets and classrooms is likely to be organized based on the *haremlik selamlık* (sit

¹⁴See for an example; <http://www.nurtopuanaokulu.com/hakkimizda.php>

separately) understanding of the Islam. Besides, I think that male and female children are likely to encounter more strict and unequal gender and sexuality roles in kindergartens having Islamic missions than the particular kindergarten where I conducted my research. Hence, religious and secular ideologies have different gender and sexuality understandings and they would emphasize somewhat different social roles and rules for gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, as I could observe religious values might also play a role in secular kindergartens too. Religious discourses have been intense in Turkey in the last decade because the current government puts Islam at the center of their political agenda. Discourses operating in a society, as part of power relations, constitute the subjectivities of individuals (Foucault, 1978), and therefore their perceptions. Consequently, religious/Islamic discourses operating in the society affect what and how people think, talk and behave. In this sense, as I could observe too, religious discourses and religious values play a role in the kindergartens. In this sense, as Foucault states discourses operating in the society, as part of the power relations, are constituting subjectivities of individuals (Foucault, 1978); therefore their perceptions. Thus, the reflections of Islamic discourses which is one of the most influential discourses operating in Turkey, I believe have impact on how people identify themselves no matter whether they are secular or religious.

Similarly, most of the researches constituting the literature highlight the effects of religious values on gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educator, but the religion they mention is mostly Christianity. Nevertheless, Christianity and Islam have more or less similar notions regarding to gender and sexuality. Although both Christianity and Islam pose conservative visions of gender and sexuality, the social rules of gender and sexuality that are put by them are different. Considering renewed Islamic discourses and Islamic politics in Turkey, secular people feel the need to emphasize their secularism and their opposition to political Islam. This emphasis on being secular and in opposition to political Islam is often expressed, through rejecting the ideal woman figure supposed to be presented by Islam.

The husband of the head of the kindergarten, Ömer, who is called “grandpa Ömer” in the kindergarten, drives the school bus every morning and evening four times in total in a day. Moreover, he is responsible for the basic repair and maintenance works in the kindergarten. Importantly, he represents a “strong but kind male figure” to the children, as the head of the kindergarten states. The daughter of the head of the kindergarten, Aslı, has a business administration diploma, and works in the kindergarten as the deputy manager. She has an initiative in managing the kindergarten especially in the absence of the head of the kindergarten.

Furthermore, there is one cook, one cleaner, one helper mother, and four early childhood educators working in the kindergarten. The cook of the kindergarten changed two times due to the disagreement between Seda and them throughout the two months I attended the kindergarten. The last cook is approximately thirty years old and she did not continue her education after obtaining her primary school diploma. She is married and has two kids, one of whom, a four year old male child, has started to attend the kindergarten. The cleaner of the kindergarten is approximately forty years old, and she graduated from primary school. She is responsible for the daily cleaning of the kindergarten, and making children’s beds. Sometimes she also helps children with their toilet needs. The helper mother, who left high school, is married and has two children, is about thirty years old. She is primarily responsible for meeting children’s self-care needs including toilets and diapers. She helps the teachers of the three and four-age groups during the dinner times. The cleaner and the helper mother work together and cooperate in the kindergarten.

Melek is the teacher of the three-age group, in which there are five female and five male children. She is twenty two years old and graduated from the Child Development department of the Girls' Technical and Vocational High School in Ankara. She has two years work experience as a helper teacher in another early childhood education institution, and she has worked since August 2013 in the kindergarten. She is at the bottom of the hierarchal relationship between Seda, Aslı and other teachers in the

kindergarten. She is single and living with her family who control and regulate her life. Importantly, as I could observe during the research she has a gendered and heterosexist worldview which is generally reflected in her social interactions.

There are eight female and nine male children in the four-age classroom, and two of the children are inclusive children. As the teachers in the kindergarten indicated, they have been medically diagnosed with autism. The teacher of the four-age group, Sinem, is twenty one years old and graduated from the same school as Melek. She has one and a half year work experience in another early childhood education institution, and this is her first year in the kindergarten. She is single and lives with her family to whom she has to account for her behaviors. She wants to go to a university and get more education in order to achieve a career. Moreover, I observed during the fieldwork that she reproduces gendered discourses within the kindergarten and she behaves to the children in a gendered way.

In the five-age group, there are two female and ten male children. The teacher of the five-age group, Suzan, is twenty five years old, married and has a 6 year old male child attending the six-age classroom at the kindergarten. She graduated from the Child Development department of a Girls' Technical and Vocational High School in Ankara, and she has worked in different early childhood education institutions and has six years of work experience in total. She has been working in this kindergarten for two years, and wants to leave her job, because she is alienated from her work due to oppressions and restrictions of the head of the kindergarten, Seda. She complains about the perfectionism of the head of the kindergarten, which she indicates creates high stress for the employees in the kindergarten because she always criticizes what they do. On the other hand, she says that Seda is very knowledgeable and experienced, and she had learned a lot from her. Furthermore, Suzan is a very religious person expressing her belief in statements such as “*inşallah, if God permits (Allah izin verirse), cleanliness is next to godliness (temizlik imandan gelir)*” and so forth. In fact, she states that believes in justice and she

explains justice through Islam. With regard to her gender and sexuality understanding, in theory she is in favor of gender equality, but she has contradictory behaviors in practice.

There are five female and four male children in the six-age group classroom. The teacher of this classroom is Canan, who is twenty four years old and married. She has 6 years of work experience and she dedicates herself to her job and to the children in her classroom. She has more commitment to her work compared to the other teachers in the kindergarten, and she is much closer to the head of the kindergarten. She is a kind of a mediator between the head of the kindergarten and other teachers. It is her who transmits the messages of the head of the kindergarten to the teachers in the kindergarten. Concerning gender and sexuality, she is likely to categorize children and games according to sexes of children.

There is a grouping among the teachers that can be observed and seen. Suzan and Canan are very close; in fact, they spend time outside the kindergarten as well. Still, sometimes they disagree on issues that are generally about what the head of the kindergarten had done or said. On the other hand, Melek gets along with Sinem, but their relationship is not that close. Nonetheless, they can unite and help each other especially when the head of the kindergarten pushes them. Speaking of the head of the kindergarten, she is a very authoritative person who wants everything to be perfectly done in her sense. To illustrate, although the working hours of the teachers is around eleven or twelve hours a day, the head of the kindergarten thinks they should work more adequately and efficiently. In fact, the head of the kindergarten once complained to me about the teachers by saying *“teachers in other kindergartens are also responsible for the self-care of the children, our teachers do not do that, but still they do not do their job properly”*.

Apart from the daily education in the kindergarten, there are optional lessons for children. These optional lessons are drama, orff, ballet, and gymnastics that take place weekly. Besides, children are provided with a theater play monthly in the kindergarten.

All these additional lessons and activities have additional costs, so not all children can participate in theory, however, the head makes all children see the theater play whether they pay or not.

The kindergarten is connected to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, General Directorate of Child Services, and the *Early Childhood Education Program* prepared by the Ministry of National Education is used in the kindergarten. All teachers are supposed to follow the curriculum offered by the program which has distinct practices and trainings for each age group. The teachers have to prepare their daily education plan based on this program, and their plans are regularly controlled by the head. This program can be implemented through various education approaches depending on the preferences of early childhood education institutions. As stated by the head the kindergarten, they have adopted the High Scope education approach among various approaches while implementing the program because she thinks it fits to their mission. However, the teachers working in the kindergarten do not know which education approach is adopted in the kindergarten.

The basic feature of the High Scope education approach, as the head explains, is learning by living, which, she believes, is the basis of the pre-school education. The High Scope education approach recommends to deconstruct the conventional hierarchal relationship between the teacher and children in which the teacher is active and the child is passive. On the contrary, according to this approach, children must be active as much as the teacher; and children should learn by living, doing, touching, and feeling. Therefore, this approach argues that children should learn through their own experiences. The head also states that they focus on the behavioral changes of children rather than pure learning, because the child may know what is wrong and/or what is true, but may not apply it to his/her behaviors. The same idea is also valid for gender and sexual identity of children, as the head argues, according to this approach, "*children look for their sexual identity starting from age three and they try everything, however, they discover their sexual identity until they are six*". According to the high scope education

approach, children learn by doing, thus, experience is the basis of their learning. This approach allows children to play all toys and games, and to perform different roles even if these toys and roles are “inappropriate for their sexed bodies”, because it is thought that children will find out their “true gender and sexual identity based on their sexed bodies” (Seda, the head of the kindergarten).

Most of the children in the kindergarten come from middle class or upper class families. Based on the results of the survey I conducted, 1 out of 34 mothers, and 3 out of 34 fathers have PhD degree; 3 out of 34 mothers and 2 out of 34 fathers have master degree; and 23 out of 34 mothers, and 24 out of 34 father are university graduates. 5 out of 34 mothers and 2 out of 34 fathers are high-school graduates. There are one mother and one father who graduated from secondary school; and there is one mother graduated from primary school, who is the cook of the kindergarten. The occupations of the parents are academician, manager, executive assistant, teacher, engineer, judge, medical doctor, dentist, pilot, police officer, sergeant, physiotherapist, and so forth. Consequently, the majority of the parents have a university degree and regular and prestigious jobs, which, I think, gives them a middle and/or upper-middle socio-economic status in society. More information about the families will be provided under the next sub-heading.

2.3.The Family Issue

Throughout the field work of this thesis, I have observed that family as a notion and as a social institution occupies a very crucial position in terms of gender and sexuality in early childhood. Under the *Family Issue* subheading I will discuss two aspects. Firstly, I will focus on the roles of families in construction of gender and sexual identity in early childhood, and I will show that family has power to regulate children’s gender and sexuality perceptions, therefore identities of children. Secondly, I will discuss how the

family is represented to children in the kindergarten. I believe that the family notion and its representation are closely related to gender and sexuality perceptions.

2.3.1. The Roles of Families

There is a relationship between traditional, heterosexual, nuclear or extended, family and patriarchal social order. It is with parents and other primary care-givers with whom the social interactions, therefore socializations of children start. Thus, family and gender relations within the family are important in terms of gender and sexuality perceptions and identity development of children. Throughout my field work, I observed that children generally imitate their parents; especially female children are likely to perform their own mothers' behaviors. In fact, they generally organize their game by saying "*now, I am your mother, and you are my kid, ok?*" For this reason, having a sense of the gender relations and gendered division of labor in their families is crucial in order to understand what kind of gender relations children have come to be familiar with in their home.

Who does what, how often, who takes more responsibility in child-care, and who spends more time out-of home are helpful questions in understanding the gender dynamics in the family, and these questions were asked in the surveys (The surveys are available in the Appendix). According to the results of the survey, there is a significant gendered division of labor within the families of children in the kindergarten. Firstly, it is women who are primarily responsible for child care in the family. The majority of the children were taken care of by their mother until starting school, which means children have seen their mother in the role of the main care-giver. In fact, women continued to be the primary care-giver when children started to go to kindergarten even if they worked, too. Mothers' spending much more time alone with their children, and being responsible for the basic needs of children such as preparing breakfast, sending them to school, cleaning, putting them to sleep and so on can be an indicator of this. Consequently, almost all children were

socialized in a family environment where the mother figure is primarily responsible for child care even if the father may involve much less frequently in certain activities such as taking children from the school in the evenings.

Secondly, there is a very significant gendered division of labor regarding the domestic work in the families of children. In the survey, parents were asked “which domestic tasks are done by the mother and father with what frequency?” in order to understand gender division of labor between them. According to the results of the survey, cleaning, tidying up the house, cooking, setting the table, doing the dishes, laundry, and ironing are done mainly by women. In fact, men hardly ever take a role in these domestic tasks, even though both parties work equally outside the home. On the other hand, there are certain domestic tasks exclusively done by men. Minor maintenance and repair works within the house, and paying bills, for instance, solely belong to the responsibility of men. On the other hand, men and women can cooperate in tasks such as market shopping. Such kind of gendered division for domestic tasks has a ‘social meaning for femininity and masculinity’ (Ferree, 1990, p. 874). Women are engaged in domestic tasks which are associated with femininity, while men perform domestic tasks associated with power and authority. Paying bills is an indicator of controlling income or money which is in the hands of men, father, husband in the family (p. 877).

Additionally, according to the results of the survey, activities that mothers and fathers do with their children have gendered dimensions. Firstly, parents do distinct and different activities with their children depending on the gender of their children. For instance, most of the female children play house and play with dolls together with their parents, whereas the number of male children playing house together with their parents is very small, and none of the male children play with dolls together with their parents. However, some activities that I considered as non-gendered such as doing puzzles and painting do not show differences between male and female children. Secondly, the activities that mothers and fathers do with their children differ depending on the characteristics of the activity. For instance, fathers hardly ever play dolls together with

their daughters, but they do play with cars together with their son, or they play ball with their children much more than they play house with their children. This signifies that children's activities done with parents are also gendered. I think training activities and plays done by and with the parents are influential in gender and sexual identity construction of children.

In conclusion, as the results of the survey have shown too, there is a gendered division of labor in child-care and domestic tasks between mothers and fathers of the children. Besides, the activities that are done together with children and parents change depending on the gender of children and the type of the activities. Such kind of gendered divisions and differentiations, I believe, are crucial in the formation of children's realities, because they see mother/woman, and father/man, as performing and engaging in certain tasks in the family.

2.3.2. The Emphasis on Family

Normative family institution has been critically discussed by many feminist theorists as taken for granted and seen as 'natural' despite its being a socially constructed institution. Many feminists have agreed that family is generally full of "*the diverging and sometimes conflicting interests of each member*" (Ferree, 1990, p. 867). Accordingly, representations and discourses of the family imply that there is solidarity in the family as if it did not include conflicts and contradictions in itself (Ferree, 1990). However, unlike the commonsensical understanding, a family is not generally a unitary, separate and solidarity entity (Ferree, 1990). Family, whether extended or nuclear, at the end mostly heterosexual, as a social institution is moreover represented as a reality, and its domination as an institution has been maintained despite its bad sides and shortcomings. We, members of society, all have the notion of family as a social institution in our mind because of the socialization process (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 21). The socialization process imposed the idea that family is a social institution that is necessary for the sake of

individuals and society. Importantly, the family that is concerned is always the heterosexual nuclear family including normative gender roles.

As I could observe there is a significant emphasis on the institution of family in early childhood education. There are many related discourses operating in the kindergarten, and its reflections can be seen in diverse activities and education materials such as stories and cartoons that are provided to children in the kindergarten. Based on my observations and interviews, the representations of family present the family as gendered and heterosexual unit, as “sacred” and “peaceful” place, and marriage as telos.

2.3.2.1. Gendered and heterosexual unit

Despite the multiplicity of family forms, such as unmarried couples living together, single parents, married couples living apart, same-sex couples and so forth (Bourdieu, 1996), the heterosexual nuclear family is represented as ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ family, thus, the heterosexual nuclear family has dominance and privileges. Robinson puts it in this way: “*the heterosexual nuclear family ...is constituted as the only normal, stable, successful ... way of living family life*” (Robinson, 2008, p. 12). I think the constant and exclusive representation of the heterosexual nuclear family contributes to the dominance of heteronormativity.

Children in the kindergarten are provided with portrayals of the heterosexual nuclear family through diverse education materials. For instance, the roles of the members of a nuclear family, mainly mother and father, in house playing, are given to children, or the portrayals of a ‘happy’ heterosexual nuclear family exist in stories and cartoons that are provided to children in the kindergarten. As I will examine in detail in the fourth chapter, *Popeye* and *the Flintstones* are some examples of cartoons children watched in the kindergarten and in which there is a significant emphasis of a heterosexual nuclear family whose members have normative gender roles. On the other hand, despite the fact that the representation of nuclear family life in the kindergarten is in the majority, there

are some cartoons such as *Pepee* and *Caillou*, in which extended family life is represented.

Furthermore, normative gender roles of the members of the family are seen in stories and cartoons. Caring and housework have been subordinated to women (Ferree, 1990), and reflections of this fact exist in the family portrayals available to children. To illustrate, the mother figure is represented as domestic laborer and care giver, and she is mostly represented in the private sphere, the home, while the father figure is represented as a bread winner and in authority, and therefore is shown in the public sphere. Gender roles of male and female children within the family are also highlighted in stories and cartoons. The daughter is helping the mother in domestic work, or playing with dolls, while the son is playing with his friends outside or with cars. This is the general representation of male and female children in the context of family life in the stories and cartoons that are provided to children in the kindergarten. As I will examine education materials in the kindergarten such as stories, cartoons, songs in the fourth chapter in detail, I prefer not to discuss this in more depth.

Hence, the sole and exclusive representation of the nuclear heterosexual family with mother and father figures, I think, contributes to children's learning the ideal family life, which at the end contributes to heterosexism and heteronormativity in society (Meyer, 2007, p. 23; Robinson, 2008).

2.3.2.2. Family as “sacred” and “peaceful” place

The commonsensical and conservative understanding of the family claims that family is a “sacred” and “peaceful” place where the family members live in solidarity, in a “... *sacred, secret universe, with its doors closed to protect its intimacy, separated from the external world by the symbolic barriers...*” as stated by Bourdieu(1996, p. 20) for the privacy and intimacy of family. Similarly, the representation of the family in stories and cartoons, and the relevant discourses in the kindergarten, show family as “sacred” and

“peaceful” place, although we, members of this society, constantly hear violence stories in families. Additionally, it is also assumed that family is a separate entity from public which makes it a private sphere. However, this conventional understanding of family, as separate private sphere, has been criticized by many feminists (Ferree, 1990).

The attitude of Canan and the head of the kindergarten towards physical violence in a child’s family clearly show how the family is considered as a private sphere by early childhood educators. One day the six year old children in the kindergarten were telling what they had done the previous night after leaving the kindergarten. Narin, a six years old female kid, started to tell and Canan and the other children in the class were listening to her. She told, *“my father beat my mother, she was injured, there was blood on her arm....”* The other kids were surprised and asked to Canan *“did he beat her?”*; Canan replied, “ssh”, then she asked Narin, *“Narin are you sure that this happened?”* Narin said, “yes” and she continued, *“dad beat my brother too then he looked at me and I ran away, went to my bed”*. The teacher interrupted her saying *“you think for a while, and I will tell what I have done last night ...”*, and she mentioned her last evening in her lovely peaceful family. I know that no one can know for sure whether what Narin told was true or not, but I believed her because she seemed to have normalized physical violence. She told her father’s beating her mother and her brother as if she was telling what she had eaten and played last night just like other children in the class. In the following days, I tried to talk to Canan and the head of the kindergarten to do something for Narin, but the answer to my question *“what can be done?”*, and my covert messages offering to talk to her parents was *“what can we do? What can we say? Nothing, he (Narin’s father) comes and can say ‘you cannot intervene in our family’, this is family issue, so we cannot do anything”*. Therefore, there is an invisible but rigid boundary that separates family, the private sphere, from the external life. “Sacred” “peaceful” and “happy” lives are lived in the boundaries of family (!), which is what the children in the kindergarten learn about the family.

2.3.2.3. Marriage as a telos

Discourses concerning the family and its members place marriage as a kind of telos for children in the kindergarten. Children are subject to comments such as *when you become mother/father*” which may make children wish to get married and become a mother/father in order to be able to do that thing. More particularly, when children ask to engage with an adult issue, they are told that “you can do it when you become a mother/father” instead of saying “when you grow up”, which I believe may make marriage and forming a family a goal for children. For instance, one day in the kindergarten, Suzan prepared play dough for the children. While she was kneading the dough, Ela and Burcu asked to knead the dough, and Suzan told them, “*you are too young now, you can do it when become a mother, ok?*”, and the girls replied “*okay*”. Similarly, Gizem, a four year old girl, brought makeup tools to the kindergarten in the free toy day, and she wanted to use them. Sinem rejected her saying “*Gizemciğim¹⁵, you are too young to do make up. You can do makeup when you are grown when you become mother. But you may play with those at home with the permission of your mother.*” Consequently, what I problematize is not their attitudes toward children’s demands, but the content of their explanations, the way they put their arguments. I think teachers’ rejecting children’s demands to do something by posing that act as an aspect of being mother and father may lead children to wish to become mother/father. This argument might be seen as naïve, but considering the fact that children generally perform mother/father roles while playing in the kindergarten, I believe that such comments may cause children’s considering (heterosexual) marriage as a telos.

This chapter has aimed at proving general picture of gender and sexuality dynamics and education system in Turkey, thus in this chapter, I have tried to describe the broader context in which this particular research is located. To do so, I have mentioned firstly gender and sexuality dynamics, and secondly early childhood education in Turkey.

¹⁵-ciğim: a Turkish suffix which gives the affectionate tone.

Hegemonic gender and sexuality dynamics in Turkey have reflection in the particular kindergarten I conducted the field research. Then, I introduced the particular kindergarten in which I have conducted an ethnographic field work lasting for about two months. Then, I touched on the family issue where I firstly argued that family as a gendered and heterosexual unit has a significant role on the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and therefore in the construction of their gender and sexual identities. Further, I pointed out how family as a notion and as a social institution is represented in the kindergarten. The ideal family is presented as nuclear and heterosexual unite where there is no place for conflicts or divergences between family members. This chapter also has shown that how discussions of family institution and gender and sexuality are interrelated.

CHAPTER III

3. How Early Childhood Educators Perceive Gender and (Hetero/Homo)Sexuality

There are several factors affecting and contributing to gender and sexual identity construction of children in the kindergarten, and gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators are among these. How the teachers in the kindergarten perceive gender and sexuality is important because their perceptions are reflected in their interactions and social relations with children. Based on my observations and interviews, I can say that the early childhood educators that formed part of my research generally have ‘traditional’ perceptions of gender and sexuality, although some of them also have challenging ideas. Perceptions and explanations of many teachers regarding gender and sexuality are close to the explanations of the *sex role theory*, according to which “*gender differences is grounded in sex difference, and sex differences form the unquestioned and unexamined base on which gender is constructed*”(Davies, 1989, p. 232). Most of the teachers in the kindergarten think that male and female individuals instinctively have different and distinct behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics that are almost opposite to each other. Besides, their gender and sexuality perceptions are formed according to the patterns that have already been defined by heteronormativity.

In this section of the thesis, I will examine how the teachers in the kindergarten perceive gender and sexuality and how they reflect their perception in their social relation with the children in the kindergarten. To do so, I will firstly point out how male and female dichotomy is reproduced; secondly, I will be discussing how desires and bodies of children are “normalized” in the kindergarten. Then I will examine how compulsory

heterosexuality operates in the kindergarten. Next, I will mention the differences between early childhood educators and kindergartens that I have visited throughout this research. Lastly, I will discuss children's conforming heteronormativity.

3.1.Reproducing/Reinforcing Male and Female Dichotomy

Early childhood educators tend to reproduce the dichotomy between male and female children in terms of their attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics. They generally consider sexes, male and female, as having distinct features coming from nature. Throughout the fieldwork of this thesis, I have heard many sentences that put male and female children in different positions. Comments such as *"Girls are more naïve, calm, relaxed, but boys are active (hareketli), more naughty"*, *"girls are much more talented and skilled in handcraft things, they are very skillful"* (Suzan), *"generally boys are more clever and girls are more emotional"* (Sinem) are some examples of how the teachers tend to attribute different features to children based on their gender. Importantly, such perceptions are reflected in many practices and discourses which may affect the realities and understanding of children regarding gender and sexuality. The teachers in the kindergarten reproduce the male/female dichotomy mainly through creating sex-based classifications, having different attitudes to male and female children, emphasizing the gender of children through discourses, and feminizing girls and masculinizing boys.

3.1.1. Sex-based classifications

Making classifications on the basis of sex is, I think, a product of how one perceives gender and sexuality, and sex-based segregations appear in almost all activities and areas in the kindergarten. Similarly, Foucault, for the schools of the eighteenth century, states that *"the architectural layout, the rules of discipline, and their whole organizations... referred to the sexuality of children"* (1978, pp. 27-28). Through sex-based segregated spaces and activities children's gender and sexualities are regulated. Children directly or

indirectly are subject to several forms of sex-based segregations in the kindergarten environment.

Firstly, toilet usage is the most visible form of sex-based segregation practice in the kindergarten. Male and female children are not allowed to use toilets simultaneously; on the contrary, they are taken into toilets separately based on their sexes despite the existence of screens between two closets. In fact, children are prevented to see each other while using the toilets even if they are in the bathroom at the same time. However, there is no spatially separated toilet or bathroom for male and female children; they use the same bathroom and toilets, but not simultaneously. On the other hand, in the kindergarten that I have visited during the pilot research, there was not such sex-based segregation of male and female children's usage toilets. In fact, children in those kindergartens are allowed to use the same toilets and to exist in the toilets simultaneously. The closets were separated via folding screens in order to prevent children's seeing each other while using toilets. Hence, the rules in terms of sex-based segregation for toilet usages depend on the kindergarten. For the kindergarten, I have conducted my field research, sex-based segregation of toilet usages was a very strict rule. A small dialogue between Suzan and Ela, a five-age female kid, illustrates how using toilets sex-based segregated is important for the kindergarten. When the helper mother came to the classroom to take a male kid to the toilet, Ela wanted to go to the toilet too, and asked her teacher. Suzan said: *"no! Do girls and boys go to toilet together? They don't, go to your place, and sit down!"*. As seen in this example, male and female children's using toilets separately on the basis of their sexes is very important, in fact, it is more important than the physical and biological needs of children.

Secondly, teachers tend to make sex-based grouping and categorizations for children and for training tools used in the kindergarten. Such groupings and categorizations can be seen in games, plays, handicraft activities, clothes, and so forth. As I could observe, among the teachers in the kindergarten, Canan, the teacher of the six age group class, is

most likely to create sex-based groupings and classifications. She always matches children and allocates roles to them based on their gender in the games and/plays. Children's drawers and toothbrush boxes in that classroom, for instance, are organized according to the gender of children; girls' are here and boys' are there. In fact, she matches same sex children in competition games as she thinks boys are stronger than girls so they cannot compete equally. Moreover, her sex-based segregation practices do not vary according to ages of children. One day in the kindergarten, the five and six year old age children were unified in the same classroom and they were provided with costumes. While explaining what they would do with those clothes, Canan introduced the clothes to children. She picked up each costume from the box and showed them to kids, saying "*this is a girl's dress, and this is for boys... a skirt for girls, pants for boys, a black dress for girls, and a scarf for girls*", therefore, she made sex-based segregation among clothes, and led children to choose clothes that were "appropriate" to their gender. Through the very end of the fieldwork, I interviewed the teachers in the kindergarten and posed questions related to my observations. During the interview, I asked her whether there was a purpose or logic behind her introducing each costume by emphasizing the gender, and other sex-based segregations that she did in the kindergarten. She said: "*yes, I did it on purpose; I want them to learn their sexuality, I don't want their mind to be confused, they have to learn what is for girls and what is for boys*". As implied by Canan, children have to learn how to be "a proper girl or boy"; they have to learn obeying the gender norms that are already defined.

Based on my observations, I can say that Canan is an educator who makes sex-based segregation on an extreme level. Although other teachers in the kindergarten are also likely to make sex-based segregation for children, I observed that they also engage in non-sex-based segregated practices. For instance, Sinem usually provides children with toys and asks them to play together by sharing, instead of giving instructions such as *girls shall play here, and boys there*. However, this does not mean that Sinem does not have heteronormatively defined gendered perception. On the contrary, she also has a

gendered and heterosexist world view, but sometimes she can break from it, or she can express her perception in a different way.

3.1.2. Different attitudes to male and female children

Gender and sexuality perceptions of the early childhood educators affect their expectations from and attitudes toward male and female children in the kindergarten, because there is a direct link between expectations and practices of teachers (Davies, 1989). As the teachers consider there are differences coming from birth between girls and boys, they expect male and female children to act and behave in a way that is “proper” to their gender. Accordingly, their attitudes toward male and female children may vary depending on their gender and sexuality perceptions and expectations from children.

The teachers in the kindergarten have different attitudes toward male and female children. Such different attitudes can be seen in helping children in handicraft activities or in changing the clothes during sleeping time. For instance, Suzan once stated that *“girls are much more talented and skilled in handicraft things, they are very skillful, I do not help them in these activities, they can do whatever I give them”*. She prefers to help male kids whether or not male children ask for help; indeed she asks each of the male children whether they need help or not during the handicraft activities. However, she does not help female children even if they ask for help. When female children ask for help in cutting, pasting, or painting, Suzan generally says *“why do you ask for help, try, I know you can do it”*, in an encouraging manner, then the female kids try more and do it somehow. Suzan as well as the other teachers expect from female children to do handicraft activities, change their clothes, try to make their own beds, and even to clean the tables on their own, and when female kids do these things on their own, teachers do not say “well done!” However, they do not expect male children to do such things on their own; rather, they help male children in handicraft activities and changing clothes,

and they praise male children when they finish their handicraft or *try* to change their clothes. Such different attitudes toward male and female children reproduce the sex-based segregation between male and female children.

Hence, the teachers think male and female children are ‘naturally’ different, and their characteristics are nearly opposite to each other. The teachers expect male and female children to act differently. If they do not, they try to ‘normalize’ their behaviors and ideas.

3.1.3. Discourses emphasizing gender

Discourses on femininity and masculinity exist in almost all areas of social life including institutions (Walby, 1989). I think these discourses can function to teach children how they should perform their gender, because discourses as “*socially organized frameworks of knowledge and meaning... create and control particular ways of thinking, feeling and acting as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’*” (Renold, 2005, p. 3). In the kindergarten, teachers not only use femininity and masculinity discourses that identify how male and female individuals ought to be and ought to act, but they also use discourses emphasizing gender of children in order to point out the sex-based segregation between male and female children. Apart from “girls are ... and boys are ...” discourses, teachers’ continuously calling children by indicating their gender; moreover, warning children in order to remind them of their gender and what is appropriate to it are among the most repetitive and visible discourses in the kindergarten.

The teachers and many people in Turkey as well usually say “*kızım*” (*my girl*) or *oğlum* (*my boy*) when calling children, although there are alternative, gender neutral terms such as *kuzum* (*my dear*), *yavrum* (*my little one*) in Turkish. However, I rarely observed that these terms were used by the teachers in the kindergarten. Rather, they mostly use *kızım* and/or *oğlum* while calling children. In my view, emphasizing the gender of the kid that is grounded on his/her sexed body has two functions: firstly, it reminds the child of his

or her socially ascribed gender. Secondly, it also shows other children who is girl and who is boy. Calling children *kızım* or *oğlum*, I believe, causes the internalization of I am a girl or boy and/or s/he is a girl or boy. “*Ela kızım take this, Ege oğlum come here, kızım get in the line...*” can be some examples that illustrate how teachers constantly refer to children in ways that emphasize their gender. Additionally, when children want something or act in a way that is not ‘appropriate’ to gender norms, teachers ask what their gender is in order to remind and teach them what is proper for their gender. I will share two examples from the field in order to illustrate this. In the first one, the children played with play dough in the five age classroom and after playing, Suzan gave wet wipes to each kid to clean their hands, and she gave more wet wipes to Ela and Burcu saying “*girls please clean the table*”, then a male kid told “*I will clean too*” looking to the teacher. The teacher replied “*no, I said girls, are you a girl? Girls will clean the table...*” then she realized that I was watching them so she continued “*... today, you may clean another day*”. In the second case, five and six age groups were playing the *değirmenci teyze* (*Miller Aunt*) game, and Suzan was leading them by also taking part in the game. In this game, players form a circle by holding each other’s hand, rotating in a circle, and singing the song of the game, and one kid stands in the middle of the circle pretending to be sleeping. Based on the gender of the kid standing in the middle, the lyrics of the game change: they say either aunt or uncle¹⁶. After finishing the song, the kid standing in the middle “wakes up” and picks up another player to replace. During the game I observed, there was a female kid in the middle of the circle, and Fırat, a five age male child, said *değirmenci amca* (*miller uncle*). Suzan, who was near him and holding his hand, heard this and became a bit angry, and she asked him by shaking his hand “*look, is she an aunt or uncle, she is a girl so she cannot be an uncle, she is an aunt, be careful*” with a loud and an aggressive voice.

¹⁶The lyrics of the game’s song: (TR) “*Yorgun uyuyor, yaslanmış bir çuvala. Yorgun uyuyor değirmenci teyze/amca. Tikitak tikitak değirmenim çabucak çabucak dönüyor.*” (ENG) “*Sleeping tired, leaning towards a sack. Miller aunt/uncle sleeping tired. Tick tick my mill turns quickly, speedily.*”

As seen in these cases, discourses on gender and sexuality operate in a way that supports and reinforces the *heterosexual matrix* (Butler, 1990; Renold, 2005). The teachers, in this sense, teach children their proper gender on the basis of their sexed bodies, and if children confuse or could not learn already established normative patterns, they are forced to learn what is proper concerning to gender and sexuality.

3.1.4. Feminizing girls and masculinizing boys

According to gender and sexuality perceptions of the teachers in the kindergarten, female children are expected to be feminine, polite, emotional, and vulnerable, and to wear colorful clothes, while male children are considered masculine, rough, naughty, not emotional, but gentlemanly. Such portrayals in the perception of the teachers can be explained through the concepts of *emphasized femininity* and *hegemonic masculinity*. Connell defines *emphasized femininity* as “*the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation*” (1987, p. 183), while *hegemonic masculinity* is characterized as power, authority, aggression, and strong protection (Connell, 1995). Children in the kindergarten are socialized into gender roles that try to make female children feminine and male children masculine. Some practices and attitudes of the teachers contribute to the feminization of female and masculinization of male children. An anecdote from my field notes illustrates this very well; “*girls can use pink while painting, and they can decorate things*” said Sinem in a very feminine way, and trying to be pretty as much as she could, when Gökhan, a four age male kid, complained of his female classmate to the teacher by saying “*she used pink!*” in order to indicate that lions cannot be pink (!). Then, he loudly said “*boys?*” hoping that the teacher would say boys can use pink too, but rather she said “*boys, boys are handsome, strong and powerful*” in a very masculine manner and with a deep voice. In this case, Sinem did not only reproduce and reinforce the dichotomy between male and female children, but also made children hear the artificial but taken for granted differences

between girls and boys in terms of behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics by portraying “feminine girl and masculine boy” figures.

3.2. Controlling or Normalizing Desires and Bodies of Children

Schools are seen as sites of gendering, therefore, of normalizing of children through intervening in their behaviors and attitudes (Connell, 1996; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; Robinson & Davies, 2008). Gender and sexual identities of children and the ways children reflect their gender and sexualities, and therefore their desires and bodies, are to be controlled and normalized by the early childhood educators in the kindergarten.

Accordingly, the teachers in the kindergarten criticize and try to normalize those children who act beyond the normatively defined attitudes. Children’s talks, acts, and performances regarding gender and sexuality, which can be considered as desires of children, are among those that are tried to be normalized by the teachers in the kindergarten. Since I prefer to reserve this part to the normalization of children’s desires and bodies by the teacher, I will partially exclude here the discussion of how children are feminized, masculinized, therefore normalized.

3.2.1. Kissing and Hugging

Kissing and hugging, which I regard as a signifier of an emotional bond of someone to other(s) that is reflected in physical acts, among children is common as far as I observed in the kindergarten, and children at any age may kiss and hug each other while watching cartoons, playing, having lunch, and even resting in the kindergarten. However, children’s kissing and hugging each other are not generally welcomed and approved by the teachers. On the contrary, those children who try to kiss and hug each other are generally prevented by the teachers. Not surprisingly, attitudes of the teachers toward kissing and hugging among children vary depending on the gender of children. More

particularly, while the teachers in the kindergarten may welcome kissing and hugging between two female children, they are generally against it between male and female, and male and male children, which can be seen as the indicator of a heterosexist and homophobic world view. On the other hand, teachers in the kindergarten may have different attitude toward kissing and hugging between male and female children. In order to illustrate how the attitudes of the teachers toward children's kissing and hugging each other vary depending on their gender, I will share three cases from the kindergarten.

In the second day of my field research, the five and six age groups were unified and they were watching a cartoon, Turbo. While watching the cartoon, İskender, a six year old male kid, kissed his female classmate, Arya and touched her stomach. Then, Ersin, a five year old boy, complained them to Suzan; and she said "*aa what you're doing?*" in very polite manner and she was a kind of smiling. In this case for her, there was no challenging, problematic issue in kissing and hugging between male and female children because it fits to heteronormative gender patterns. However, she does not approve kissing and hugging between male children, indeed, she immediately tries to separate and warn them, which is explicitly seen in the second case. After the sleeping time, Suzan was helping children in changing their clothes and children were talking with each other while sitting on their beds. Berk and Onur, two male children, were sitting close to each other and they were chatting and joking, then they hugged each other throwing their arms around each other's neck. Suzan, dressing a child, saw them and told them "*what you are doing oğlum, quick get up!*" in an aggressive manner. The boys got separated; maybe thinking what they were doing was wrong because they were warned for that. Although I shared here only two cases that I observed in Suzan's classroom, similar events also took place in other teachers' classrooms. Arya and Ahmet, between whom the head of the kindergarten claims there is a romantic attraction, are very likely to hug, touch, and kiss each other. Canan generally intervenes when they hug and/or kiss each other, although sometimes she seems to ignore their hugging and

kissing. For instance, one day Arya and Ahmet were kissing each other on the cheeks and touching each other's faces; and Canan saw them and asked "*Ahmet leave your friend alone (arkadaşını rahat bırak), please sit another place*". Therefore, although Suzan approves the physical closeness such as hugging and kissing between male and female children, Canan usually warns children asking them to get separated.

In these three cases, it is clearly seen that Suzan had different reactions to kissing and hugging, emotional acts, between female-male and male-male. While she positively reacted to a male kid hugging a female kid, and showed her approval by smiling at the children, she warned Berk and Onur sternly in order to prevent their hugging each other. I think the very reason why she approves emotional and physical act between female and male children, but not that between male children is related to heteronormative understandings. What is more, she attributed gender and sexual meanings to kissing and hugging between children which makes her approve heterosexual hugging and kissing while preventing same-sex (between males) kissing and hugging. However, I think, the emotional bonds that are reflected in physical acts do not necessarily carry gender and sexual meanings regardless of one's gender and age. Even close physical acts such as kissing and hugging are not necessarily derived from sexual drives, they are generally assumed to be associated with romantic relationships. On the other hand, kissing and hugging of female children, as a same sex interaction, is not considered a threat. One possible explanation for this might be related to commonsensical idea that female kids are naturally more affectionate and loving. Unlike in the case of female children, emotional and physical closeness between two male children are considered as threatening (Mac an Ghail, 1994). For my view, the fact that female individuals are associated with being sensitive, emotional, lovely, while males with being rough, strong, and powerful might be the reason for this. Therefore, emotional and physical closeness between male children might be considered a threat to manhood as these practices are indicators of being sensitive.

3.2.2. Masturbation

Masturbation is one of the taboo topics that has been discussed by many theorists examining sexuality. Weeks has shown that masturbation has been an issue since the nineteenth century, and that by the middle of the nineteenth century the control of masturbation concentrated on young individuals (Weeks, 1981 (1996), pp. 48-49). As I could observe in the kindergarten, masturbation is one of the sexual acts that children may practice in early childhood, and the early childhood educators whom I have interviewed consider it as normal and commonly seen during early childhood. As far as I could observe, children may masturbate by scratching their genital organ with their hands, or rubbing on a cushion, or stuffed toys. The teachers moreover generally explain how children start to masturbate in those ages when incidentally discovering their bodies especially after quitting the diaper. However, while some teachers can speak of masturbation of children comfortably, other early childhood educators that I interviewed outside the kindergarten ignored the fact that children may masturbate in early ages. Further, the attitudes of the teachers who participated in this research, and who accept the existence of masturbation in childhood, toward male and female masturbation does not vary; on the contrary, they consider masturbation of both male and female children as an act that needs to be prevented. More particularly, the early childhood educators try to prevent children from masturbating through several strategies that they have developed. These strategies aim at making children forget masturbating.

According to the teachers that I have interviewed, covert warning is the “best strategy” to prevent children from masturbating; however, covert warnings may become very overt and can be understood by other children in the classroom. This may hurt masturbating children as they become the target of the warning. For instance, Berk, a five year old boy, is used to holding and scratching his penis especially at sleeping time. Whenever Suzan saw him holding or scratching his penis, she became shocked and warned him loudly and overtly. It was just after the sleeping time; Berk was lying in his

bed and scratching his penis while Suzan was awakening children in the classroom. She saw Berk and loudly said “*what are you doing, put your hands out, we don’t do such things at school*”. Berk replied “*but it is itching*”. I have witnessed similar dialogues between Suzan and Berk, and Canan and other children in her classroom for several times. Toward the end of the fieldwork, Suzan told me “*Berk is used to masturbate, this is common, and I try to make him forget*”. As seen in this case, the teacher intervenes in the body and desire of a child by preventing him from masturbating in order to make him forget it. Suzan began to constantly observe Berk after she started to think he was masturbating. Therefore, as Weeks states, the body and sex of child[ren] becomes the target of adult gaze (Weeks, 1981 (1996)). This adult gaze and intervention aims at preventing children from engaging in practices that are linked to sexuality, sexual desires. However, I do not argue that teacher should not intervene and prevent masturbation of children but rather problematize the teachers’ intervention in children’s bodies and desire, because the teachers, whom I have interviewed, themselves state that masturbation in childhood is common and ‘natural’. Thus, I am seeking the reasons why they attempt to prevent children from masturbating and to make them forget masturbation. Besides, why do the teachers aim at making children forget masturbation despite the fact that children might start to do it some years later?

I think one possible answer to this question might be the modern distinction between children and adults (Renold, 2005; Robinson, 2002; Robinson & Davies, 2008). Renold argues that there is an artificial division “between asexual child and sexual adult” (Renold, 2005, p. 20). Sexuality moreover is considered a private matter that should remain within the privacy of the family or within adults’ private lives (Robinson, 2002). Accordingly, sexuality and childhood are regarded as separate and distinct notions, which make adults, the teachers in this case, see children as asexual, and innocent. Particularly speaking, children are considered as innocent which implies that children are asexual and children and sexuality discussion should be separated. I think, considering children asexual and innocent might be reason why the teachers in the

kindergarten intervene in masturbating children. Furthermore, I think early childhood education does not only aim at educating and caring for children, but also normalizing and standardizing them. Robinson and Davies put this argument in this way; “*children are ... normalized and regulated*” through schooling (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 8). Foucault also argues that “*the body of a child, under surveillance, [is] surrounded ... by an entire watch-crew of parents, nurses, servants, educators, and doctors, all attentive to the least manifestation of his sex...*” (Foucault, 1978, p. 98). Therefore, sexualities, desires, and bodies of children are regulated according to the dominant norms operating in society, and which are also internalized by individuals.

However, one rightfully can ask why the teachers intervene in masturbation of children while they indicate masturbation among children is “normal”. I think, the very reason for this conflict might be related to the difference between what they are taught about it and how they feel about it. More particularly, this can be seen as the conflict between theory and practice. Hence, normalizing children including their desires and bodies, and the conflict between theory and practice, I believe, are answers to the question why the teachers try to prevent children from masturbating.

3.3. Compulsory Heterosexuality and Fear of Homosexuality

Heterosexuality, as one possible sexuality, is accepted as normative sexuality in many contemporary societies, and as a normative sexuality, it is “*taken for granted and rarely questioned*” (Weeks, 1986, p. 92). It has superiority and privilege among other ways of sexuality, and this superiority and privilege has been institutionalized, which causes the marginalization of other sexualities because institutionalized heterosexuality regulates people and marginalize the transgressions (Jackson, 2006, p. 2). Compulsory heterosexuality has a claim of naturalness which entails the assumption that each individual is naturally heterosexual.

The superiority and privilege that heterosexuality possesses, as Weeks suggests, is called '*compulsory heterosexuality*', '*institutionalized heterosexuality*', the '*heterosexual matrix*', the '*heterosexual assumption*' or '*heteronormativity*' in different theoretical discussions (Weeks, 1986). I prefer to use mainly the terms compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, because in my view the term *compulsory* highlights the fact that heterosexuality is not a sexual identity or sexual orientation but rather is a (forcedly) "assigned" identity, while *normativity* signifies that heterosexuality operates as a norm in society. Andrienne Rich, making the term *compulsory heterosexuality* known, used it in discussing how women and sexuality of women are regulated and controlled by men, and, in this regard she argues that "*covert socializations and overt forces channeled women into heterosexual romance*"(Rich, 1980, p. 7). However, I will not use *compulsory heterosexuality* in the way Rich conceptualizes it. Instead, I will use it to refer to how heterosexuality operates as a norm, how each individual from birth is considered 'naturally' heterosexual, how individuals are treated as if all of them are heterosexual, and how non-conforming genders and sexualities are ignored and marginalized.

Compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced by and has maintained its domination "*through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes*" (Butler, 1988, p. 7). In other words, there is an attempt to constitute dual gender positions, girls and boys, and women and men, with normative gender roles. Such masculinity and femininity performances of individuals are crucial in view of the reproduction of compulsory heterosexuality, because compulsory heterosexuality covertly or overtly exists in normative gender roles (Epstein, 1994a, p. 34). However, one must know that neither masculinity nor femininity is intrinsic properties of individuals, but products of society (Davies, 1989).

As I will discuss in this part of the thesis, I could observe throughout the fieldwork of the thesis that early childhood educators consider heterosexuality 'natural', 'normal', 'healthy' and the 'only' form of sexuality, thus as Epstein argues that heterosexuality is regarded as a norm in schools (Epstein, 1994a). The existence of homosexuality and/or

transsexuality and even the possibility of children's being homosexual is ignored and non-conforming gender performances of children are regarded as abnormal or pathologic and in need of being immediately cured through the collaboration of parents and school staff. Non-conforming gender performances of children make the teachers anxious because they consider them as an indicator of abnormality, homosexuality.

This section of the thesis examines how compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity operate in the kindergarten. I will firstly discuss heterosexualisation of gender by also pointing out how early childhood educators link gender performances of children and their sexuality. Secondly, I will mention the general attitude of the early childhood educators whom I interviewed toward children with nonconforming gender performances, and toward the LGBTIQ issue.

3.3.1. Heterosexualising Gender

As indicated in the earlier parts of the thesis, gender and sexuality are not reducible to each other. They are not identical concepts though they may be interrelated. Nevertheless, the early childhood educators whom I had observed in the kindergarten and interviewed in and outside the kindergarten generally use the concept of sexuality in a way that refers to both what is named gender and sexuality in the literature. In other words, the teachers used only the concept of "sexuality" (*cinsellik*) while talking about gender and sexuality of children, so that they use it even when they are talking about the ways children do their gender. Consequently, teachers generally use gender and sexuality as the same thing; they consider gender and sexuality as identical and mutually determining each other. I assume this is related to the fact that gender and sex categories have been tied to each other, which constructs a link between biology and social. This means maleness (sex) is associated with masculinity (gender), and femaleness (sex) is associated with femininity (gender) (Renold, 2005).

The head of the kindergarten once stated that “*children start to look for their sexuality after about the age of three; they find it before reaching six years of age*”. This statement led me to question what she meant by sexuality; is it about the sexual orientation of children, or is it just simply about how children act, their masculinity and/or femininity performances. Then, I realized that both the head of the kindergarten and the teachers in the kindergarten use the concept of sexuality in a way that refers to both gender and sexuality of children, because they think that there is a direct relation between gender and sexuality. In fact, the sex of children, for them, determines children’s sexuality and is the basis of their gender. Particularly speaking, if a child is male then he must be a boy and must like girls and must learn to act as a man. Feminine expressions of a male child cannot be accepted or tolerated because according to the common sense, having male genital organs and feminine behaviors and manners are not compatible (Davies, 1989). The same statement is also valid for female children. However, children’s having normatively conforming gender performances does not guarantee that he or she is heterosexual, but the teachers tend to judge based on the gender performances of children. Therefore, teachers seem relieved for those children who have heteronormatively defined gender performances.

Early childhood educators are likely to make sense of children’s sexualities based on their masculinity and femininity performances in the kindergarten settings. Based on the gender performances of children, early childhood educators may intervene and try to control the acts of children. For instance, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, I was chatting with Suzan about children’s gender and sexuality in the classroom. She started to share her experiences regarding this issue, and stated that

...my son used to love playing with dolls; I mean he was always playing with dolls or other girl toys. He used to like and want to help me in cleaning or cooking. Then I started to worry about him, and asked to Seda, she said it is normal so I become relieved... because you know I was afraid, now he is just a normal boy... (Suzan)

Later on the fieldwork, the head of the kindergarten said,

...we observe our kids, with what and whom they play, which roles s/he is taking while playing. If s/he tries different roles (mother, father, sister etc.) for one or two times, this is normal, but if s/he continuously takes a role that is not appropriate to his/her 'physiological sex' then we intervene (The head of the kindergarten, Seda)

I think the quotes of these early childhood educators, meanings related to sexuality, have an implicit message for the fact that sexual orientation of children is attributed to their gender performances. More particularly, the teachers have a hidden anxiety for children's sexuality, but that is not directly and explicitly put into words. This might imply that the early childhood educators regard sexuality and gender as parallel to each other. Besides, as Emma Renold stated in the *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities*, sexuality is at the center of how we understand *children's gendered childhood* (Renold, 2005, p.2). Children's not representing normative gender roles may lead the early childhood educators, and many other adults, to question their sexualities, because sexuality as a "*historical invention ... is highly gendered*" (Weeks, 1998, p. 35). Besides, compulsory heterosexuality exist in the gender roles that children are expected and encouraged to perform (Epstein, 1994a, p. 34).

The teachers in the kindergarten expect children to adopt normative gender performances starting from a very young age. In the quote above, Suzan mentions her feeling discomfort as her son used to play with 'girl toys', dolls. For Suzan, his playing with dolls instead of cars is a threat because according to conventional understanding boys ought to play with 'boy toys' and girls ought to play with 'girl toys'. The primary condition of being a man is to have the opposite features of what is associated with woman and womanhood (Selek, 2011, p. 90). Thus, in this case, the son of Suzan is considered as representing the feminine features such as playing with dolls and cleaning that are associated with girls and woman. Further, Seda's saying "*this is normal*" for his engaging with feminine activities is related to her belief that "*children start to look for their sexuality after about the age of three; they find it before reaching six years of age*". More particularly, Seda and other teachers in the kindergarten think that children's

engaging with non-conforming gender activities and plays in early ages is normal because they have not yet learned ‘the proper’ gender performances for themselves; and this is the way how they learn.

In general, the head of the kindergarten and the teachers in the kindergarten become anxious when children perform gendered activities that do not obey the heteronormative gender definitions. In other words, as I will discuss later on this chapter of the thesis in detail, they tend to consider a child as homosexual when he or she passes beyond the limits of heteronormativity. However, a male kid having feminine behavioral expressions does not necessarily mean that he is homosexual, and his having masculine manners does not necessarily mean that he is heterosexual. Similarly, having masculine behaviors does not make a female kid homosexual, or her being feminine does not mean that she is heterosexual. I mean we cannot always have conclusions regarding to one’s sexuality only by considering his/her gender performances. In this regard, the Anatolian Bears or the Bears of Turkey¹⁷ can be one of the best examples for the fact that there is not a direct or parallel relationship between one’s gender and sexual identity. The Bears of Turkey is a male homosexual group who rejects being feminine, and whose members show very masculine and macho man portrayals. They are known with their motto; *“erkek adamın erkek sevgilisi olur” (a real man has a man as lover)*.

Furthermore, the early childhood educators regard heterosexuality as the unique, normal, and only natural form of sexuality, because heterosexuality is an identity that is *“imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force”* (Rich, 1980, p. 468), rather than being a sexual orientation. For instance, Meral, an early childhood educator whom I interviewed during the pilot research of the thesis stated that

one of the children in my classroom had very feminine behaviors, he was used to act like a girl, you know. He was used to play girls and girlish toys such as dolls. I was very annoyed... I had warned him several times, but he continued to play dolls and act like a girl. Then I invited his

¹⁷Detail information can be accessed at <http://www.ayilar.net/>

parents to the kindergarten, and I saw that his father was also like him... I asked his parents to take their kids to doctor and take hormone tests, and to psychologist, because he was not normal

Similarly, while interviewing Canan at the very end of the field work, I asked her ideas about the romantic attraction such as flirting between children at early ages; and she said that children at about five and six year old ages may have romantic feelings about one another. Then I asked her whether she has ever observed a romantic attraction between same-sex children. Canan immediately replied, “*no, no, they naturally... I mean boys like girls, and girls like boys. I haven’t seen such a case.*”

Heterosexuality, as a normative sexuality, is not questioned, it is taken for granted. Accordingly, individuals are considered and treated as *innately heterosexual*. As seen in the quotes above, the early childhood educators consider heterosexuality as “the normal” sexuality; and the way they mention (hetero/homo)sexuality imply that homosexuality is abnormal. In fact, for the early childhood educators that I interviewed and observed, heterosexuality must be normative. In other words, the teachers expect heterosexuality being reflected in one’s gender performances that have to be normatively defined. For instance, Ayşe, a female early childhood educators having fifteen years of work experience whom I interviewed during pilot research expects female children to be, as she put it, “*quite, well-behaved and easy care*”, while male children to be “*strong, naughty, having powerful voice, go-getter*”. Importantly, I witnessed such gendered expectation of teachers for children in the kindergarten too. Importantly, their normative gender and sexuality perceptions are reflected in their social relations with children in the kindergarten. They expect children to obey those normative gender and sexuality patterns that the teachers consider as “normal”, and those children who perform non-conforming gendered activities are to be normalized by teachers, which I have discussed in the third chapter with examples. Thus, children’s gender is to be normalized through a heterosexualization process (Butler, 1990). Importantly, the gender identity construction of children generally operates parallel to the construction of sexual identity of children (Robinson & Diaz, 2006, p. 139).

I think that teachers' considering heterosexuality as unique, normal and the only natural form of sexuality, as exemplified above, is why they become worried when a child represents a set of gendered behaviors that does not suit normative gender patterns. Boys representing behaviors that are associated with femininity, and girls adopting masculine manners, and the continuity of such behaviors, make teachers anxious. This, at the end turns to an attempt of the teachers to normalize children.

3.3.1.1. Where is that "fine line"?

Generally, the early childhood educators agree that children regardless of their gender should play with all kind of toys. More particularly, they do not consider boys playing with dolls or girls playing with cars as harmful for their gender and sexual identities. However, when children are playing with gendered toys that are regarded as belonging to the "opposite gender", the teacher carefully watches these children. Indeed, they may attempt to dominate and control the roles (mother, father, sister, etc.) that children take in the games. As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli argues such children who have non-conforming performances may "*become target, and life for them at school can become unbearable*" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 34). Although I did not directly observed such a case in which a life had become unbearable for a kid, I was told such stories by the early childhood educators I interviewed throughout this research. For instance, Meral stated that she asked the parents of a boy to take him to the doctor and take hormone tests just because he did not have conforming gender behaviors.

The teachers and the head of the kindergarten are in favor of children playing with all toys, because they think children learn their future roles through plays and toys. Especially the head of the kindergarten and Suzan can be seen as supportive of gender equity and equal division of labor between men and women. However, they emphasized the *fine line* while mentioning how they support and encourage children's playing with all toys. For instance, the head of the kindergarten once stated,

there is an idea that house play tools (evcilik oyuncakları) are only for girls, but this is wrong. All children should play house. They have to learn their future roles. Toys are multi-purpose. Boys need to learn how to cook, to wash dishes, to clean the home, because they will grow up, and will have to do their own. However, there is a very fine line there, so we have to be careful...

What they mean with this *fine line* is clear: the head and the other teachers as well refer to the limits and/or boundaries of heteronormative gender and sexuality categories, the limits of heteronormativity.

Thus, children can play all kind of gendered and non-gendered games as long as they do not overstep the limits of normative gender roles and rules. Concretely speaking, for the teachers, boys can play with dolls or other “girl toys”, but their role in the game must be appropriate to his gender, so that he can be father, brother or any man role. Therefore, the problem with children’s engaging in other genders’ activities for the early childhood educators might be related to the idea that children may confuse their “proper” gender and sexual identities while performing other genders’ roles, because children at early ages are still in the learning process. Consequently, it can be argued that the anxiety of the teachers is not completely and solely about adherence to traditional gender roles but it is more about deviating from “proper” gender and sexuality. Additionally, what is interesting but not surprising in this *fine line* issue is that it is generally used for the case of male children. The early childhood educators are more likely to set limits for male children’s behaviors rather than that of girls in the kindergarten, because there is a greater emphasis on masculinity performances of male than femininity performances of females (Mac an Ghail, 1994), and a greater anxiety about male homosexuality than female homosexuality.

3.3.2. Ignoring LGBTIQ

The general attitude toward LGBTIQ adults, adolescents, and children is to ignore their existence in Turkey and in many other societies as well. In my view, this general attitude

toward LGBTIQ individuals in Turkey has reflections in the kindergarten. Firstly, LGBTIQ individuals are not given place in the education curriculum that is prepared by the Ministry of National Education. Besides, throughout the field work I could not observe that children are provided with any messages affirming LGBTIQ or even mentioning their existence. On the contrary, there is a huge silence on LGBTIQ issues in the kindergarten. Importantly, it is argued that the absence of LGBTIQ in the education curricula contributes to the construction of heteronormative subjects (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 2), because children are presented only heterosexual couples and relations.

Secondly, heterosexism is intense in Turkey, and individuals, the early childhood educator in our case, as members of society, are also socialized with existing norms, values, and hegemonic understandings. Their gender and sexuality perceptions, especially as regards LGBTIQ, are partially shaped under this hegemonic understanding. Accordingly, they reflect their gender and sexuality perceptions in their social relations with children in the kindergarten, and I argue that there is no place for a 'healthy' representation of LGBTIQ individuals in the kindergarten. However, this does not mean that early childhood educators do not and cannot have challenging ideas and attitudes to LGBTIQ individuals. On the contrary, as I have seen that some of the early childhood educators that I interviewed outside the kindergarten may have challenging ideas and views regarding to LGBTIQ issue. Still, the number of such early childhood educators, as I could observe, is very limited. Therefore, although the majority of the early childhood educators that I have observed and interviewed for the thesis generally speak of homosexuality as a threatening and pathological issue, there are also a few early childhood educators, who are outside the particular kindergarten where I did my observation, who accept the fact that children may be homosexual or transsexual and that these children should not be oppressed because of their gender and sexual identities. There may be contradictions between what they tell and how they act; however I am not able to comment on their attitudes to children in class as I could not observe them.

The discourses and comments of the head and the teachers of the kindergarten covertly and indirectly give messages about how they perceive LGBTIQ issue. Based on my observations, interviews and informal dialogues in the kindergarten, I can say that the head of the kindergarten and the teachers in the kindergarten have heteronormative gender understandings. Some children may perform non-conforming gender behaviors which generally attract the attention of the teachers. For instance, on a day when five and six year old children were provided with costumes, Berk attempted to pick up a long black dress, and he held it and wanted to wear it, but a female kid pulled at the dress so Berk started looking for another costume. While Berk and the female kid were arguing for the dress, Suzan said *“Berk got excited and confused the clothes”*. In the second tour, he picked up that dress and did wear it; he also wore a high heels court shoe, a woman bag, and sun glasses. Suzan became worried and it could be seen in her face. She took Berk’s photo then; while the head of the kindergarten was passing by, Suzan told her, *“you should have seen Berk, you should see his photo!”*, the head of the kindergarten replied *“we will look at it later”*. I do not and cannot argue that Berk is heterosexual, homosexual, or transsexual, but I can say that he has non-conforming gender performances and comments, for instance, he said *boys can be mother too* twice. However, the behaviors and attitudes of Berk worry Suzan and the head of the kindergarten; however, they try to normalize his behaviors by covering up the issue, and by producing excuses and rationales for his behaviors. While having a chat with the head of the kindergarten, I asked her what she thought about Berk, and she replied,

Berk is a special kid; his mother works too much, so his father takes all the responsibilities of his mother. His father takes care of the domestic tasks and Berk at home, so he sees a father figure as mother. But if you ask Berk, he knows being man very well and he is more man than any other man.

According to what the head of the kindergarten told, Berk is a special kid just because of the unconventional and non-normative division of labor between his parents. In this case, I question how and why such unconventional and non-normative division of labor

could make a kid special; and how a kid's boundary crossing performances and comments, such as boys can be mother too could be a result of such nonconventional gender division of labor at home.

On the other hand, the results of the survey filled by Berk's parents give a different picture regarding a gender division of labor than what the head of the kindergarten told to me. Although I paid attention to keep the anonymity of the surveys filled by the parents of the children in the kindergarten, some of them are distinguishable for me because of the occupations of some parents. While analyzing the surveys, I realized that unlike what the head of the kindergarten told, the working hours of Berk's mother are put down as less than that of his father, and his mother spends more time with Berk. However, no one can know for sure which one is the case because Berk's parents might want to represent "normal" gender division of labor at their home. Therefore, the difference between what the head of the kindergarten said and what Berk's parents indicated in the survey are not identical, which led me to consider it critically and skeptically. In my view, there are two options for this difference: first, the head of the kindergarten might try to produce excuses and rationales for Berk's non-conforming gender performances, and second, Berk's parents might self-police themselves in terms of their division of labor at home and therefore they might have filled the survey differently. In the case of Berk, his being cared for mostly by his father, as the head of the kindergarten told, is presented as the reason for Berk's con-forming comments in terms of gender. During the interviews that I conducted at the very end of the fieldwork, I also asked Suzan what she had thought when Berk had worn a woman dress. She replied,

ayyh, yes he did, he wore a long dress. I got surprised, it was weird. But Berk is a very good kid. He did it because he doesn't know yet because he is too young now, but he will learn. But he likes being decorated. Every evening he asks me to brush his hairs. But as I said he is a very good kid, I like Berk very much.

Suzan's saying "he is a good kid" for several times while talking about Berk's non-conforming gender performances, I think, is quite interesting. I suggest that Suzan emphasized Berk's being a good kid for several times because she thinks non-conforming gender performances are indicators of 'something bad', and she wanted me to think that Berk does not have this 'bad thing'. Concretely speaking, Suzan's telling "Berk is a good kid" might be due to her wishing to convince herself and me that Berk is not homosexual. As a result, Berk might be homosexual, heterosexual, or transsexual; I believe that no one can be sure just considering his behaviors and comments. However, Berk, as a male kid performing non-conforming and challenging gender performances has become a subject of concern for Suzan and the head of the kindergarten; therefore, they try to legitimize his behaviors and comments with certain excuses.

Sinem, on the other hand, has a different attitude toward non-conforming gender performances of a male kid, Gökhan, in her classroom. Through the end of the fieldwork, Sinem mentioned her experiences with Gökhan. As Sinem said,

one day Gökhan asked me to paint his nails as I painted girls' nails in the class, and the nail polish was blue so it attracted his attention. I explained him that it is for ladies (bayan), men don't use it. Mothers use it, but fathers don't use it.

I asked Sinem what could be the reason of Gökhan's asking her to polish his nails in order to understand how she perceives it. She replied,

as I said it was blue, a boy's color, so it attracted his attention. And he has some curiosities; he has curiosities for women's accessories. In fact, one day, he brought make up tools to the kindergarten. I got surprised, and he wanted to play with them in the classroom. I didn't give them to him, keep them in his bag. We talked to his mother, and she said he is doing it at home too; he uses his mother's lipsticks and other things. His mother is very concerned for him, but I am not. He has curiosities for everything, for instance he opens up cars to see its inside. So when he meets his curiosities, he won't do such things anymore

Unlike Suzan, who feels uneasy about children having non-conforming gender performances and comments, Sinem is not seen worrying about Gökhan. However, as I could not have a chance to observe how she reacted to Gökhan in such cases, I am not able to accurately argue for the case of Sinem and Gökhan. Nonetheless, I can say that similar to Suzan, Sinem also denies the possibility of children's being homosexual or transsexual through posing Gökhan's being curious as the reason of his non-conforming gender performances. Therefore just like Suzan, she also produces certain rationales for the behaviors of Gökhan.

Furthermore, one day in the fieldwork, I asked the head of the kindergarten whether there have been children with non-conforming gender performances, and she told,

during the year when I was an active educator, there was a kid. He was always playing near the makeup desk. He always wore necklaces and earrings. Then I called his mother to the kindergarten, and we learned that the kid had no role model. Mother and father are divorced and never see each other. Mother, sister, aunt at home... the boy was always with women. What did we do? We provided him with a true role model. The uncle from his mother's side (dayı) involved in the family, they spent more time together. We put the notion of man to man into his head. Let's come to bazaar man to man, do that man to man. And in another example again there were feminine behaviors, playing with girls and girls' toys. We again called the family. This time, there was a father, but the mother was very dominant, the father was passive (silik). The boy was taking his mother as a role model. And this time with the approval of parents, we made children spend time with grandpa Ömer.

I asked her whether there occurred any changes in the behaviors of these children after their intervention, and the head of the kindergarten continued,

they recovered (düzelmek). In fact, you know what they say, one of them became very lad (delikanlı) this time, and he started to wave his hands and arms. Then we joked between us saying, what did we do, did we draw the long bow (dozu fazla kaçırmak). Actually, here again we see the importance of toys. If these kids hadn't played with all toys, if we hadn't allowed them to play, then we couldn't understand that these kids were like that. Because sometimes, some children choose a different gender (cinsiyet) from their own physiological sex, and they start to act as if they

are him/her. In order to be able to understand this, kid should play freely. We observe, and realize. At that case, we present the right thing in a right time...

As can be understood in the quotes of the head of the kindergarten, if a kid performs in a way that challenges the normative gender roles, they start to feel discomfort presumably because challenging gender behaviors of children are linked to homosexuality, which at the end is perceived as ‘abnormal’ by the head of the kindergarten and the teachers in the kindergarten. They try to regulate the kid by policing his/her behaviors. Ironically, early childhood educators tend to deny the fact that children, especially those who are questioning and challenging normative gender and sexuality, may resist hegemonic gender norms. Instead of accepting the fact, they try to produce certain “legitimate reasons” and rationales for why children act in that way, and they also try to ‘normalize’ the kid through several strategies. Importantly, most of the time, the role model issue is presented as the main reason.

I have reflected on two cases shared by the head of the kindergarten, in which the stories of male children challenging heteronormativity and performing non-conforming gender roles are told, and in both cases, the head of the kindergarten presented the lack of a ‘proper’ role model in the lives of these children as the main excuse for children’s challenging heteronormativity. In the quotes above, the head of the kindergarten states that “... *he started to wave his hands and arms. Then we joked between us saying, what did we do, did we draw the long bow ...*”. This implies in my view that the kid might start to act in a way that he may not feel but in a way he was expected to, he was encouraged to, and he was taught. I am not able to make clear comments on that case as I did not directly observe and involve in the issue, but based on what the head of the kindergarten told, I can say that children who challenge heteronormativity through their acts and attitudes became the target of the early childhood educators’ attention, and a normalization process.

Throughout the pilot research of the fieldwork, I witnessed that there are few early childhood educators who accept the fact that there are homosexual and transsexual individuals/children. Therefore, what Derya told during the interview was very hope promising for me. She was mentioning her adolescent relative,

he is about seventeen years old, and he is Kurdish. Everyone tells him effeminate (kız kııklı), you are acting like a girl. Then one day he came to me and asked 'why everyone treats me like that, I am so sad, I cannot walk like them, I cannot swear, I cannot play football, I cannot do'. I said to him 'don't care what they say, this is who you are, you have to act how you feel, no one can prevent this'... this boy is happy in this way, no one can blame him, he has a boyfriend now, okay it might be sin in our religion, but he is happy, you cannot be angry with him. Likewise, we have a boy in my class, he is a bit different, but I like him, he wants to be like that, we cannot change him, no one can change him, this is who he is...

As seen in the quotes of Derya, she has very challenging understanding and attitude toward LGBTIQ issues compared to other early childhood educators who participated in this research. The way she mentioned her relative implies that she gives priority to the happiness of her relative, and she did not try to convince him to 'change' his attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, she openly indicated that there is a boy in her class who has non-conforming gender performances. However, unlike many other early childhood educators that I interviewed, Derya seems to accept children's potentially being homosexual or transsexual, and she does not try to change their behaviors. However, still I think there might be differences between what she told me and how she treats children with non-conforming gender performances.

Additionally, Diyar, a female early childhood educator with four years of work experience, also stated that "*some children may be different; they may reject their gender (cinsiyet) and pass to the opposite one*". However, her attitude for those children is different than that of Derya. Diyar told,

if a kid rejects his/her gender, the only thing we can do is to oppress him, we cannot eliminate it for sure. We, parents, or any other third party can

only oppress, but feelings/emotions cannot be changed. It will explode somewhere sometime in the absence of the third party. The important thing here is to know what to do, and always control him/her... like I said no one can change it but it can be postponed through oppressing. So we should orient children to oppress his/her feelings...

Diyar accepts the fact that children may have challenging and/or non-conforming gender performances, and neither the feelings nor the attitudes of those children can be changed. However, she believes that feelings and behaviors of those children should be oppressed, because she thinks, for my view, “*rejecting one’s own gender*” is abnormal and fatal.

Hence, considering the behaviors and comments of the head of the kindergarten and the early childhood educators in and outside the kindergarten, it is seen that there are three patterns regarding to LGBTIQ issue. The first pattern, as I could observe in the kindergarten, is to totally ignore the existence of LGBTIQ individuals, to produce excuses and rationales for non-conforming gender performances and comments of children, and to try to “normalize” those children. The second pattern, which I could not observe in the kindergarten but learned about through the interviews, is to affirm the existence of LGBTIQ individuals positively. I think this is the most challenging and hope promising attitude toward LGBTIQ that I witnessed during the pilot research. Accepting but trying to oppress, therefore, superficially “normalize” the behaviors of children having non-conforming gender performances is the third and the last pattern.

Although it is argued that female children are also subject to surveillance due to their non-conforming gender performances (Meyer, 2007), I could not observe cases in which female children were regulated, and/or the early childhood educators mentioned female children regarding non-conforming gender performances and comments. Rather, the discourses and the comments of the head of the kindergarten and of the early childhood educators in the kindergarten were operating around male children. However, based on my observations, I can say that regulation and normalization process works differently for female children. The regulation and normalization of girls were generally again

oriented to behaviors of female children. In order to make my argument clearer and more intelligible, I will share two examples from my field notes.

My first example is from the five years age group. Burcu, a five year old female kid, generally acts in a way that is not “appropriate” to the heteronormatively defined girls’ characteristics. She speaks a lot and loudly, tries to control her friends and their plays, she hardly sleeps, and she tends to put rules in games. Her teacher, Suzan, generally complains about her and her behaviors in the class. Suzan warns Burcu in order to make her act “properly”. One day, Suzan shared her thoughts on Burcu with me by saying,

I don't understand what kind of girl she is. She never gets tired, never shuts up, always talks, and never listens to me. She hardly sleeps... I haven't seen such a girl before. I don't like her behaviors

Consequently, Suzan’s saying “*what kind of girl she is*” implies that she considers Burcu’s behaviors as not appropriate to girls, because being a “difficult girl”, naughty girl, is not considered as feminine behavior (Özkazanç & Sayılan, 2008, p.6), but rather as characteristics of boys.

The second example for how girls and their behaviors are regulated is from the six age group. Canan and the children were sitting on the floor and playing memory cards. Dilan wore a dress on that day, and she was sitting by separating her legs. Canan warned her for a few times and asked her to close her legs. She said: “*girls I ask you to sit properly when you wear a dress or skirt. Girls ought to pay attention to how they sit, especially when they wear a dress, skirt.*” Thus, the regulation of female children aims at normalizing their behaviors not only because it attempts to make female children’s behavior suit the existing social norms, but also tries to standardize them which means to eliminate the diversities and differences among their gender performances. Besides, the process of normalization of female children seems to me as a part of misogyny because it attempts to restrict the behaviors of female children. Concretely speaking, it is female children who are subject to comments such as close and/or cover your legs. Then, I would like to pose a question: why are girls supposed to pay attention to how they sit,

for instance closing their legs in this case? This is because of the fact that sexualities and bodies of women in Turkey and in many other contemporary societies as well, are controlled. In fact, women are taught to control their bodies, hiding certain parts of their bodies. In this case, Canan's asking girls to pay attention how they sit especially when they wear a skirt is a kind of teaching them to control themselves, developing a self control.

Nonetheless, I have observed throughout the field research that male children are more often than female children target of regulation and normalization of attitudes and behaviors in terms of gender and sexuality. Importantly, this fact has been also observed in different social contexts; and in this regard Mac an Ghail argues that the very reason of it is that feminine behaviors of male children are regarded as a moral threat (Mac an Ghail, 1994). Non masculine behaviors or/and attitudes associated with femininity are considered injuring manhood because being woman, being feminine, have lower status and reputation than being man and being masculine in a social ranking. Consequently, men's engaging with non conforming gender performances is seen as a moral threat in Turkey and in many other contemporary societies. Therefore, there is more emphasis on gender performances of male children than that of female children in the kindergarten. Considering the femininity and masculinity dynamics in Turkey, I believe similar statement could be also valid for Turkey. Despite the fact that women are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy and are subject to diverse and intense inequality in terms of gender and sexuality norms, those men who do not obey the heteronormative gender patterns are also located in lower positions of the gender hierarchy. Males have to become *a man* which means they have to be strong, rough, protective, masculine, and heterosexual. Selek argues that male individuals become *man (my emphasis)* through several social rituals and mechanisms such as *sünnet (male circumcision), military service, finding job, and marriage* (Selek, 2008, p. 19). Consequently, there is strong emphasis on manhood and being a man in Turkey. Non masculine behaviors, feminine expressions, and being passive in a same-sex sexual relation are considered a shame for

manhood. Thus, *man* has to engage in a heterosexual relationship by also adopting normative gender roles, or has to be active in a same-sex relation in order to protect manhood honor.

3.4.Differences between Teachers and Kindergartens

Based on my observations and interviews in the kindergarten and outside the kindergarten, I can say that there are differences between the early childhood educators I interviewed and the kindergartens that I have seen regarding to gender and sexuality. Firstly, while most of the teachers participating in the research are likely to think that there is a ‘natural’ distinction between male and female children, some teachers question this taken for granted distinction. For instance, Ayşe stated that

girls and boys are completely different from each other... the distinction between girls and boys start when they fall into mother’s womb (anne karnına düşmek), girls are naïve and calm, and boys are naughty”, whereas Suzan said “boys are more naughty than girls, but we create this distinction, from the very beginning. When they are born, we start to treat them differently and this continues. If we treat them in the same way, give them all toys and colors, maybe they wouldn’t be different

How teachers perceive homosexuality, and therefore the way they behave to those children having non-conforming gender performances, is the second difference between the teachers that I have interviewed. I could not use the notion of homosexuality in the interviews as the majority of the early childhood educators that participated in the research were not open to overtly talk about this issue. As indicated in the earlier parts of the thesis, I used the terms of “weird” in the first place while speaking of nonconforming gender and sexuality issues. Then, according to reactions of the participants, I either kept using the word “weird” or started to use the term homosexuality. The majority of the teachers consider homosexuality as abnormality that should be normalized, but two of the teachers accept the existence of homosexual children, and they think those children should not be oppressed or regulated due to their gender performances and sexual

orientations. In this sense, those two teachers, Esra and Derya - a female early childhood educator having 13 years work experience - have very differentiated thoughts regarding homosexuality. For instance, Derya indicated that *“homosexuality cannot be fixed or changed, because this is how she/he is, so we should not put a pressure on children or try to change them”*.

The attitudes of the teachers toward masturbation and masturbating children is the third and last difference among the teachers. Although masturbation in childhood is a controversial issue, some of the teachers have a less oppressive attitude toward masturbation. Although most of the teachers that I have interviewed agree that masturbation in childhood is common and natural, they usually intervene in masturbation acts of children. However, a psychologist working in a kindergarten that I visited during the pilot fieldwork of the thesis, as well as Esra and Derya also think that masturbation in childhood is natural, but unlike the other teachers they think masturbating children should not be oppressed. Rather, the psychologist indicated that the family of the masturbating child should be informed about the case, and parents should talk to their children. What is important here is that, what the psychologist said is parallel to what has been critically approached; masturbation, therefore, sexuality belong to private life, privacy of family (Renold, 2005; Robinson, 2002; Robinson & Davies, 2008), because the psychologist believes that informing children about sexuality is the task of parents, rather than the teachers in the kindergarten. Leaving the task of informing children about sexuality to family might be related to the fact that “being warned” in the kindergarten context might injure the children. Thus, one reason for the discomfort about masturbation and masturbating children in early age is related to the preconception that sexuality, and sexuality knowledge, belong to the private domain (Epstein, 1994b). Shortly, observations and interviews in the kindergarten and interviews outside the kindergarten show gender and sexuality understandings of the teachers and their attitudes regarding gender and sexuality may vary. Depending on the gender and sexuality perceptions of the teachers, their practices in the classroom, and

attitudes toward children might change regarding gender and sexuality, and thus have an impact on the construction of gender and sexual identity of children. Besides, as I have indicated earlier, what teachers say and what they do regarding to gender and sexuality may be in contradiction with each other.

Regarding the differences between early childhood educators in their views on gender and sexuality, I think the social backgrounds of early childhood educators have an impact. Particularly speaking, those who have relations or interaction with individuals with non-conforming gender and sexual identities may have different gender and sexuality perceptions from those who do not, because both Esra and Derya have homosexuals around them. Esra had been sharing a flat with an activist lesbian for about a year; and she was very open minded about (homo/hetero)sexuality. Importantly, she stated that sharing a flat with a homosexual young woman had created certain positive changes in her perceptions of homosexuality. Similar to Esra, Derya also had had a homosexual person around her. Derya told the story of her gay relative by indicating how much troubles he came across. Importantly, while speaking of this gay person, she stated that *“he is happy in this way... I cannot stop liking him just because he loves men, who he is, I still like him”*. Therefore, considering the socialization backgrounds of Esra and Derya, I think that being familiar with and having “good” representation of homosexual persons, have an impact on early childhood educators’ perceptions and recognitions of homosexuality. Furthermore, the social environment in which the early childhood educators grew up is also crucial. Esra is from one of the large cities in Turkey, where LGBT individuals are more visible than in little towns or districts (*ilçe*). Most of the early childhood educators who participated in the research had grown up in such little towns or districts. Therefore, they have been socialized in more or less close and conservative areas, which I believe might have an effect on their perceptions of and attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

In addition to social and cultural backgrounds, I think the educational backgrounds of early childhood educators might also be an effective factor in the formation of their

gender and sexuality perceptions and differences between them. Most of the early childhood educators who participated in this research had graduated from the child development and education departments of vocational high schools in various districts of Ankara. Only Esra had graduated from the early childhood department of a university which has LGBT and women student clubs. Therefore, considering the education system in Turkey in terms of gender and sexuality, or considering studies on gender and sexuality in the field of education in Turkey that are mentioned earlier in the thesis, I argue that homosexuality discussions or “neutral/good” figures of LGBTI individuals most probably were not available to early childhood educators throughout their educations. Since people can develop their own thoughts and perceptions only through what is available to them, the majority of the early childhood educators have heteronormative and therefore discriminatory gender and sexuality understandings.

3.5. Is everything all right when children conform to heteronormativity?

Considering the kindergarten setting, everything seems all right in terms of gender and sexuality when children conform to heteronormativity. Teachers do not feel discomfort or annoyed as long as children obey the social roles and rules of normative gender and sexuality. For early childhood educators, the problem arises only when children cross the boundaries of gender and sexuality which is defined by heteronormative patterns. For example, early childhood educators do not problematize children who perform conventional mother or father roles that are appropriate to their gender. However, they become suspicious if a child engages in a toy, game, or play that belongs to cross gender.

However, this cannot be the case for a researcher investigating gender and sexuality in an early childhood education institution as s/he investigates how heteronormativity operates in that education institution. Therefore, children’s conforming heteronormativity is just as critical as how early childhood educators react to children

having nonconforming gender and sexuality performances and comments in a childcare institution. Consequently, I have also problematized children's conforming social roles and rules of heteronormativity that operate in the kindergarten. In this sense, one may ask why some children cross the limits of heteronormativity while some children conform to heteronormativity. As far as I am concerned, this is closely related to subjectivities of children. What kind of discourses and figures are available to children in their social environment in and outside the kindergarten, I believe, has an impact on whether they conform or resist to heteronormativity.

Considering my theoretical and political standpoint, my answer for the question of whether everything is all right when children conform to heteronormativity is "no" because it would result in further social problems. Firstly, children's conforming to heteronormativity means that they embody conventional gender and sexuality understandings which are taken for granted. For instance, the dialogue between me and Firat, a six year old male kid, in the kindergarten is one of the best examples for this argument. Firat reacted to me saying "*girls cannot be a police, boys can be a police; girls can be sister and mother, boys can be father brother and police*" when I told him the traffic rules song that they had learned in the kindergarten. This implies that he has learned the normative gender categories in society according to which he is about to attribute certain social roles to men and women. I think that children's thinking that there are certain social roles and occupations for men and women in society is a crucial problem, because unless developing different understandings in engagement with a different social context, he is likely to become a sexist person who confirms gender inequality. Thus, remembering what Asan (2010, p.4) argues –gendered norms given to children continue to exist in that society for a long time- conforming children's heteronormativity should be problematized in order to reduce the degree of sexism and homophobia in society. In this sense, I think early childhood educators' reproducing heteronormativity in the kindergarten as they had not been provided with non-normative gender and sexuality understanding neither through their educations nor their other

social environments is a good example how the cycle of heteronormativity continues unless it is broken.

Throughout this chapter, which aims at discussing the gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators, I have argued that most of the early childhood educators have conventional, therefore heteronormative gender and sexuality understanding. Importantly, reflections of their gender and sexuality perceptions can be seen in their social relations and interactions with children in kindergarten. The teachers whom I interviewed in and outside the kindergarten generally attribute different features to male and female children; and they attempt to teach children their “proper” genders based on their sexed bodies. The teachers also try to normalize desires and bodies of children in the kindergarten. However, although the majority of the teachers participated in this research have heteronormative gender and sexuality perceptions they can challenge gender norms from time to time. Besides, there are also some teachers who have challenging gender and sexuality understanding. This chapter moreover analyzed how compulsory heterosexuality operates in early childhood. I have argued that early childhood educators participated in this research generally have heterosexist understanding. They consider each child heterosexual, and try to “normalize” children’s behaviors based on the heteronormative gender and sexuality understanding. Moreover, I have also shown that although children, regardless of their gender are allowed to play all kind of toys, they are monitored and regulated while playing in order to prevent them passing the boundaries of heteronormativity. Accordingly, it is merely impossible to find a place for the affirming representation of LGBTIQ individuals. On the other hand, I have also indicated the existence of early childhood educators who have challenging and hope promising ideas in terms of homosexuality. Unfortunately, the numbers of such early childhood educators are too limited to be generalized. Then, I have indicated the differences between early childhood educators in terms of their gender and sexuality perceptions by also discussing factors that might cause differences between them in

terms of gender and sexuality perceptions. Lastly, I have discussed the problem of children's conforming heteronormativity.

Hence, I have observed that visible power relations operate between children and adults, early childhood educators in our case. Early childhood educators attempt to put rules and to draw limits for children in terms of how they speak, act, play and so on. This also includes gender and sexuality issues. However, as the literature indicates and I observed in the field, some children resist/challenge the rules and norms that are imposed upon them, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

4. Hidden Curriculum

While the third chapter has engaged with the gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators through discussing firstly reproduction of male and female dichotomy; secondly controlling and normalizing of bodies and desires of children; thirdly the way how compulsory heterosexuality operates in the kindergarten by pointing out how each children are treated as if all of them are heterosexual, and according to heteronormative gender patterns, this chapter will focus on the role of the hidden curriculum in the construction of gender and sexual identity of children. Hidden curriculum gives messages that are not planned through the official curriculum in the kindergarten. As I could observe, these messages also have gender and sexuality aspects. This chapter aims at discussing the role of hidden curriculum in gender and sexual identity construction of children through the examination of education materials, peer socialization, teachers' interventions and comments on children's plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten.

The school environment and (in)formal curriculums adopted in schools, in the kindergarten in this case, are usually parallel to normative gender and sexual identity construction (Connell, 1996, p. 216). Epstein (1994a, pp. 54-55) argues that the hidden curriculum carries the heterosexist values and norms of the society, thus it is generally heterosexist and homophobic. Education materials involve overt and covert messages in terms of gender and sexuality. Importantly, they give distinct and different messages to male and female children (Francis, 2010; Aina & Cameron, 2011). In this research, I take education materials which are cartoons, stories, songs, lyrics of games, toys, peer

socialization, intervention and comments of teachers on children's plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten as the main components of hidden curriculum. Therefore, for this research, I operationalize hidden curriculum as a set of messages given to children through education materials, peer socialization, teacher's intervention and comments on children plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten.

4.1. What do Education Materials Tell Us?

The roles of teachers' instructions, attitudes, and their social relations with children in gender and sexual identity construction of children are highly important and undeniable as I have discussed in the third chapter of the thesis. However, they are not the sole factors that contribute to and take a role in this construction process. As also indicated above, education materials in the classroom and the kindergarten are part of the elements composing what I want to call hidden curriculum in this research.

As I could observe that education materials such as cartoons, stories, toys, and songs used in the kindergarten are generally full of normative gender and sexuality messages although there are also some challenging figures and comments in terms of gender and sexuality. For instance, there are small icons of a feminine girl in pink color and a boy in blue color holding a ball on the walls of children's toilets and on the doors of the wardrobes at the entrance of the kindergarten; and these figures attract the attentions of children. Therefore, I believe all such elements and especially education materials are crucial in understanding the formation of children's gender and sexuality perceptions, and therefore their gender and sexual identity construction. The next subheadings will examine certain education materials used in the kindergarten in terms of the messages they carry concerning to gender and sexuality.

4.1.1. Cartoons and Stories

Regarding the effects of watching TV on children, it is said that television is among the most important factors of children's socializations (Hayes & Casey, 1992). A specified amount of time in each day is reserved for watching cartoons in the kindergarten. Children watch cartoons either on TV channels or on DVDs that can be provided by the kindergarten or brought by children. The total amount of time for watching TV is sixty minutes in a day and is generally divided into three periods: morning, noon, and evening. All children in the kindergarten watch the same cartoons, therefore they are transmitted more or less identical messages. However, this does not mean that audience, children, understand the same things from these messages. As Hall (1980) states audience "decodes" the message at the moment when s/he receives the message, therefore, how children understand and interpret the messages they are given are likely to be different from each other.

The Turbo, the Smurfs, Toy Story, Ice Age, Happy Feet, Finding Nemo, Popeye, The Flintstones, Tom and Jerry, Cinderella, the American Fairy Tales, Bugs Bunny, and Winnie the Pooh, are the cartoons that are mostly watched in the kindergarten. Each time cartoons were shown, I carefully and critically watched them with the children in the kindergarten. I was very familiar with some of the cartoons because I had also watched them in my childhood. However, I realized that I had never recognized these cartoons' being that much gendered and heterosexist. This shows that as Haraway indicates in *situated knowledge*, what we see is closely related to with which eyes we are looking (Haraway, 1988). Based on my observations, I can say that the most of the cartoons watched in the kindergarten are replete with heteronormative gender figures and comments. Still, there are also challenging figures regarding to gender and sexuality in the cartoons that are available to children in the kindergarten. I will share some of the gendered and heterosexist figures and dialogues that take place in the Popeye and Flintstones although there are many cartoons that are worth to mention. Then I will mention the Winnie the Pooh and Smurfs in order to show how some cartoons and cartoon characters can challenge conventional understanding of gender and sexuality.

I have chosen Popeye and Flintstones to be analyzed in detail for the following reasons: firstly, these cartoons are the ones which are most frequently watched in the kindergarten. Secondly, I consider these cartoons as a kind of representative of the other cartoons watched in kindergarten concerning to gender and sexuality, because these cartoons involve all the aspects I generally criticize in other cartoons in terms of gender and sexuality. *Popeye*, which is known as *Temel Reis* in Turkish, tells the story of *Popeye* and his girl friend, Olive Oyl, who is known as *Safinaz* in Turkish, and his main enemy Bluto who is also in love with Olive Oyl. In the Turkish version of the cartoon, Bluto is called *Kabasakal*. For my view, the Turkish names given to the characters of the *Popeye* have certain meanings. Temel can be translated as main, and Reis¹⁸ is defined as male name meaning the head or the chief; Safinaz¹⁹ is defined as female name having the meaning of coquettish according to the Turkish Language Association (*Türk Dil Kurumu*). *Kabasakal* moreover means rough beard in Turkish. Therefore, I think the Turkish names given to the characters are related to the personalities and physical appearances of the characters, and this is important for the audience, children in this case, because they see how someone having such personalities and appearances is named.

Temel Reis and *Kabasakal* fight for *Safinaz* and in general Temel Reis wins the fight as he is honest and he eats spinach. Accordingly, at the first glance the cartoon seems to aim at giving messages about having an honest and good personality and eating healthy. However, the cartoon is full of gendered and heterosexist figures and dialogues. For instance, Temel Reis is a white, muscular, powerful, masculine and heterosexual man who gains his strength by eating spinach; *Safinaz* is a white, feminine, naïve, in need of protection (of a man), vulnerable and heterosexual woman; and *Kabasakal* is a white,

¹⁸http://www.tdk.org.tr/index.php?option=com_kisiadlari&arama=anlami&uid=6935&guid=TDK.GTS.539430569524b3.93193899

¹⁹http://www.tdk.org.tr/index.php?option=com_kisiadlari&arama=anlami&uid=7073&guid=TDK.GTS.53942b9741b3a5.93954435

muscular, bearded, and heterosexual man. As Temel Reis gains his strength by eating spinach, I ask why Safinaz does not eat Spinach and gains strength to fight and defend herself against Kabasal. Moreover, the dialogues between the characters generally imply how powerful Temel Reis is, and how beautiful and good Safinaz is. Therefore, male and female children are presented with stereotyped gender figures and comments by Popeye as a gendered and heterosexist cartoon.

The Flintstones is another cartoon having heteronormative gender figures and dialogues. Unlike Popeye, the original names of the characters in the Flintstone are maintained, but their surnames are modified into Turkish. However, I will not mention it here because I think the altered surnames are not related to the gender and sexuality discussion. The Flintstones tells the story of two heterosexual married couples and their children, who are neighbors and who live in a prehistoric fictional age. Fred, the main character of the cartoon, is a brunet, rough, masculine, and generally aggressive man. The man portrayal presented by Fred reminds me of machismo which is a kind of power relations constructed by men between women, children and other men (Lancaster, 1992). Machismo moreover is associated with ‘manly’, rude, and vulgar behaviors, which can find a place in different cultures. Fred is used to command people around including his wife, Wilma, and their friends Barney and Betty. For instance, one day Fred returns home from work and he yells at Wilma, “*dinner must be ready when I come home, I work hard all day, ..*”, and Wilma mumblingly continues to set the table. Unlike Fred, Wilma is a polite and naïve person, and she tries to protect herself and her rights against her husband, Fred, from time to time by arguing with him. Betty is the best friend of Wilma, and she is married with Barney who is the best friend and colleague of Fred. Barney is a blond and more polite person compared to Fred. I give importance to the physical appearances of the characters, for instance whether they are brunet or blond; because I think a direct linkage between personalities of characters and being brunet or being blond has been constructed. Importantly, the Flintstones represents a gendered division of labour between characters, and it also draws a masculine man and feminine

woman portrayal. Thus, the characters in the Flintstone are gendered and sexualized with heterosexist norms.

Furthermore, considering the cartoons that children watch in the kindergarten, I think the representation of man and woman figures form a pattern. Women are generally represented as white, beautiful, fancy, well-kept, naïve, polite, lovely, feminine, heterosexual and generally in need of protection of especially a powerful man; and man figure is portrayed as white, strong, gentlemen, and heterosexual. Importantly, there is an emphasis on the beauty and physical appearances of women. In some cartoons, the bodies of women figures are fetishized: done hairs, painted faces, significant breasts, trim waistlines, and so on. In fact, I agree that the bodies of woman are generally represented in a way that does not associate to real woman image (Gao, 2010). Besides, all well-intentioned woman figures that are generally the main character are represented as very beautiful in modern sense and very slim. Similarly, man figures in cartoons, such as Temel Reis, and other man characters in many other cartoons as well, represents an “ideal man figure” for male children. Particular to Temel Reis, the audience, children see a white, strong, muscular, shaved, and heterosexual man image.

On the other hand, there are also some challenging and hope promising cartoons and cartoon characters. I would like to touch on how some cartoon characters might have challenging gender performances. Some cartoons involve hope promising messages regarding gender and sexuality in the kindergarten. Winnie the Pooh, I think, is one of the most challenging figures that are available to children. Winnie, a lovely bear, wears an open core red t-shirt, and its clothes, appearance and voice imply that it is a male bear. Although Winnie has a male voice, his voice is so soft, and it does not carry masculine signifiers. He is very naïve, polite, friendly, and thoughtful, and he is a bit slow-witted. Winnie, his friends and their activities in the cartoon are promising hope in several aspects. Unlike many cartoons, the characters in Winnie the Pooh rarely engage in structured activities of capitalist society (Stanger, 1987, pp. 40-41). As I could observe there is no economic exploitation and division of labor on the basis of gender in

Winnie the Pooh. In addition to Winnie, Piglet, another character in the same cartoon, is a character deconstructing heteronormative gender understanding, because the voice of Piglet implies that it is male. As a male, it is a pink creature. Piglet, moreover, has some phobias, for instance, he is afraid of thunder. Unlike Winnie and Piglet, however, Tigger portrays a masculine and strong male figure. The cartoon enables the audience, children, to see differences and diversities in gender performances. Therefore, I believe Winnie the Pooh is a very hope promising cartoon not only because it involves figures that challenge heteronormativity, but also because it shows that differences and diversities among genders are welcomed, because neither Piglet nor Winnie are humiliated or discriminated due to their “feminine” and “non-manly” behaviors.

Another challenging cartoon character is Vanity Smurf (*süslü şirin*) from the Smurfs. Vanity Smurf is a male, fancy, well-groomed Smurf who cares about his appearance. He has a flower on his head and a mirror in his hand. He generally looks at his image in the mirror. I see Vanity Smurf as challenging and hope promising figure regarding to gender issue that is available to children, because he represents an unconventional and non-masculine man figure. Similar to the case of Winnie and Piglet, Vanity Smurf is not discriminated against because of his feminine manners among the Smurf community.

Similar to cartoons, stories read in the kindergarten also include gender and sexuality messages. In this regard, it is argued that stories transfer messages to children about values (Aina & Cameron, 2011, p. 14). Although stories aim at giving moral and social messages to children, there are also covert messages in the stories. The stories read in the kindergarten mostly belong to the preschool education set named *Kırmızı Balık Eğitim Seti* (*Red Fish Education Set*). Additionally, there are also other story books which form again a set, for instance, *Tavşan Tali's* (*Rabbit Tali*) stories such as *Tali is tidying up his room* (*Tali odasını topluyor*). These stories aim at teaching children moral values and rules of daily life such as being honest, respecting elders, being hygienic, having regular sleeping and so forth; and occupations and social roles such as fireman, teacher, police etc. Although the main purpose of the story books is to give children

lessons regarding to moral values, they have gendered aspects. For instance, in the *Tali is telling the truth*, one of the stories that is read to children in the kindergarten, there are two male kids in the form of rabbit playing at home, and one of which is Tali. Tali and his friend decide to paint water color, while waiting his father, who is at work, to go to the beach. Tali's mother says "*be careful, I just bought the carpet, it is new, please don't mess up on it*". Kids continue to paint and they accidentally pour the water color jug on the carpet. The mother returns, sees the water color spot on the carpet, and asks the children who did it, but the kids couldn't confess that it was them who had poured the water color jug on the carpet. The mother cleans the carpet and then Tali tells his mother that he had poured watermark on the carpet and the mother advises them to listen to his mother and not to lie. Accordingly, the overt message in this story advises children to listen to adults and not to lie even in difficult situations. On the other hand, there are covert messages which lie at the core of gender relations. It is the mother, therefore a woman figure who buys a new carpet, which represents woman as a consumer. Further, it is again the woman, but not a man who pays attention to cleaning and thus cleans the carpet. Therefore, woman is represented in this story as consumer, as mother and as domestic laborer. Further, the father, man figure is represented working outside. Therefore, children see a gendered division of labor in this and in many other stories.

Furthermore, I could observe that children tend to pick up a character especially from cartoons, and associate him/herself with that character, which is generally the main character, therefore "hero" of that cartoon. For instance, they generally say, "*this is me, the blue one me...*". Importantly, children generally pick up characters whose gender is identical to theirs. More particularly, while female children chose girl/woman characters, male children pick up boy/man figures while watching cartoons.

The representation of man and woman figures in cartoons and stories generally affirm and support the existing gendered images. Through stereotypical representation of gender identities, children are given normatively defined gender messages which play a role in their gender and sexual identity construction. However, as I could observe and

discussed above, there are few challenging and hope promising figures available to children in cartoons.

4.1.2. Songs

Music regardless of its types has been accepted as having influence on how people think and feel, and it is seen as a kind of reflection of the culture of a society in which it is produced (Adams & Fuller, 2006). Accordingly, as songs have power to shape how individuals think and feel, I believe in the necessity to examine the songs children learn in the kindergarten. Children are taught various songs in the kindergarten, and they sing songs several times a day. In fact, they generally start the day by singing songs together in the mornings. Some of the songs sung in the kindergarten are to transfer particular information to children. For instance, through songs children learn traffic rules, emergency telephone numbers, being economical, nationalist values and Atatürk, geometric figures, numbers, colors, fruits, vegetables, and so on. Sometimes, children are taught songs just for entertainment. Similar to cartoons and stories, some songs give covert messages in addition to their main function, and gender and sexuality is one aspect of these covert messages. Some songs certainly are not related to gender and sexuality. To illustrate,

I swelled like balloons from soap bubbles; I swelled like balloons from soap bubbles. I blew once, one balloon, I blew once, five balloons, I blew once, ten balloons. Balloons are flight, flight, balloons are flight. Children ran ran, children ran. Balloons fell into place, all exploded, all exploded.²⁰

and,

²⁰The translations of the songs cited in this research are done by me. The original version of the song: "Sabun köpüklerinden balonlar yaptım, sabun köpüklerinden balonlar yaptım. Bir üfledim bir balon, bir üfledim beş balon, bir üfledim on balon. Uçtu uçtu balonlar, uçtu balonlar. Koştu koştu çocuklar koştu çocuklar. Yere düştü balonlar, hepsi de patladılar, hepsi de patladılar."

I am the roof your home, the door of a tent. I am the sail on the sea. Guess what who am I? I have three edges, three sharp corners. Let's come kids, guess who am I? The triangle, my name is triangle²¹

These songs aim at teaching children notions such as numbers and geometric figures in this case. Such kinds of songs can be further exemplified. On the other hand, unlike the songs which have nothing to do with gender and sexuality, some songs directly or indirectly give messages regarding to gender and sexuality. I have chosen these songs which are to be examined here because these songs are the ones which were most frequently sung in the kindergarten.

Suzi washes the clothes; waters are flooding from her head. Those floods shall be mine. I wish I had twin siblings. One is ..., one is Jump chocolate, chocolate. I ate salad evening. The half of the salad; the wife of the doctor²²

While singing that song, children jump and wave their hands and arms, and at the end of the song, children are supposed to close their legs. Otherwise they lose the game, so the song is kind of the lyrics of a game. In this song, there is an individual washing the clothes. What is critical in these lyrics is that the person washing the clothes is given a female name; therefore it signifies a woman as washing clothes, as performing domestic work. Further, at the end of the song, the wife, a woman, is mentioned in relation to her husband, a doctor. In sum, we see a woman as performing domestic work, and as the wife of a doctor.

²¹The original version of the song: "Evinin çatısıyım, çadırın kapısıyım. Denizdeki yelkenim. Blin bakalım ben kimim?Üç kenarım var benim, üç tane sivri köşem.Haydi gelin çocuklar, bilin bakalım ben kimim? Üçgen, benim adım üçgen."

²²The original version of the song: "Suzi çamaşırıykar, başından seller akar. O seller benim olsa. İkiz kardeşim olsa. Biri ..., biri ... Hop çikolata çikolata. Akşam yedim salata. Salatanın yarısı, doktor beyin karısı."

*My mother cuts lemon like this, squeezes lemon like that, washes the clothes like this, wrings out the clothes. She irons like this and plaits my hair like that. Then she smiles at me.*²³

The lyrics of the song cited above are another example of how some songs that children learn in the kindergarten are normatively gendered. In this song, woman is mentioned as mother who performs all domestic works from kitchen to laundry. Then, at the end, it is indicated that she smiles to her daughter/son, which implies that she is a lovely person and she does all these tasks willingly. On the other hand, in another song, a man figure is represented as a father who has control over the economy of the family.

*We made a deal with my father. Electricity will not be switched on uselessly. Top water will not be flood uselessly. My father will buy me a bicycle with the money we saved.*²⁴

This song draws a man figure with the identity of father who has the capacity to establish rules and regulate the consumption decisions for the household. The representation of man in other songs as well supports stereotypical gendered discourses.

Furthermore, there is an implicit emphasis on the family in these songs cited above. However, in some songs which children learn in the kindergarten, and which they sing almost every day, there is a direct emphasis on the family. To illustrate,

*Mother, father and children form a family. The closest relatives take empty places. Family members live all together. They collaboratively overcome troubles and sadness.*²⁵

This song represents the portrayal of nuclear and heterosexual family. Importantly, it also implies that family is a united, homogenous, and peaceful entity in which

²³The original version of the song: “Annem limonu böyle keser, suyunu da böyle sıkar. Çamaşırını da böyle yıkar, suyunu da böyle sıkar. Ütüyü de böyle yapar. Saçımı da böyle örer. Sonra da bana böyle güler.”

²⁴The original version of the song: “Babamla anlaştık sular boşuna akmayacak. Elektrikler boşuna yanmayacak. Babam da biriktirdiğimiz parayala bana bisiklet alacak.”

²⁵The original version: “Anne baba çocuklar bir aile olurlar. En yakın akrabalar boşluğu doldururlar. Aile bireyleri hep birlikte yaşarlar. Dertleri kederleri birlik olup aşarlar.”

individuals, family members, are shoulder to shoulder against to possible troubles. However, inner conflicts between family members are not mentioned. As the representation of family has been discussed in detail under the *Emphasis on Family* subheading in the second chapter, I prefer not to go deeper now.

Hence, some songs that children learn in the kindergarten are full of normative gender messages. While women are represented as domestic laborer, care giver, and lovely, men are represented as having control over financial decisions at home, and being in authority. Importantly, there is a considerable emphasis on family. In fact, both woman and man are mentioned either as mother and father or wife and husband. Thus, many songs have gender roles messages (Aparicio, 1994, p. 663).

4.1.3. Toys

Similar to other education materials, toys are considered as texts through which gender identities of subjects are constructed (Francis, 2010), because at the very moment of playing with toys children perform roles of gender identities. Children are given different types of toys and plays based on their gender identities, but they do not see toys as gendered at a very early age (Francis, 2010). For instance, girls are generally provided with toys that are to develop their communicative and emotional skills while the toys given to boys are to develop technical skills. Providing children with different types of toys makes children develop different gender characteristics (Francis, 2010), and to learn that some toys are for girls and some are for boys through time. Importantly, learning this categorization -girls' toys and boys' toys- may result in children drawing symbolic boundaries in their play between male and female children (Francis, 2010), which I will discuss under the *Peer Socialization* subheading.

The general discourse operating in the kindergarten regarding to toys supports the idea that all children ought to play with all types of toys. However, in practice there are some variations in terms of toys that children play with in the kindergarten. Firstly, even if the

toys that are given to children are not gendered, i.e. construction toys, memory cards etc., teachers may make sex-based segregations for grouping children. To illustrate, Canan was giving puzzles to six year old age children, and she chose two puzzles according to genders on the basis of their themes. She loudly announced the puzzles she chose: *“play park for girls, and construction vehicles for boys, let’s sit on the carpet”*.

Secondly, there are toys that are definitely gendered, for which, fashion dolls such as Barbie, make up tools, toy cooking set, cars, wild creatures can be given as example. As I could observe, teachers do not prevent children from playing with cross-gender toys, on the contrary, all children in a class are provided with the same toy set. For instance, if it is time to play with dolls and toy cooking sets, these toys are laid out and children come together to play. As male and female children, regardless of their gender, are encouraged to play with such gendered toys together, this might be seen as gender equality in games. Gender equality and gender neutrality can be procured for children’s equal access to education materials, especially for gendered toys such as dolls; however, this attitude is not valid for sexuality (Martin, 2005; Francis, 2010). In other words, conventional boundaries of genders can be crossed in playing toys, but when it comes to sexuality, a taboo in Turkey and many other societies as well, crossing the normative boundaries of sexuality is not possible. In one instance I observed, it was a free toy day, and five and six years old children were playing with the toys that they had brought from their homes. A male kid found a pink toy lipstick on the carpet and asked Suzan, *“teacher what is this?”*, showing the lipstick. Suzan took it and looked at it for few seconds, and then said *“a lipstick”* pretending as if she is putting on the lipstick. When the boy said, *“me too”* Suzan told, *“boys cannot use it, only girls can use it. You know mothers put on makeup”* by pretending to use it. Then she asked to children in the class, *“kids, whose is this?”*, Eda, a six year old girl replied, *“mine”*. While reaching the lipstick up to Eda, Suzan asked her *“did you put on makeup this morning?”*, and Eda nodded her head yes. Consequently, as seen in this case, male and female children are provided and encouraged to cross gender toys; boys are allowed to play with dolls and

toy kitchen sets, and girls are allowed to play with vehicles and “boys’ toys. However, a toy, a lipstick in this case, which seems a threat to normative sexuality, heterosexuality, children are absolutely not allowed to play with. I think the examination of toys and children’s playing with toys is crucial because how children perform gender roles in playing becomes clearly visible when they play with such gendered toys. For, these toys are gendered therefore they are ascribed certain meanings.

Moreover, some dolls such as Barbie are problematic, in my view, because the body image of woman is unrealistic. They represent the woman figure as white, sometimes bronzed, too fancy, too slim, having recognizable breast, slim waist, taller than average, and very feminine. Therefore, similar to the case of cartoon, the body image of woman portrayed in some dolls is fetishized. I think this gives inappropriate message to children regarding being a woman. On the other hand, the representation of human image in some dolls, especially baby dolls are more realistic. Lastly, I observed in the kindergarten that most of the dolls which children care for, feed, and put to sleep, are in the form of female. I do not know the number of female dolls given girl identity through clothes, hairs and etc.; however, there is only one male doll which is Ken, the lover of Barbie in the kindergarten. Then, I consider this in general sense, and I realized that there are more female dolls than male dolls. Thus, I question whether my small scale observation regarding to the number of male and female dolls could be generalized, and if yes, what could be the reasons this. Despite my effort to find a possible answer to this question, I could not find a reliable answer.

Although most toys are generally ascribed a gender, there still are some toys that do not carry any gendered and heterosexist messages. For instance, toy blocks, and toy spoons for carrying eggs, and construction toys such as Lego are examples coming to my mind that are neither gendered nor heterosexual, because these toys are not in gendered colors such as pink or blue, but rather they are colorful. Besides, male and female children are equally and together allowed to play with these toys. However some teachers, Canan for instance, tend to group children on the basis of their gender while playing with Lego as I

mentioned above. Unlike Canan, I did not observe that Suzan, Sinem and Melek made a sex-based grouping for children playing with Lego. On the contrary, they first spread out Lego equally on the floor and then ask children to come close to play.

Hence, majority of toys that are available to children in the kindergarten directly or indirectly give gendered and heterosexist messages to children. Further, although children regardless of their gender are encouraged to play all types of toys, they are controlled and regulated by teachers while playing. The next subheading will discuss teachers' interventions in and comments on children's plays and toy preferences in the kindergarten.

4.2. Peer Socialization

It has been argued that gender and *sexuality (my addition)* perceptions of children are influenced by two main aspects of early childhood education, which are teachers and materials in the kindergarten (Aina & Cameron, 2011, p. 13). I have discussed gender and sexuality perceptions of the early childhood educators and its reflections in the kindergarten, and education materials giving overt or covert gender and sexuality messages to children in the kindergarten. However, I believe that peer socialization among children can also be considered a significant component of the construction of their gender and sexual identities; therefore, in this part I will be discussing the peer socialization among children in the kindergarten. I observed that children develop a kind of control mechanism through which they regulate each other in the kindergarten. This control mechanism developed by children, which I call peer socialization, operates among others for gender and sexuality norms in the kindergarten. Therefore, peer socialization among children in the kindergarten is another factor shaping children's gender and sexuality perceptions and therefore identities in early childhood education.

4.2.1. Internalization of Heteronormative Gender Roles

Children's learning about themselves as male or female is required for them to have a recognizable social identity within the existing social order, otherwise it may be a social fail for them (Davies, 1989, p. 11). Therefore, children develop their gender and sexual identities through the social interactions and discourses around and about gender and sexuality. However, children have various forms of negotiations and resistance to what is tried to be imposed upon them and/or what they are asked (not) to do (Davies, 1989), because children are active in constructing their gender and sexual identities (Connell, 1996; Mac an Ghail, 1994). Laughing, ignoring, and avoiding what they are instructed are some ways through which children resist the norms and values. I believe these are also valid for gender and sexuality.

Based on my observations in the kindergarten, I argue that children start to internalize gender and sexuality norms, although sometimes they also challenge heteronormative gender patterns. In this regard, I think children's starting to play with dolls or cars when they are provided with toys, children's usually setting the play of a heterosexual family unit, and performing mother or father roles support my argument. I will share a few examples from my field notes in order to show how children seem to internalize and/or resist or challenge normative gender and sexuality. Play is a volunteer activity, and the organization of play including its content and rules are arranged by the players, children (Fromberg, 2005), therefore children reflect their perceptions of social reality in their plays. Accordingly, play is an important area to understand how children perceive and have learned gender and sexuality. In free toy days, children bring their own toys and play together by sharing their toys with their friends in the kindergarten. Their toy preferences, I believe is one of the indicators of how they internalize and resist and/or challenge heteronormativity, although parents have control over what kind of toys children could have because they may want to buy gendered or gender neutral toys to their children. As I could observe, Ozan and Baran, five year old boys, always bring gender neutral toys such as plush toys, toy writing set, toy farm, and toy funfair. On the other hand, some children usually bring highly gendered toys such as Barbie, pink plush,

toy make up tools, wild creatures, trucks, and cars. Freeman (2007) argues that children generally start to prefer gendered toys and activities after they learn whether they are boy or girl. Importantly, I could not observe children bringing cross gender toys, for instance, a girl bringing a truck and/or a boy bringing doll, but Sinem told me Gökhan once brought her mother's make up tools to the kindergarten, and although Sinem had explained him that make up tools are for women he insisted to play with them. This exemplifies how he resists the normative gender roles although his intent of keeping to play with make up tools cannot be known. In other words, in this particular instance, one could not know why Gökhan did not keep bringing makeup tools to the kindergarten, and whether he still continued to play with make-up tools at home or not. He might have given up bringing make-up tools to kindergarten either because he has learned normative gender and sexuality roles, or because he feels the necessity of obeying the rules of authority, his teacher. Further, I did observe many times that children do engage in playing with cross gender toys. This, children's not bringing cross gender toys to the kindergarten, might be again related to the parents' regulating the toys children can have. Parents might allow their children to play other genders' toys but they may not buy other genders' toys to their children. Considering widespread childhood understandings in Turkey, children are to obey the rules that are given by authority figures, who are mostly their parents or teachers.

Burcu, a five year old girl, always brings a plush pink rabbit which she uses as an infant. She cuddles it, feeds it, and puts it to sleep as if she is "the mother" of that infant. While performing the care-giver and parent role, she usually sits on the sofa crossing her legs, and cuddles the toy rabbit pretending to feed it. In fact, she sometimes mumbles lullabies to put it to sleep, or she reprimands it in order to make it eat or sleep. Accordingly, the way she performs gender roles while playing implies she has already learnt the normative gender roles, because as a female kid she is performing the mother role in a feminine manner. Additionally, on the day when children were provided with costumes, Burcu was holding a white belt and asked me, "*is this a girl belt?*", I kept my

silence for a while, but she asked again, and I replied, *“I don’t know Burcu, it doesn’t matter I think, you can wear it if you want”*. She was not satisfied with my answer and she asked her friend, Eda. She said, *“yes, it is a girl belt, you can wear it,”*, and Burcu put it on her waist. Therefore, it seems that she is aware of the existing boys and girls categorization and she wants to obey its rules, because children see the importance of gender categories as they are subjected to many gendered figures and discourses so that they start to do their genders (Francis, 2010).

Additionally, the comments of children also show how they perceive gender and sexuality. For instance, children were playing with toys in the five age class, and I was sitting on the sofa and taking notes. Fırat, a six year old male kid, was also sitting near me and holding a toy car steering wheel, and a card. After asking his name and telling mine, I asked him whether he has a driving license; after waiting several seconds he replied *“it isn’t real, it is a toy”*. I told *“I know it is a toy, but you have a toy driving license, look it is written here”* showing him the card he was holding. Then, I mumbled the traffic song which they always sing in the kindergarten; *“... who makes mistake, who do not obey the rules, I will fine them...”*²⁶. While I was mumbling, he looked at me and said *“girls cannot be a police, boys can be a police; girls can be sister and mother, boys can be father brother and police”* interrupting my singing. I could not say anything in return. I did want to explain to him that there are female police too, and girls are not only sisters or mothers, but they are teachers, doctors, lawyers etc., but I could not do it because the head of the kindergarten had put rules for me and my behaviors in kindergarten, and had made me promise *“not to confuse children”*. All that I could say was *“well, okay then”*, then he went somewhere else in the class. The way he reacted to me, his manners and his comments, imply that Fırat, as many children and adults, has learnt and is still learning the artificial distinction between girls and boys, and who girls and boys could become. In fact, he contributes to this distinction through his comments.

²⁶The original version of the song: *“Ben büyüğünce trafik polisi olacağım. Şapkamı takıp, düdüğümü çalıp yayaalara yolları açacağım. Kim hata yaparsa kurallara uymazsa, onlara ceza yazacağım.”*

On the other hand, throughout the field work, I could observe Firat playing “girlish toys” such as dolls with his male and female friends in the kindergarten. Consequently, Firat and many other children as well are learning heteronormative gender rules and roles in one hand; on the other hand they also challenge these normative rules and roles through engaging in cross gender activities. However, I do not claim that children challenge normative gender roles intentionally.

One day Suzan was reading a story to children, and children were sitting on a sofa listening to her. Then she suddenly said to the children “*look at Berk, how he sits*” in order to make him sit “properly” and Burcu said “*he sits like an ox*”, Berk replied “*no I am sitting like a man, men sit like this*”. Burcu said by shaking her head “*but girls do not sit like that*”. In this case, the comments of Berk means more to me than that of Burcu, because Berk generally challenges normatively defined gender roles through his comments and behaviors in the kindergarten. He is far away from hegemonic masculinity, on the contrary, he is a naïve, obedient, well-behaved child. However, in this case he defines himself as belonging to man category and claims that he sits like a man, which signifies that he recognizes the normative gender discourses on the one hand, and on the other hand he challenges heteronormativity in some other instances. In this sense, Butler argues (Butler, 1997) that this simultaneous and paradoxical submission and mastery of agents is how a subject becomes a subject.

Importantly, I observed that younger children in the kindergarten also perform gendered behaviors and make gendered comments. For instance, I was sitting and taking notes on the sofa in the four age group classroom, and children were playing. Rojda, a four year old girl, came near me and asked me to join in her play. Although the head of the kindergarten had asked me not to have social interactions with children in order to prevent the possibility of their being “confused” due to my comments, through the end of the fieldwork she told me I could play with children and have a chat with them. Therefore, I accepted Rojda’s offer to play together; actually, we had met her before in the kindergarten, and we were on good terms. She showed me her Pony magazine,

which is pink and has colorful tinsels on it. Then she said to me, *“I am your mom and you are my kid. I will put your clothes on, ok?”* I replied *“okay,”* but, at that moment, I was thinking, how a four year age kid could know performing mother roles. I mean, she hardly speaks, indeed, I need to give my attention to understand what she is saying because she cannot pronounce well, but she has learned to act like *“mother”*. Then, mothering and performing a mother role, therefore gender roles must be learned before learning to speak properly.

One of the important results of children’s learning and internalizing gender and sexuality norms, I think, is that children form groups based on their gender and may exclude other genders. Concretely speaking, children construct girls and boys boundaries in their activities and they may not allow other children to cross borders. To illustrate, six year age children were playing puzzles and they have already grouped according to their genders. Narin wanted to join in the boys’ group, but boys reject her saying *“no, girls cannot play with this. This is for boys. It is Spiderman”*. So, Narin returns to the girls’ group to play. Although Canan heard that boys did not let Narin play with them, she did not intervene but just watched them, therefore she let them discriminate her, and consider Spiderman as for boys, but not girls. This also shows that children also start to control each other regarding gender identities in the kindergarten, which I will discuss in the next subheading.

Hence, children learn heteronormative gender categories in early ages (Freeman, 2007), and they internalize or they may resist and/or challenge gender and sexuality norms that they are imposed upon. Further, as children’s age increase, their gendered performances also increase (Albert & Porter, 1988). The process of learning normative gender and sexuality can be outlined in this way: children first encounter many discourses and figures concerning gender and sexuality, they learn them by also through possible resistances. Then they reproduce and contribute to hegemonic gender and sexuality perception, even though some of them challenge it.

4.2.2. Control Mechanism among Children

As indicated earlier, children are aware of the importance of gender categories and they seek ways of performing gender roles (Francis, 2010), and as I could observe, children also tend to control their own and their peers' behaviors in the kindergarten in terms of gender performances. For children are not only normalized and regulated in early childhood, but they also learn to control themselves and become a self-surveillant (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, play has an important role in terms of peer socialization and control mechanism among children. Play, which is one of the ways children learn, makes children gather around a common activity in which they share their ideas and thoughts (Fromberg, 2005). Besides, children can control each other in plays, and such controlling covers gender performances as indicated earlier in this section of the thesis. To illustrate, I will share two examples from five and six age groups. Firstly, in the five age classroom, Ela and Burcu were playing with their fashion dolls, Barbie; and Ozan, a five years old boy, asked them to join in their plays. However, Ela rejected him saying *"no, you can't have Barbie because Barbie is a girl toy; you can't play with us"*. Ela has already learned the categorization of girls' toys and boys' toys and she controls herself and her friends in playing gendered toys. However, I observed several times that both Ela and Burcu play dolls with male children in the kindergarten. Therefore, children might use gender categories that they have learned as an excuse to control their games, or they adopt and reflect such gender categories in their games in their social relations.

Secondly, on the free toy day in the kindergarten, a male kid brought a toy which was a cartoon character, and which I had not seen before. It was white and black color, and it was like warrior creature. A six year old female kid, Dilan, was playing with it, and Arya, 6-age female kid, said *"it is boys' toy, you cannot play with it; girls do not play such toys."* Another 6 age female kid, Eda, supported Arya by saying, *"you might play with it only when you grow up, but little girls cannot play with it."* As seen in this

example, interventions of children in each others' gender performances, toy preferences in this case, take place in early childhood. Importantly, such behaviors of children, even these children mentioned here, cannot be generalized. In other words, sometimes they engage in cross gender plays and do not regulate their peers' gender performances such as toy preferences, although sometimes they regulate each other by intervening each others' plays, toy preferences, and so forth. Children's regulating each other while playing might be related to their preferences of with whom they want to play. In other words, children might discriminate or regulate their friends in plays because they may refuse to play with them. I believe that this might be the reason of children's regulating each other in some cases, but there are also cases in which children intervene in their friends' plays and toy preferences just because they think that play or toy does not suit his or her gender identity.

4.3. Teachers' Interventions in and Comments on Children's Plays and Toy Preferences

As discussed in the third chapter and in the previous parts of this chapter, the early childhood educators that participated in this research generally have conventional gender and sexuality perceptions. The majority of them tend to think that there are 'natural' distinctions and differences between male and female children, and they reproduce the dichotomy between male and female children through sex-based segregations and gendered and heterosexist practices, attitudes and discourses in the kindergarten. However, based on my observations and interviews that I conducted during the fieldwork and pilot research of the thesis, I can say that there are also early childhood educators who have challenging gender and sexuality perceptions. For instance, in my view Esra has the most challenging gender and sexuality perception among the other early childhood educators who participated in this research because she defined gender as "*it is how one feels*", while the majority of the early childhood educators that I interviewed during the pilot research responded as *man and woman or girl and boy*.

Gender and sexuality perceptions are reflected in early childhood educators' toys and game preferences, and their interventions in and comments on children's plays in the kindergarten. Accordingly, early childhood educators' interventions in and comments on children's plays and toy preferences in the kindergarten are very likely to be gendered and heterosexist. Thus, one might rightfully ask whether there are any non-gendered and non-heterosexist practices and comments in the kindergarten. Although the overwhelming majority of teachers' interventions and comments concerning to children's plays and toy preferences in the kindergarten involve heteronormative gender and sexuality messages, there are also some, but few challenging practices available to children in the kindergarten as will be discussed in the later parts of this chapter. However, these non-gendered practices are considerably limited and therefore are rarely recognizable. Consequently, these non-gendered practices' being predominant guidelines for children is nearly impossible.

As I could observe in the kindergarten, children like playing house, and they are encouraged by the teachers to play it. Importantly, male and female children are provided with toys for playing house, and they are asked to set up a play, however, how they play, which roles they take, and how they perform their roles are observed and regulated by the teachers. In order to illustrate this, I will tell how the teachers in the kindergarten observe and regulate plays and children's play in games.

My first example is from a free toy day. Children were playing with toys that they had brought from home and Sinem, the teacher of the four year age group, had also provided toys for playing house. Gökhan was sitting on the floor near female children and playing with a toy plate, toy pot, toy cup, and toy cutlery. He was acting as if he was cooking and serving tea or coffee by using the toy pot and toy cup. Sinem was looking at them, and then she said: "*Gökhan, are you cooking, what are you cooking oğlum*", and Gökhan replied "*I am preparing a tea, would you like to drink, take it*". Sinem took the toy cup and pretended as if she was drinking the tea. Then she told "*immm, it tastes very good, that's my boy, he has grown up, became father, and made me a tea*". At the first

glance, it might seem that there is not an unfavorable aspect of her behavior. However, I believe there is a hidden message behind the visible in her attitude toward Gökhan, because she said “... *became a father...*” at the end. This implies that she highlighted the gendered role that a male kid, Gökhan in this case, can have. Indicating the “proper” roles in plays, and therefore future identities that male and female children would have, I think, means to draw the lines of heteronormativity, because Gökhan, in this case, can become a father or brother, but not a mother or sister according to existing normative gender and sexuality.

Similar to Sinem, Suzan also observes children’s plays, and intervenes in the roles children are taking. One day, Ela and Burcu were playing with the Barbie dolls. They were changing its clothes, brushing its hair, and talking about the play. Then, Onur came and asked them to join in their play, but the girls rejected him saying, “*no, you can’t play with us*”. Suzan heard that Onur was rejected by Ela and Burcu, and told them “*Onur can also play with you, he can be father or he can be brother. Lets share your toys with him*” and made him join in with the girls. In my view, what she did was nice on the one hand because she explained children that boys can play with Barbie dolls and with girls; in fact she encouraged them to play together. Therefore, her attitude in this case is deconstructing the conventional attitudes against boys’ playing with dolls. On the other hand, there is a negative side of her action. She regulated the role that Onur would take in the game by saying “... *he can be father or he can be brother...*”. Thus, she limited him with heteronormative gender roles as she attained a “proper” role based on his sexed body.

As can be seen in the cases above, the teachers in the kindergarten can support children playing house, which is generally considered a “girls’ game. In fact, their attitudes regarding boys playing house can be regarded as in favor of gender equity, because as both the head of the kindergarten and the teachers in the kindergarten indicated, children learn their future roles through games and toys. Therefore, through playing house, male and female children learn to take part in domestic tasks such as cooking. In this case,

through playing with toy kitchen tools or Barbie dolls, male children learn that just like girls/women, boys/men cook and take care of babies too. In other words, teachers might be on the side of gender equity, and might develop several strategies for teaching children gender equity. However, as Robinson and Diaz (2006, pp. 137-138) state, there is a limit of this, which is, I believe, heteronormatively defined.

The dialog between the drama teacher, Serap, and Berk in the drama lesson can be another supportive example for my argument. Serap set up a spontaneous game in which there were a mother duck, a baby duck, and a wolf. The wolf role is given to male kids; the mother duck role is given to female kids; and the baby duck role is given to both male and female children in each play. Thus, the roles in the play were assigned to children on the basis of gender. Before starting to play, Serap explained the game to the children by telling the story: one day mother duck offers her baby duck to go to the lake to have a bath, but baby duck does not want to go. Thus, the mother duck goes to the lake by leaving baby duck alone at home. Then, the wolf shows up and goes near baby duck and tries to convince him/her to go to his place as he wants to make a dinner from baby duck. Meanwhile, the mother duck returns home, sees the wolf, and protects her baby duck. Serap also showed children how a mother looks like by saying *“I used red lipstick, polished my nails, I am so pretty”*, and she asked children to perform as she had shown. When Serap asks *“who wants to be mother duck?”*, female kids raised their hands, and Berk also said *“I want to be mother”*. She told him *“no, who can be mother? Girls can be mothers, boys cannot be mothers. You are a boy so you cannot be mother”*, she turned her face to the female kids and said *“I want a beautiful mother duck”*. Then, Serap looked at me and told me: *“actually he knows who can be mother or father, but he got excited so he confused”*. The only thing I could do was saying *“hihi”* by shaking my head. In this case, Serap underlined the normative gender roles and openly remind children of normative gender roles. She also abnormalized the gender roles and identities that deviate from this. Therefore, she reproduced the boundaries of heteronormative gender roles and identities that male and female children can have. Importantly, I could

not observe a case in which a female child wanted to perform a nonconforming gender role, for instance a father role, throughout the field research.

Although the majority of the teachers that I observed in the kindergarten and interviewed outside the kindergarten think that both male and female children can and should play house and dolls, they covertly give messages that they can be father or they can be mother. On the other hand, there are also those teachers who are absolutely against male children's playing with dolls and housing. For instance, during the pilot research, I visited a private kindergarten in an upper middle class neighborhood of Ankara in order to interview the early childhood educators working in that kindergarten. When I asked Meral, a female early childhood educators having 15 years of work experience, what she thinks about toys, and whether there is a distinction between girls' toys and boys' toys, she replied

... there is no problem for girls' playing cars, but when a boy plays with a doll... I am annoyed when I see a boy holding or feeding a doll. I can't accept this... when a boy play with doll, I immediately take it from his hand and give him something else. God forbids, (allah korusun), I am a mother too, I have a son too, their playing with dolls makes me uncomfortable...

As in the case of Meral, some early childhood educators may be totally against male children's playing with dolls, as this is seen as a girls' toy and associated with nurturing. Nurturing is considered a feature of women (Martino & Berrill, 2003). In my view, Meral and other childhood educators are troubled by male children's playing with dolls as nurturing activities because it rings the bells of homosexuality. Importantly, I did not come across the case in which a teacher feels uncomfortable or is against female children's playing with cars or repair toys, and I believe the very reason for this is the fact that there is a greater emphasis on and anxiety about males' non-conforming gender behaviors (Epstein, 1994a; Mac an Ghail, 1994), and also about male homosexuality.

4.4. Daily Practices in the Kindergarten

The existing literature on gender and sexuality in education (preschool and elementary school) has shown that school is a gendered and gendering social setting (Asan, 2010; Connell, 1996; Epstein, 1994a; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Robinson & Diaz, 2006). Accordingly, as have been discussed until now, practices, figures, and discourses operating in the kindergarten which give hidden messages in terms of gender and sexuality. However, there are also non-gendered, therefore challenging practices in the kindergarten. In this part, I aim to analyze daily practices in the kindergarten in order to understand what kind of messages they give to children.

I would like to make clear what I mean by daily practices. Daily practices are routine practices that occur each day in the kindergarten. Accordingly, toilet usages, changing clothes, sleeping time can be examples for the daily practices in the kindergarten. Since I have discussed the toilet usage issue in third chapter while discussing sex-based segregated practices in the kindergarten, I will not include the toilet usage into this part.

Changing clothes for sleeping time is one of the daily practice in the kindergarten that I would like to mention concerning to gender and sexuality. Three, four, and five year age groups sleep between 12.30 pm and 15.00 pm in the kindergarten, but six year old children only rest for thirty minutes in their classes. There is a separate sleeping room for three year old children, but four and five year old children sleep in their own classrooms. The cleaner of the kindergarten makes the children's beds while the children are having lunch. After lunch, children come to their classroom, and they change their clothes and put on their pajamas with the help of their teachers and the helper mother; and after sleeping, time, children are dressed in the classroom. Both male and female children change their clothes side by side. As I could observe, this does not create discomfort either for Suzan or Sinem. As I could not have chance to observe the three year age group, I am not able to make a comment for Melek's attitude on this issue. Children moreover might need to change their t-shirts or trousers as their clothes may be dirtied. In such cases, Suzan and Sinem change children's clothes just next to children's drawers in the classroom. However, the case in the six age classroom is different. Canan

does not allow the children in her classroom to change their clothes or fix their clothes (*kiyafet düzeltmek*) such as putting undershirt in, or pulling a panty-hose, but rather, she clothes children outside the classroom. Besides, she tells children not to change or fix their clothes in front of their friends in the classroom.

Another daily practice taking place in the kindergarten is brushing the hairs of female children. The hair of each female child in the kindergarten is brushed and decorated with buckles before each meal time, and after sleeping time every day. In fact, each female child has a comb and several buckles in their personal drawers in the kindergarten. However, the hairs of male children are not brushed: even if they demand so, they are rejected. One day, Berk, a five age male kid asked his teacher, Suzan, to brush his hair too, but she rejected by saying “*first girls*”. Here, what is important, I think, is that female children are to be feminized in several ways, and decorating them is one of them. The hair of male children is not brushed or they are not decorated because being fancy, well-kept (*bakımlı*) are associated with femininity, attributed to womanhood. Thus, the rigid line between girl/woman and boy/man is clearly drawn, which are to be learned by children.

Additionally, there are some activities children take part in which do not contain any sex-based segregation, gendered and heterosexist aspects, at least in my view. Dancing, for instance, is one of the non-gendered and non-heterosexist activities in the kindergarten. The teachers provide children with songs, which are usually lilt, to dance in each day. In some songs, children need to match in order to dance as a couple. However, teachers do not intervene in how and with whom children match. I observed that same-sex children becoming partner for dancing does not create a discomfort for the teachers. In fact, although the teachers may intervene in physical closeness such as hugging between male kids, they do not split children while dancing. As physical closeness between female children is not considered as a threat, I do not think that teachers would feel discomfort in girls’ dancing together, but their attitudes toward dancing have surprised me.

In this whole chapter I have argued that hidden curriculum is an important component of the factors effecting the gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education, in addition to the practices of the teachers discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, I have tried to show that hidden curriculum including education materials, peer socialization, teachers' interventions in and comments on children's plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten play a role in the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and the construction of their gender and sexual identities. Importantly, although, there are some non-gendered, therefore challenging figures and comments in education materials such as cartoons, stories, the majority of them carry gendered and heterosexist messages. In this sense, Winnie and Vanity Smurf, for instance, could be the best examples for non-gendered and challenging figure. However, it is highly difficult to pose similar argument for the case of sexuality. Concretely speaking, there is an overt and covert references and emphasis on heterosexual relationship. Besides, there are toys that support the dominance of heterosexuality. Barbie and Ken, I think, is one of the most normative heterosexual couples that exist in the worlds of children. Therefore, children are provided with the characters that are in romantic relationship; however, all of these relationships existing in the education materials in the kindergarten are heterosexual. Therefore, children are not provided with the "possibility" of same-sex relationships in the kindergarten. Moreover, throughout this chapter I have also tried to show the importance of peer socialization among children in the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and therefore in construction of gender and sexual identities in early childhood education. Based on my observations and small interactions with children in the kindergarten, I can say that most of the children have learnt and continue to learn social rules including gender and sexuality norms, and they interact with their peers accordingly what they have learnt. This means that they may control and regulate each other in terms of gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER V

5. Conclusion

5.1. To Sum Up

This thesis has sought to investigate *how gender and sexual identities of children are constructed in early childhood education in contemporary Turkey*. Discussions carried out in this research are based on the data that are collected through ethnographic field research lasting about two months in a private kindergarten in a middle class environment of Ankara. Throughout this research, I have mainly aimed to give answers to the questions of how heteronormative gender and sexuality understandings operate and how children are socialized within heteronormative gender and sexuality norms by also considering how children negotiate with these norms in early childhood education institutions in Turkey.

I agree that gender socialization of an individual starts even before its birth not only because one is born into a heterosexist society but also because the environment into which one is born is organized based on one's sex. This gender socialization continues throughout one's lifetime, and as indicated earlier in the research, I believe early childhood and early childhood education are crucial for gender and sexual identity construction. I have also argued that school sites are generally organized in a heterosexist way, and children are taught heteronormative gender and sexuality categories through schooling even though there may not be a direct sexuality education. Consequently, my research has shown that schooling has a very crucial role in gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education in line with studies conducted in different social contexts (Blaise, 2005; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson &

Diaz, 2006; Robinson & Davies, 2008). Despite the fact that this study is conducted in a different social context than those studies cited above, there are some similarities in terms of results. Therefore, the main difference of my research from the previous researches on this topic is its being conducted in a different social context, in Turkey. Furthermore, differently from those previous studies, this study has given place to the discussion of the roles of children's families in the formation of children gender and sexuality perceptions, and construction of their gender and sexual identities.

This study has discussed how families of children play a role in the formation of children's gender and sexuality perceptions and their gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood. Survey results have shown that children are socialized in a nuclear heterosexual family environment in which there are usually gendered relations between parents. Particularly speaking, children see that it is mostly women who are primarily responsible for domestic tasks and child care; and it is again women who spend much more time alone with children. The effects of this fact are clearly seen in children's plays and games in the kindergarten, for instance, children are likely to imitate their parents while playing. Hence, this research has pointed out that the effects of children's families on their gender and sexuality perceptions and identity constructions are very important. I could also observe that there is a strong emphasis on the family institution in the kindergarten, and this emphasis exists in discourses and comments operating in the kindergarten, and in education materials such as stories, songs, or cartoons. Importantly, children are given the messages that the ideal family form is a nuclear heterosexual family; and the family institution is represented as gendered and heterosexual unit which is a "sacred" and "peaceful" space. Additionally, I have claimed that heterosexual marriage might become a goal, a telos for children as a result of discourses and comments around the family and being a parent.

In the sense of children's gender socialization, I have argued that gender and sexuality perceptions of teachers and how their concerned perceptions are reflected in their social relations and interactions with children in the kindergarten setting are important in

understanding how heteronormative gender and sexuality operate in the kindergarten. This research has shown that the hegemonic heteronormative gender and sexuality understanding is dominant, and there is an attempt to socialize children within the boundaries of heteronormative gender and sexuality patterns. According to the early childhood educators who participated in this research, each child is born either as a girl or as a boy and they become aware of their gender after a certain age. In fact, most of the teachers tend to attribute different features to children based on their gender. Accordingly, they reproduce the dichotomy between male and female children through several ways such as making sex-based classifications, behaving towards male and female children differently and so forth. The teachers moreover generally attempt to regulate children's genders and sexualities through controlling and normalizing desires and bodies of children such as kissing or masturbation. However, I do not claim that all the early childhood educators have entirely heteronormative gender and sexuality understandings which are reflected in all their behaviors or in their social relations with children. On the contrary, some of the teachers who participated in this research have challenging ideas in terms of gender and sexuality, therefore they can break normative gender and sexuality patterns, or they can express their ideas in different ways.

This research has also shown that early childhood educators regard heterosexuality, an identity that is "*imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force*" (Rich, 1980, p. 468), as the unique, normal, and only form of sexuality; consequently they treat children as if all of them are heterosexual. Importantly, majority of the early childhood educators participated in this research agree that some children might cross the boundaries of normative gender and sexuality, but they think that these children should be controlled or fixed; on the other hand there are few educators who reject even the possibility of children's being homosexual. The early childhood educators who participated in this research tend to have conclusions for children's sexualities based on their gender performances. The teachers consider gender and sexuality as identical and mutually determining each other; and compulsory heterosexuality exist in the gender

roles that children are expected and encouraged to perform as it has been also shown in previous studies conducted in different social contexts (Epstein, 1994a). However, the teachers and the head of the kindergarten are in favor of children playing with all toys, even gender crossing toys, but I could observe that the teachers keep their eyes on children when they are playing with gender crossing toys and plays. In this sense, both the teachers and the head of the kindergarten emphasize the *fine line*, the limits and/or boundaries of heteronormative gender and sexuality categories, that children should not across. Importantly, both the head of the kindergarten and the teachers participated in this research refer to male children while speaking of non-conforming, therefore gender crossing performances of children.

Not surprisingly, the existence of LGBTIQ individuals is ignored in early childhood education in Turkey. I could not observe that children are provided figures or information affirming LGBTIQ individuals; on the contrary, this issue is not given place in early childhood education. The discourses and comments of the head and the teachers of the kindergarten imply that they consider non-conforming gender performances and identities as abnormal, and something that needs to be fixed. In this regard, the teachers generally attempt to either normalize non-conforming behaviors of children, or try to legitimize non conforming gender performances and comments of children with certain excuses. On the other hand, I have also come across early childhood educators who have challenging and hope promising ideas concerning LGBTIQ individuals, and children having non-conforming gender performances although their number is very limited. This indicates that there are differences between teachers in terms of how they perceive genders and sexualities and how they express their ideas in their social interactions with children.

Considering the role that early childhood educators play in children's gender and sexual identity construction, I think knowledge of early childhood educators on gender and sexuality needs to be improved. They might be given gender courses throughout their vocational educations, or they might be provided with seminars focusing on gender and

sexuality. This, improvement in gender and sexuality perceptions of early childhood educators, I believe would result in a change in their social relations and interactions with children concerning gender and sexuality. I believe this can decrease the heteronormative and heterosexist impositions in early child care institutions, and therefore difficulties and discriminations that children having non-conforming gender performances could experience.

Similar to gender and sexuality perceptions of children and their reflections in the kindergarten setting, hidden curriculum also plays a crucial role in the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and the construction of gender and sexual identities of children. I have tried to show that hidden curriculum including education materials, peer socialization, teachers' interventions in and comments on children's plays and toy preferences, and daily practices in the kindergarten play a role in the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and the construction of their gender and sexual identities. Education materials such as cartoons, stories, songs and so on, which generally aim at giving moral and social messages to children, generally carry heteronormative gender and sexuality messages representing heterosexual and stereotypical gendered figures, and gendered division of labor in heterosexual families. Despite the fact that the majority of the figures and comments in education materials support heteronormative gender and sexuality patterns, there are also few figures such as Winnie the Pooh and Vanity Smurf who challenge normative gender understandings, which also give children the idea that non-conforming, challenging gender performances could be welcomed. However, it is highly difficult to pose similar argument for the case of sexuality. Concretely speaking, there are overt and covert references and emphasis on the heterosexual relationship. Besides, there are also many toys that support the dominance of heterosexuality, for which Barbie and Ken might be the best example. I think they are of the most normative heterosexual couples that exist in the worlds of children. Therefore, children are provided with the characters that are in a romantic relationship; however, all of the relationships existing in the education materials in the

kindergarten are heterosexual. Therefore, children are not provided with the “possibility” of same-sex relationships in the kindergarten, on the contrary the majority of factors taking place in the kindergarten naturalizes heterosexuality.

This research has also discussed how peer socialization among children has an impact on the formation of gender and sexuality perceptions of children, and therefore in the construction of gender and sexual identities in early childhood education. Based on my observations and small interactions with children in the kindergarten, I have argued that most of the children have learned and continue to learn social rules including gender and sexuality norms, and they interact with their peers according to what they have learned. However, some children do resist or challenge (though not necessarily intentionally) the gender and sexuality norms that are imposed upon them instead of directly internalizing these norms. Children also tend to control and regulate each other in terms of gender and sexuality. Daily practices in the kindergarten also give hidden messages in terms of gender and sexuality. One can see the effects of hegemonic gender and sexuality understanding on the daily practices in the kindergarten, for instance, male and female children are not allowed to use toilets simultaneously despite the existence of a screen between closets. On the other hand, male and female children change their clothes side by side in a classroom before and after the sleeping time. However, there are differences between early childhood educators’ attitudes and between childcare institutions in terms of daily practices.

Considering the overall thesis, I have tried to examine how heteronormativity operates in early childhood education in Turkey, and I have come up with conclusions that I had not assumed before the field research. I have found that male children are more likely to be target of regulation and normalization concerning gender and sexuality than female children. In other words, the normalization process with regard to gender and sexuality operates for male children more than it works for female children. I think this is closely related to existing gender hierarchy in which masculinity and/or normative manhood are located at the top. Furthermore, in order to understand gender and sexual identity

construction in early childhood education, I have also posed several minor questions such as how early childhood educators perceive gender and sexuality, what kind of messages official and hidden curriculum give and so forth by indicating the possible answers to them. Apart from these questions that I posed in order to fully grasp *the gender and sexual identity construction in early childhood education in Turkey*, I have also come across some other questions during the writing process as a result of the differences between what I found in the field and my pre-assumptions. Consequently, this thesis contains several provocative questions and possible answers given to these questions. This research has shown the importance of early childhood and early childhood education in terms of gender and sexual identity construction, which has not been studied before in Turkey. In this sense, I believe this thesis not only complements the existing literature of gender and sexuality in early childhood by examining the case in a particular private kindergarten in Turkey, but it also opens several ways for the further research on the concerned area that could be conducted in Turkey.

5.2. Research Gaps and Further Research Avenues

Discussions in this research are mostly based on the ethnographic research that I conducted in a private kindergarten in Ankara. The kindergarten is also associated with secularism. Therefore not all arguments can be generalized for early childhood education in Turkey, because I believe that one can reach different conclusions in different kindergartens or in different neighborhoods and regions. For instance, one could come up with different findings in a conservative kindergarten than I have found in this particular kindergarten.

The early childhood educators who participated in this research are generally graduated from vocational high schools. The absence of early childhood educators with a university degree might be considered a gap for this thesis. Thus this research can be

advanced through incorporating early childhood educators having different degrees such as university degree.

Another gap in this research arises from the fact that all of the early childhood educators who participated in this research are female. In fact, I have not come across a male early childhood educator neither throughout this research, nor before the research. However, I heard that there are male early childhood educators and male students at the early childhood education departments of universities, but they are in limited number. I consider the lack of male early childhood educators participants in this research as a gap because I believe their contributions to this thesis would be different as their social interactions with children would likely differ from that of female teachers due to the fact that male and female individuals have different socializations. In other words, I believe if there were male early childhood educators participated in this research, there would be different discussions and conclusions in this research. Consequently, I think this research opens a way for new researches in which a researcher would include male early childhood educator participants.

Lastly, masturbation, a taboo topic in Turkey, matters in early childhood as I could observe. Although some early childhood educators I interviewed reject the fact that children may masturbate, most of the participants agree that children may start masturbation in early ages which they explain as a normal behavior. However, there is a significant attempt to prevent children from masturbating. Unfortunately, I could not give adequate space to the discussion of masturbation issue as my data on it is limited. However, I think that masturbation in early childhood in Turkey could be further investigated, and such research would be helpful in understanding how and why sexuality is denied or oppressed in childhood.

All in all, in my thesis I have argued that a heteronormative gender and sexuality understanding is very predominant and it is reproduced in the kindergarten despite the existence of very few gender neutral and/or some unconventional figures and comments

that are available to children. I also argue that the normalization process in terms of gender and sexuality works quite well in the kindergarten. I have moreover discovered that normalization process in terms of gender and sexuality works more for male children than female children. In other words, male children are more subjected to processes of normative heterosexualisation. Lastly, I have found that children, as active agents in doing gender, do not immediately accept and internalize normative social roles of gender and sexuality. On the contrary, some children can resist to or challenge gender and sexuality norms by transgressing the boundaries of heteronormativity although they are not really provided with alternative gender and sexuality figures and comments. Still, most of the children conform to heteronormative gender and sexuality. In this sense, I believe that whether or not children conform to heteronormative gender and sexuality roles is highly related to what is available to them in their social environments. Therefore, considering the significant roles of the attitudes of teachers and education materials such as cartoons, stories and toys in the formation of children's gender and sexuality perceptions and in their gender and sexual identity construction, I suggest that children should be provided with more alternative gender and sexuality figures and comments through attitudes of teachers and education materials in the kindergarten. Moreover, early childhood educators should be provided with more alternative gender and sexuality understanding through courses or seminars on gender and sexuality in order to make them present non-normative gender and sexuality figures and comments to children in the kindergarten. This, I believe, might contribute to breaking the cycle of heteronormativity.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Early Childhood Educators outside the Kindergarten

1. Sizce cinsiyet nedir? Cinsiyet dendiđi zaman aklınıza neler geliyor? (*What is gender? What do you think of when I say gender?*)
2. Kız ve erkek çocukları için farklı davranış biçimleri var mıdır? Davranışları farklı olmalı mıdır? (*Are there different behaviour patterns for male and female children? Do you think behavior patterns of male and female children should be different?*)
3. Kız ve erkek çocukların davranışları arasında ne gibi farklılıklar var? (*What kind of differences are there between male and female children's behaviors?*)
4. Bu davranışlara uymayan çocuklar var mı/ oluyor mu? (*Are there any children who do not conform these behaviors patterns of their gender?*)
5. Kız ve erkek çocuklarda bu durum farklılaşıyor mu?(*Does this -children's nonconforming gender behaviors- vary for male and female children?*)
6. Bu çocuklar hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*What do you think about these children?*)
7. Çocuklar arasında bu yaşlarda küçük flörtleşmeler/ kur yapmalar oluyor mu?(*Are there flirtings between children in that ages?*)
8. Daha çok hangi yaş gruplarında oluyor?(*In which age groups are there mostly?*)
 - a. Bunu nasıl karşılıyorsunuz?(*How do you consider flirtings between children?*)
9. Aynı cinsiyetten olan çocuklar arasında da oluyor mu? (*Are there flirtings between sma-sex children too?*)
 - a. Bu durum hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*What do you think about this?*)
 - b. Sizce bu durum gelecekteki hayatlarını nasıl etkiler?(*How does this situation affect their future lives?*)

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Early Childhood Educators inside the Kindergarten

Interview Questions for the Teacher of Four Age Group

1. Çocuklar tırnaklarına oje sürdüğünüzü anlattı. Onlar mı istedi oje sürdürmeyi yoksa siz mi önerdiniz? (*Kids said you have painted their nails. Did they ask you to do it or you offered them to paint their nails?*)
2. Erkek çocuklar da oje sürdürmek istediler mi? (*Did male kids wanted to have too?*)
 - a. Evetse, onlara ne söylediniz ne yaptınız? (*If yes, what did you do and say them?*)
3. Kız çocuklarının çoğu sınıftaki aynanın önünde oyuncaklarla makyaj yapıyormuş gibi yapıyorlar. Bu durum hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*Most of the female kids pretend as if they make up in front of the mirror. What do you think about this?*)
4. Neden çocuklara makyaj yapmanın yetişkinlere ait bir şey olduğunu anlatmıyorsunuz? (*Why do not you tell and/or inform kids about makeup's being an adult issue?*)

Interview Questions for the Teacher of Five Age Group

1. Kostüm oyununda Berk kadın kıyafetleri (elbise, topuklu ayakkabı, çanta) giyip, feminine bir şekilde yürüdüğünde ne düşünmüştünüz? (*What did you think and feel when Berk wear woman clothes (dress, high heels court shoe, bag) and walk in a feminine way at the costume play?*)
2. Erkek çocukların feminine davranışlar seğilemesi hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*What do you think about male kids' having feminine manners?*)
3. Değirmenci Teyze oyununda, ortada kız çocuğu varken Fırat teyze yerine amca demişti, siz de biraz sinirlenmiştiniz. Sizce Fırat neden teyze yerine amca demiş olabilir? (*While playing Miller Aunt, Fırat told uncle instead of aunt although there was a female kid at the middle. And you got a bit angry. Why do you think Fırat told uncle instead of aunt to his female kid?*)
4. Çocukların amca teyze hala gibi isimleri karıştırması önemli bir sorun mu sizce? (*Do you think kid's confusing aunt, uncle etc.?*)
5. Sınıftaki bazı çocuklar zaman zaman “meme” “popo” gibi kelimeler kullanabiliyor. Çocukların bu kelimeleri kullanmaları hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*Some children can use the words of “breast” and “butt” in the classroom. What do you think about kids' saying breast or butt?*)

6. Neden çocukların bu kelimeleri kullanmalarını istemiyorsunuz? (*Why do not you want children not to use these words?*)
7. Çocukların mastürbasyon yapmaları konusunda ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*What do you think about kid masturbating?*)
8. Bir çocuğun mastürbasyon yaptığını düşündüğünüz zaman ne hissediyorsunuz, ne yapıyorsunuz? (*What do you do and feel when you think a kid is masturbating?*)

Interview Questions for the Teacher of Six Age Group

1. Sizin sınıfınızdaki neredeyse her şey cinsiyet ayrımına göre düzenlenmiş durumda. Bunu yapmanızın arkasındaki nedenler/gerekçeler nelerdir? (*In your class, all things are sex-based segregated. What is the reason of these sex-based categorizations?*)
2. Sizce bu cinsiyete göre yapılmış kategoriler çocukları nasıl etkiliyor? (*How do you think this categorization affect children?*)
3. Çocukların flörtleşmeleri, sarılmaları ve birbirlerini öpmeleri hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*What do you think about kids' flirting, hugging, and kissing?*)
4. Bu tarz yakın samimi davranışlar aynı cinsiyetten çocuklar arasında da oluyor mu? (*Have such close relationships occurred between same sex children?*)
 - a. Bu durum hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz? (*what do you think about this?*)
 - b. Bu durumda ne yaparsınız? (*What would you do in such a case?*)

Interview Questions for the Head of the Kindergarten

1. Bu kreş bir kuruma bağlı mı?(*Does this kindergarten belong to any institution?*)
 - a. Hangi kuruma bağlı?(*Which institution does it belong?*)
2. Bağlı olduğunuz kurum burda verdiğiniz eğitimi kontrol ediyor mu?(*Does this institution control the education that you provided to children in the kindergarten?*)
3. Peki onlar size bir eğitim programı, müfredat temin ediyorlar mı?(*Does this institution provide you with a education program or curriculum?*)
4. Siz hangieğitim yaklaşımını benimsiyorsunuz? (*Which education approach do you adopt in the kindergarten?*)
5. Bu yaklaşımın özelliği ne? Neden bu yaklaşımı seçtiniz?(*What are the features of this approach? Why do you adopt this approach?*)

6. Bu yaklaşım çocuk gelişimini nasıl açıklıyor, çocuk gelişimi hakkında ne söylüyor?
(*How does this approach explain child development? What does it say about child development?*)
7. Peki yaşlara bağlı değişiklikler hakkında ne söylüyor bu yaklaşım?(*What does this approach say about differences between children based on their ages?*)
8. Bu yaklaşım size çocukların cinsiyet kimlikleri hakkında ne söylüyor?(*What does this approach tell about gender identities of children?*)
9. Çocukların cinsiyet kimliklerinin oluşumun “normal” olmadığını düşündüğünüzde ne yapıyorsunuz? (*What do you do when you think formation of children’s gender identities are not “normal”?*)

Appendix C: Survey for the Parents of Children in the Kindergarten

Anket yaklaşık olarak 15 dakika sürmektedir. Vereceğiniz yanıtlar söz konusu tez araştırması için oldukça değerlidir. Zaman ayırdığınız için teşekkür ederim.

Bu anket çalışması, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi Yrd. Doç. Dr. Katharina Bodirsky'nin danışmanlığını yaptığı ve Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Didem Şalgam'ın yürüttüğü "Okul Öncesi Eğitim ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet" konulu tez araştırmasının bir parçası olarak hazırlanmıştır.

Lütfen sizin ve çocuğunuzun ismini paylaşmayınız. Ankette belirtmiş olduğunuz bilgilerin hiçbir şekilde herhangi bir kurum, kuruluş ve/veya kişi ile paylaşılmayacağını, yalnızca söz konusu tez araştırması için kullanılacağını temin ederim.

Anket sorularını cevapladıktan sonra lütfen en geç 27 Şubat 2014 tarihine kadar geri gönderiniz.

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Katharina Bodirsky

Didem Şalgam

Danışman

Tez Öğrencisi

Not: * işareti olan "Diğer" bölümlerini çocuğun bakımında görev alan başka biri ve/veya birileri olması durumunda doldurunuz.

1. Çocuk Hakkında Bilgi

a. Çocuğunuzun cinsiyeti nedir?

Kız

Erkek

b. Çocuğunuzun yaşının uyduğu kutucuğu işaretleyiniz

24-36 ay

36-48 ay

48-60 ay

60-72 ay

c. Çocuğunuzun kaç kardeşi var?

	Cinsiyeti	Yaşı
1. Kardeş		
2. Kardeş		

3. Kardeş		
4. Kardeş		
5. Kardeş		

- d. Çocuğunuz kaç yaşında kreşe gitmeye başladı?
- e. Çocuğunuz kreşe başlayana kadar kim tarafından bakıldı?

2. Ebeveyn Hakkında Bilgi

Eğitim Seviyesi	Anne	Baba	Diğer*
İlkokul			
Ortaokul			
Lise			
Meslek Lisesi			
Üniversite			
Yüksek Lisans			
Doktora			
Diğer (Belirtiniz)			

Meslek	Anne	Baba	Diğer*
Mesleğiniz			
Haftada kaç saat çalışıyorsunuz?			

3. Hanehalkı Bilgileri

- a. Çocuğunuz kaç farklı evde yaşıyor?
- b. Çocuğunuzun yaşadığı ev/evlerde kimler yaşıyor?

I. Ev	
Anne	
Baba	
Kardeş	
Üvey anne	
Üvey baba	
Üvey kardeş	
Anneanne/Babanne	
Dede	
Teyze	
Dayı	
Amca	

Hala	
Bakıcı	
Diğer (Belirtiniz)	

II. Ev	
Anne	
Baba	
Kardeş	
Üvey anne	
Üvey baba	
Üvey kardeş	
Anneanne/Babaanne	
Dede	
Teyze	
Dayı	
Amca	
Hala	
Bakıcı	
Diğer (Belirtiniz)	

III. Ev	
Anne	
Baba	
Kardeş	
Üvey anne	
Üvey baba	
Üvey kardeş	
Anneanne/Babaanne	
Dede	
Teyze	
Dayı	
Amca	
Hala	
Bakıcı	
Diğer (Belirtiniz)	

c. Çocuğunuzun bakımında kimler rol almaktadır?

Kişiler	Hafta İçi					Hafta Sonu					Çocuk Hasta Olduğın -da
	Hergün/ Herzaman	Günde Birkaç Saat	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç	Hergün/ Herzaman	Günde Birkaç Saat	1 Gün	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç	
Anne											
Baba											
Kardeş											
Üvey anne											
Üvey baba											
Üvey kardeş											
Anneane/ Babaanne											

Dede											
Teyze											
Dayı											
Amca											
Hala											
Bakıcı											
Komşu											
Diğer (Belirtiniz)											

4. Ev İşlerinin Yapımı ve Çocuk Bakımı

a. Anne çalışmadığı veya ev işi yapmadığı zamanlarda neler yapıyor?

Aktiviteler	Hergün/ Herzaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Arkadaşlarla buluşmak				
Yakın akrabaları ziyaret etmek				
Çocuk ile vakit geçirmek				
Sinemaya gitmek				
Spor yapmak				
Televizyon izlemek				
İnternette vakit geçirmek				
Alışverişe gitmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

b. Anne aşağıdaki işleri ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Temizlik				
Evi Toplamak				
Yemek				
Masa hazırlamak ve kaldırmak				
Bulaşık				
Çamaşır				

Ütü				
Basit dikiş, düğme vs. dikmek				
Market alışverişi				
Küçük ev içi tamirleri (Vida sıkılmak, ampul değiştirmek vs)				
Faturaların ödenmesi				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

c. Anne çocuğun bakımında aşağıdakilerden hangilerini ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Çocuk için kahvaltı hazırlamak				
Okula hazırlamak/göndermek				
Çocuğun okul çantasını hazırlamak				
Kıyafet seçmek ve giydirmek				
Saçlarını taramak				
Temel temizlik ihtiyaçlarına (banyo, tuvalet, tırnaklarını kesmek...) yardımcı olmak				
Akşam okuldan almak				
Akşam yemeği hazırlamak				
Çocuğu uyutmak				
Çocuk için alışveriş yapmak (Kıyafet, oyuncak...)				
Rutin sağlık kontrollerini yaptırmak				
Okul dışındaki eğitim derslerine (yüzme, müzik vs.) götürüp getirmek				
Hastalandığında doktora götürmek				
Berberer yalnız vakit geçirmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

d. Anne çocuğu ile birlikte hangi faaliyetleri ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

Faaliyetler	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Evcilik oynamak				
Arabalarla oynamak				

Oyuncak bebeklerle oynamak				
Puzzle yapmak				
Boyama yapmak				
Hikaye okumak				
Sinemaya gitmek				
Arkadaşlarla buluşmak				
Top oynamak				
Parka gitmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

e. Anne çocuğun hangi işlerde kendisine yardımcı olmasına izin veriyor?

	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Yer süpürmek				
Toz almak				
Yemek yapmak				
Masa hazırlamak ve kaldırmak				
Küçük kardeşin bakımı				
Alışveriş				
Küçük ev içi tamirleri				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

f. Baba çalışmadığı veya ev işi yapmadığı zamanlarda neler yapıyor?

Aktiviteler	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Arkadaşlarla buluşmak				
Yakın akrabaları ziyaret etmek				
Çocuk ile vakit geçirmek				
Sinemaya gitmek				
Spor yapmak				
Televizyon izlemek				
İnternette vakit geçirmek				
Alışverişe gitmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

g. Baba ařađıdaki iřleri ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

	Her gn/ Her zaman	Haftada Birka Kez	Ayda Birka Kez	Hi
Temizlik				
Evi Toplamak				
Yemek				
Masa hazırlamak ve kaldırmak				
Bulařık				
amařır				
tü				
Kk dikiř, dgmek, vs. dikmek				
Market alıřveriři				
Kk ev ii tamirleri (Vida sıklamak, ampul deđiřtirmek vs)				
Faturaların denmesi				
Diđer (Belirtiniz)				

h. Baba ocuđun bakımında ařađıdakilerden hangilerini ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

	Her gn/ Her zaman	Haftada Birka Kez	Ayda Birka Kez	Hi
ocuk iin kahvaltı hazırlamak				
Okula hazırlamak/gndermek				
ocuđun okul antasını hazırlamak				
Kıyafet semek ve giydirmek				
Salarını taramak				
Temel temizlik ihtiyalarına (banyo, tuvalet, tırnaklarını kesmek...) yardımcı olmak				
Akřam okuldan almak				
Akřam yemeđi hazırlamak				
ocuđu uyutmak				
ocuk iin alıřveriř yapmak (Kıyafet, oyuncak...)				
Rutin sađlık kontrollerini yaptırmak				
Okul dıřındaki eđitim derslerine (yzme, mzik vs.) gtrp getirmek				
Hastalandıđında doktora				

götürmek				
Beraber yalnız vakit geçirmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

j. Baba çocuk ile hangi faaliyetleri ne sıklıkla yapıyor?

Faaliyetler	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Evcilik oynamak				
Arabalarla oynamak				
Oyuncak bebeklerle oynamak				
Puzzle yapmak				
Boyama yapmak				
Hikaye okumak				
Sinemaya gitmek				
Arkadaşlarla buluşmak				
Top oynamak				
Parka gitmek				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

k. Baba çocuğun kendisine hangi işlerde yardımcı olmasına izin veriyor?

	Her gün/ Her zaman	Haftada Birkaç Kez	Ayda Birkaç Kez	Hiç
Yer süpürmek				
Toz almak				
Yemek yapmak				
Masa hazırlamak ve kaldırmak				
Küçük kardeşin bakımı				
Alışveriş				
Küçük ev içi tamirleri				
Diğer (Belirtiniz)				

Appendix D: Permission Form for Thesis Photocopy

TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

Enformatik Enstitüsü

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Şalgam

Adı : Didem

Bölümü : Sosyoloji EABD

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) : Gender and Sexual Identity Construction in Early Childhood Education: The case of a private kindergaten in Ankara

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

Doktora

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ:

Appendix E: Turkish Summary

Türkçe Özet

İçinde yaşadığımız toplum cinsiyetçi ve heteroseksist bir toplumdur. Normatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine uymayanlar ve LGBTI bireyler olarak adlandırılan heteroseksüel kimliğe sahip olmayan kişiler toplumdaki normatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik anlayışından ötürü ya marjinalleştiriliyorlar yada anormal olarak damgalanıyorlar. Her ne kadar kurumsallaşmış heteroseksüelliğin sınırları kadın ve gey hakları hareketleri aracılığıyla belli oranlarda değiştirilmiş olsa da, kurumsallaşmış heteroseksüellik birçok toplumda normal, ve normatif cinsellik olarak kabul edilmektedir (Jackson & Scott, 2012, s. 145). Heteronormativitenin ve dolayısıyla toplumdaki LGBTI bireylerin marjinalleştirilmeleri açısından zorunlu heteroseksüelliğin toplumsal cinsiyet sosyalizasyonu aracılığıyla sürekli olarak pekiştirilmesi oldukça kritiktir.

Ankara'nın orta sınıf semtinde özel bir kreşte iki buçuk ay süren etnografik saha araştırmasına dayanan bu tez okul öncesi eğitimde cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşasını incelemektedir. Temel olarak, bu araştırmada heteronormativitenin çocuk bakım kurumlarında nasıl işlediği ve okul öncesi eğitimde çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik rollerine nasıl sosyalleştikleri sorularına cevap bulmayı hedefledim. Ayrıca, bu tezde çocukların kendilerine empoze edilen normatif toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine nasıl direndikleri ve/veya karşı koyduklarını da anlamaya çalıştım.

Toplumun bu kadar heteroseksit olması bir çeşit döngüdür, çünkü kurumlar ve bireyler toplumdaki heteroseksist pratikleri ve anlayışı bir şekilde yeniden üretmektedirler. Bu anlamda, Asan (2010, s. 4) çocuklara verilen cinsiyetlendirilmiş normların o toplumun kültüründe uzun yıllar boyunca kaldığını belirtmektedir. Bu bireylerin cinsiyetlendirilmiş rollere nasıl sosyalleştikleriyle ciddi anlamda ilintilidir. Bir bebek cinsel organına bağlı olarak ya kız çocuğu olarak yada oğlan çocuğu olarak yetiştirilir. Bir fetusun cinsiyeti öğrenildiğinde, içine doğacağı çevre buna göre dekore edilir: her şey ya pembe olur yada mavi. Başka türlü pek de mümkün değildir. Dolayısıyla, heteroseksizmin tohumları, ve erkek ve dişi (male female) arasındaki ikilik erkek çocukluk döneminde, hatta doğumdan önce oluşur.

Okullar çocukların cinsiyetlendirilmiş rollere sosyalleştikleri alanlardır. Eğitim kurumları heteroseksüel olmayanın varlığını görmezden gelerek çocuklara yalnızca cinsiyetlendirilmiş rolleri değil aynı zamanda zorunlu heteroseksüelliği de empoze eder. Ayrıca, çocukların okul aracılığıyla kız ve erkeğin ne demek olduğunu öğrendikleri öne sürülmektedir. Her ne kadar okul öncesi eğitimde doğrudan cinsiyet ve cinsellik dersleri olmasa da bu araştırma gizli ve dolaylı cinsiyet ve cinsellik mesajlarının çocuklara verildiğini göstermiştir. Bu mesajlar çocuklara heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik hakikatlerini çocuklara empoze etmektedir. Ancak, çocukların empoze edilen bu normatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerini direkt olarak içselleştirmediklerini aksine çocukların bu rollere direnebildiklerini ve/veya karşı koyabildiklerini savunuyorum

Çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsel kimliklerinin inşasında okul öncesi eğitim ve okul ortamı oldukça kritiktir. Her ne kadar çocuklar cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine direnebiliyor ve/veya karşı koyabiliyor olsalar da, okul öncesi eğitimde heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik büyük ölçüde yeniden üretilmektedir.

Bu araştırmada heteroseksist ve heteronormatif dünya düzeni problemleştirilmiş ve bunların kökenleri okul öncesi eğitimde cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşasında aranmıştır. Bu nedenle, bu araştırma temel olarak *günümüz Türkiye'sinde çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsel kimliklerinin okul öncesi eğitimde nasıl inşa ediliyor* sorusuna cevap vermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yapabilmek için, bu tez okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin cinsiyet ve cinselliği nasıl algıladıklarını, onların algılarını ne gibi faktörlerin etkilediğini, ne tür araçlar ve mekanizmalarla çocuklara cinsiyet ve cinsellik normalarının empoze edildiğini, ve uygun olmayan cinsiyet performansına sahip olan çocuklar için okul öncesi eğitimde yer olup olmadığını araştırmıştır. Tüm bu sorularla, bu tez heteronormativitenin okul öncesi eğitimde nasıl üretildiği ve yeniden üretildiğini açıklamaktadır.

Eğitim, özellikle okul öncesi eğitimde cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşası üzerine olan literatür başta Avustralya olmak üzere yurt dışında oldukça geniştir. Ancak, Türkiye'deki söz konusu literatürün geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir, çünkü Türkiye'nin toplumsal yapısında eğitim aracılığıyla cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşası üzerine yeterli sayıda araştırma yapılmamıştır. Ayrıca, ciddi toplumsal sorun olan heteronormativite ve normlara uymayan cinsiyet ve cinsellik Türkiye'de gerçekleştirilen araştırmalarda pek fazla sorgulanmamıştır. Dolayısıyla, önceki çalışmalardan

farklı olarak, bu tez eğitimde, özellikle okul öncesi eğitimde heteronormativiteyi ve normlara uygun olmayan cinsiyet ve cinselliği tartışmaktadır.

Okul öncesi eğitimde cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşasını incelerken post-yapısalcı feminist perspektifini benimsedim. Homojen ve evrensel kadın, *cinsiyet* (benim genişletmem) kategorilerinin varlığına işaret eden klasik feminist teorilerden farklı olarak, post-yapısalcı feminist perspektif “kadın” vs. “erkek” gibi cinsiyet kategorilerini reddetmektedir. Ayrıca, post-yapısalcı feminist perspektife göre, bireylerin cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlikleri de dahil olmak üzere öznellikleri toplumsal ve kültürel olarak inşa edilmektedir, ve bunlar bağlamsal ve tarihsel olarak değişmektedirler (Blaise, 2005; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988; Butler, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Jones, 1997). Dahası, post-yapısalcı feminist perspektif “*özneleştirme süreciyle (öznenin-kim olduğunun- inşası)*” ilgileniyor, ki bu tam da benim tez konumu oluşturuyor. Son olarak, post-yapısalcı feminist perspektif bireylerin cinsiyet yaratmada (doing gender) ve kadınlık ve erkeklik (femininities and masculinities) performanları aracılığıyla cinsiyet ve cinsel kimliklerinin gelişmesinde aktif olduklarını vurgulamaktadır (Butler, 1990; Connel & Messerschmidt, 2005; Robinson & Diaz, 2006).

“Kişi kadın olarak doğmaz, kadın olur” diyen Simone de Beauvoir’un işaret ettiği gibi cinsiyet doğuştan doğal olarak atfedilen bir şey değildir; aksine elde edilen bir kimliktir. Cinsiyet toplumsal ve kültürel olarak inşa edilir (Butler, 1990; 1988); ve tarihsel ve coğrafi olarak değişir (Jackson, 2006). Dolayısıyla, cinsiyet toplumda ortak bir şekilde kullanılır hale gelmiş tarihsel ve kültürel bir üründür. Cinsiyet toplumsal ve kültürel bir inşa olmasına rağmen, doğal olarak görülmektedir. Bu anlamda, cinsiyetin nasıl doğallaştığı sorusu haklı olarak sorulabilir. Cinsiyet yinelenen kadınlık ve erkeklik (femininity and masculinity) performanslarıyla inşa edilmiştir, ki bu da Butler’ın (1990; 1988) cinsiyeti edimsel eylem (performative act) olarak adlandırmasının sebebidir. Butler’a göre, cinsiyet performatif olarak inşa edilir ve bu performansların devam eden tekrarları cinsiyete düzen ve düzenlilik kazandıran şeydir (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1988).

Cinsiyet ve cinsellik sabit ve durağan değildir, aksine değişen ve akışkandır. Cinsiyet düzeninde birçok hiyerarşik konum vardır, ve bunların herbiri birbiriyle ilişkisellik içersindedir. Kadınlar ve heteronormatif cinsiyet kurallarına uymayan erkekler bu cinsiyet düzeni içersinde en altta konumlanırlar. Ayrıca, birçok erkeklikler ve kadınlıklar vardır, ve bunlar hem dişi hem de eril

bedenler tarafından sergilenirler. Yinelenen/tekrarlanan erkeklikler ve kadınlıklar performansları onları doğal olanmış gibi gösterir.

Cinsiyet ve cinsellik gibi, çocukluk dediğimiz şey de belli bir zaman ve topluma göre toplumsal ve kültürel olarak kurulmuştur (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2004; Robinson, 2008). Örneğin, çocuklar cinsellik gibi bazı “yetişkin” meseleleriyle baş etmek için çok genç ve masum olarak görülürler (MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson, 2008; Robinson 2002). Buna bağlı olarak çocukların cinsellik bilgisine erişimi engellenmekte ve kontrol edilmektedir (MacNaughton, 2000). Sahadaki gözlemlerime ve deneyimlerime dayanarak, aynı veya benzer argümanların Türkiye için de geçerli olduğunu söyleyebilirim. Ancak, bazı post-yapısalcı okul öncesi öğretmenleri çocukların bu meseleleri anlayamama gibi durumlarının olmadığını ifade etmektedirler. Ayrıca, çocukların asexüel olduğu iddiası da bazı post-yapısalcı okul öncesi araştırmacıları tarafından reddedilmektedir (MacNaughton, 2000). Çocukluk yetişkinler tarafından ve yetişkinlerin kabul ettiği normlara göre kurulmaktadır. Bunun, Türkiye’de çocukluk çağında cinsiyet ve cinselliğin göz ardı edilmesinin altında yatan nedenlerden biri olduğunu düşünüyorum.

Daha önce de belirttiğim üzere, bu tez araştırması özel bir kreşte iki buçuk ay süren etnografik saha araştırmasına dayanmaktadır. Geniş saha araştırmasından önce, Ankara’da belli aralıklarla farklı üç kreşi ziyaret ettim. Bu süreçte, okul öncesi öğretmenleriyle, kreşte çalışan psikologla ve kreş müdürüyle görüşmeler gerçekleştirdim. Ayrıca, mekansal organizasyonu, öğretmen ve çocuklar arasındaki ilişkiyi, çocukların eğitimi için kreşte kullanılan materyalleri inceleme fırsatım oldu. Pilot araştırma sürecinse, görmeyi ve duymayı beklediğimden fazlasıyla karşılaştım, ve bunun gerçek/genişletilmiş saha araştırmasına, dolayısıyla tezime önemli katkıları olduğunu düşünüyorum.

İki buçuk ay süren geniş etnografik saha araştırması boyunca, gözlemler, görüşmeler, anket, ve resmi müfredatın incellenmesi yoluyla çeşitli tipte veriler topladım. Sırasıyla, beş, altı ve dört yaş grubu sınıflarına katıldım. Tüm gün çocuklar ve öğretmenle vakit geçirerek gözlemler gerçekleştirdim. Çocukların izlediği çizgi filmleri izledim, söyledikleri/öğrendikleri şarkıları dinledim, çocuklara okunan hikayeleri dinledim, ve çocuklara verilen oyuncakları inceledim. Bunlardan ayrı olarak, çocukların ailelerinde gördükleri cinsiyet ilişkilerini anlayabilmek için kreşteki çocukların aileleri tarafından doldurulmak üzere anket hazırladım. Kreş müdürüyle, beş,

altı ve dört yaş grubu öğretmenleriyle görüşmeler yaptım. Araştırma boyunca toplanan verileri nitel araştırma yöntemiyle analiz ettim.

Tezde ilk olarak çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsellik algılarının oluşmasında ve cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşalarında ailelerin nasıl bir rol oynadığını tartışıyorum. Anket sonuçları çocukların, ebeveynler arasındaki cinsiyetlendirilmiş ilişkiler olan heteroseksüel çekirdek bir aile ortamında sosyalleştiklerini göstermektedir. Ayrıntılı olarak ifade edecek olursak, çocuklar ev içi işlerinden ve çocuk bakımında temel sorumlu olan kişinin çoğunlukla kadın olduğunu, ve çocukla daha çok birebir yalnız vakit geçirenin genellikle kadın olduğunu görüyorlar. Bu durumun etkileri çocukların kreşteki oyunlarında açık bir şekilde görülebilmektedir. Ayrıca, kreşte aile kurumuna ciddi bir vurgu yapıldığını, ve bu vurgunun kreşteki söylemlerde ve konuşmalarda, ve hikaye, şarkı, ve çizgi film gibi eğitim materyallerinde yer aldığını gözlemledim. Çocuklara ideal aile yapısının çekirdek ve heteroseksüel aile olduğu mesajı verilmektedir. Ayrıca, aile kurumu “kutsal” ve “huzurlu” bir mekan olan cinsiyetlendirilmiş heteroseksüel bir birim olarak sunulmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak, ebeveyn olmak ve aile hakkındaki söylemler ve yorumlar sonucunda heteroseksüel evliliğin çocuklar için bir amaç, bir telos haline gelebileceği savını ileri sürüyorum.

Çocukların cinsiyet sosyalizasyonları açısından, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin cinsiyet ve cinselliği nasıl algıladığı ve bu algılarının çocuklarla olan sosyal ilişki ve etkileşimlerine yansımaları çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsel kimliklerinin kurulmasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu nedenle okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin cinsiyet ve cinselliği nasıl algıladığı çok önemlidir. Saha araştırmasındaki gözlem ve deneyimlere bağlı olarak okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çoğunluğunun geleneksel cinsiyet ve cinsellik algısına sahip olduğunu söyleyebilirim. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin çoğu cinsiyete dayalı sınıflandırmalar yapmak, kız ve erkek çocuklarına farklı davranışlar göstermek gibi çeşitli yollarla kız ve erkek çocukları arasındaki ikililiği/dikotomiyi yeniden üretmektedirler. Bu anlamda, birçok okul öncesi öğretmeni cinsiyetlerine göre kız ve erkek çocuklarına farklı özellikler atfetmektedirler. Ayrıca, okul öncesi öğretmenleri çocukların sarılma, öpme, ve masturbasyon gibi bedenlerini ve arzularını kontrol etme aracılığıyla onların cinsiyet ve cinselliklerini düzenlemeye çalışmaktadırlar. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri heteroseksist dünya görüşüne sahiptirler, ki bu da onların kreşteki çocukların hepsi heteroseksüelmiş gibi davranmalarına neden olmaktadır. Normatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik kurallarına uymayan kişilerin

ve çocukların varlığı okul öncesi öğretmenler tarafından yok sayılmaktadır. Yine de, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin ezici çoğunluğunun cinsiyetçi ve heteroseksist görüşe sahip olmasına rağmen, bazı çocukların eşcinsel olabileceğini kabul eden okul öncesi öğretmenleri de bulunmaktadır.

Çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsel kimliklerinin inşasında ve cinsiyet ve cinsellik algılarının oluşmasında rol oynayan diğer bir etken ise gizli müfredattır. Bu tezde, gizli müfredatı, çizgi film, oyuncak, hikaye gibi eğitim materyalleri aracılığıyla çocuklara verilen kasıtsız/istemsiz mesajlar, çocuklar arasındaki sosyalleşme, ve öğretmenlerin çocukların oyun ve oyuncaklarına müdahale ve yorumları olarak ele aldım. Çizgi film, oyuncak, şarkı gibi eğitim materyallerin ezici çoğunluğu heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik mesajlarıyla dolu olmasına rağmen, cinsiyet ve cinsellik açısından meydan okuyan dolayısıyla umut veren bazı figürler de bulunmaktadır. Yine de bu figürlerin sayısı oldukça azdır. Çocuklar arasındaki sosyalleşmeyi gözlemlemek, çocukların cinsiyetlendirilmiş kategorileri nasıl öğrendiklerini, ve birbirlerinin cinsiyet ve cinsellik algılarını nasıl etkilediklerini anlamak için oldukça önemlidir. Ayrıca, çocuklar arasındaki sosyalleşmeyi gözlemlemek çocukların kendilerine empoze edilen cinsiyet ve cinsellik normlarına nasıl direndiklerini ve/veya karşı koyduklarını anlamak açısından da elzem bir öneme sahiptir. Çocukların birbirlerinin cinsiyet ve cinsellik anlamında davranışlarını kontrol etme ve düşüncelerini şekillendirme gücüne sahip oldukları görüşündeyim.

Tüm bu tartışmalardan yola çıkarak, okul ortamlarının genellikle heteroseksist bir şekilde düzenlendiğini ve direkt bir cinsellik eğitimi olmasa dahi çocuklara heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik kategorilerinin öğretildiğini düşünüyorum. Tez boyunca, Türkiye’de okul öncesi eğitimde heteronormativitenin nasıl işlediğini incelemeye çalıştım, ve saha araştırmasından önce öngörmediğim sonuçlar elde ettim. Cinsiyet ve cinsellik anlamında normalleştirme sürecinin kız çocuklarından çok erkek çocukları için işlediğini gördüm. Bunun toplumda var olan cinsiyet hiyerarşisiyle ilgili olduğunu düşünüyorum. Tez boyunca provakatif sorular sorup bu sorulara cevap vermeye çalıştım.

Bu tez araştırması, yurt dışında farklı toplumsal bağlamlarda yapılan çalışmalara paralel bir şekilde Türkiye’de okullaşmanın çocukların cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik inşaları açısından çok önemli bir role sahip olduğunu göstermektedir (Blaise, 2005; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson & Diaz, 2006; Robinson & Davies, 2008). Sonuç olarak, bu tez heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinselliğin kreşte hakim olduğunu ve çocukların alternatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine

eriřimlerinin olmadığını göstermektedir. Dolayısıyla, her ne kadar çocuklar cinsiyet ve cinsellik rollerine direnebiliyor ve/veya karşı koyabiliyor olsalar da, okul öncesi eğitimde heteronormatif cinsiyet ve cinsellik büyük ölçüde yeniden üretilmektedir.