

**TURKISH LIMINAL SEXUALITIES: A CASE STUDY OF
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS BEYOND THE 'REAL' AND
THE 'VIRTUAL'**

by

Veronika Tzankova

B.C.L., University of Istanbul, 2005

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

In the

School of Interactive Arts and Technology

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Veronika Tzankova 2011

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2011

All rights reserved.

However, in accordance with the *Copyright Act of Canada*, this work may be reproduced, without authorization, under the conditions for "Fair Dealing." Therefore, limited reproduction of this work for the purposes of private study, research, criticism, review and news reporting is likely to be in accordance with the law, particularly if cited appropriately.

APPROVAL

Name: Veronika Tzankova

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Thesis: Turkish Liminal Sexualities: A Case Study of Social Transformations beyond the 'Real' and the 'Virtual'

Examining Committee:

Chair:

Dr. Marek Hatala

Associate Professor, Graduate Program Chair, Simon Fraser University, School of Interactive Arts & Technology

Dr. Thecla Schiphorst

Senior Supervisor

Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University, School of Interactive Arts & Technology

Dr. Kate Hennesy

Supervisor

Assistant Professor, Simon Fraser University, School of Interactive Arts & Technology

Dr. John Bowes

External Examiner

Director, Simon Fraser University, School of Interactive Arts & Technology

Date Defended/Approved: June 10th, 2011 _____



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Declaration of Partial Copyright Licence

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection (currently available to the public at the "Institutional Repository" link of the SFU Library website <www.lib.sfu.ca> at: <<http://ir.lib.sfu.ca/handle/1892/112>>) and, without changing the content, to translate the thesis/project or extended essays, if technically possible, to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation of the digital work.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

While licensing SFU to permit the above uses, the author retains copyright in the thesis, project or extended essays, including the right to change the work for subsequent purposes, including editing and publishing the work in whole or in part, and licensing other parties, as the author may desire.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, BC, Canada

Abstract

This thesis examines the formation of a social liminal metacognitive layer of sexuality situated between the ‘real’ of the physical world and the ‘virtual’ within cyber and internet culture of the Republic of Turkey. The case study focuses on the dimensions of sexuality defined as the interaction between sexuality and (1) Islam as a socio-cultural system; (2) online technologies - specifically the Internet – as a mediating environment of liberated sexual discourse; and (3) private practices of sexual acts. I argue that the internet as a communication medium has stimulated the development of a liminal layer of sexual representation that differs significantly from sexuality articulated in socio-cultural domain of physical reality within Turkey.

This case study utilizes critical discourse analysis as a qualitative interpretative method to investigate sexual narratives shared on Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. It focuses on the differences in representational patterns of sexuality. The analysis provides evidence for the existence of emerging liminal social understandings of sexuality. Sexuality as a socio-cultural form represented within Muslim Turkey is a phenomenon not yet well understood, and therefore demands further investigation. Previous research in this field has focused mainly on sexuality as articulated in physical social environments. In contrast, this study examines Islamic sexuality from a perspective of ‘medium specificity’, offering new insight into this field.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a result of the collective effort of several people that have participated directly and indirectly in the production of this work. First, many special thanks go to my supervisory committee: Dr. Thecla Schiphorst and Dr. Kate Hennessy for their great comments and feedback. I am especially grateful to Thecla for her continuous support, encouragement, and brilliant editing. Without her academic ‘nurturing’ this thesis would have never been written. I want to also thank Dr. John Bowes and Dr. Marek Hatala for serving on my committee.

I am also especially thankful to Dr. Andrew Feenberg from the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University for his critical feedback. Dr. Feenberg’s insights and ideas have greatly improved the quality of this work.

A personal set of ‘many, many thanks’ goes to my family, and especially to my Mom, Detelina, for their practical help and patience. My daughter, Michelle, is the infinite source of inspiration and the primary reason I got into graduate school – for which I am grateful.

Finally, I want to express my special thanks to SIAT faculty, staff, and graduate students for their various forms of support.

Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Purpose, Problem, and Focus of the Project.....	2
1.2 Research Domain	7
1.3 Research Objectives	11
1.4 Definition of Key Concepts.....	11
1.5 Synthesis of Chapter Content	16
2: Theoretical Background	21
2.1 Literature Review.....	22
2.1.1 Sexuality from a Social Sciences Perspective.....	24
2.1.2 Sexuality as a Technologically Mediated Entity	34
2.1.3 Islam and Sexuality	41
2.1.4 Sexuality, Internet, and Turkey	44
2.2 Summary	50
3: Methodological Framework and Research Design	52
3.1 Research Questions	54
3.2 Theoretical Model	56
3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method of Investigation	60
3.4 Case Study.....	62
Personal Experience and Reflexivity.....	65
3.5 Data Collection Methods.....	66
3.5.1 Lurking.....	67
3.5.2 Purposeful Sampling	67
3.6 Ethical Considerations.....	68
3.7 Summary	71

4: The Formation of a Liminal and Socially Meta-cognitive Layer of Sexuality: A Case Study	72
4.1 Context	76
4.1.1 Short Overview of Turkish Sexual Confession Cyberspaces	78
4.1.2 Online Community	79
4.1.3 'No Physical Body, No Judgement'	91
4.2 Discourse	95
4.2.1 Linguistic Levels of Discursive Practices	98
4.2.2 Social Level of Discursive Practices	104
4.3 Action	111
4.3.1 Mediated Adoption of a Catholic Practice in an Islamic Cultural Setting	112
4.3.2 From a Sin to a 'Mediated' Norm	114
4.4 Reflection	117
4.5 Reorganization	120
4.5.1 Homosexuality and Bisexuality	122
4.5.2 Pre-Marital Sex and Virginity	127
4.5.3 Non-Coitional Practices of Sex	129
4.5.4 Female Polyamory	132
4.6 Socially Mediated Meta-Cognition	135
4.6.1 Liminal Sexuality: In-Between the 'Real' and the 'Virtual'	135
4.6.2 Evidence of Interplay between the 'Real' and the 'Virtual'	137
4.7 Summary	140
5: CONCLUSION	144
5.1 Discussion	144
5.2 Conclusions	145
5.3 Contributions of the Study	146
5.4 Limitations of the Study	147
5.5 Future work	148
5.5.1 Conceptual dimensions of future work	148
5.5.2 Methodological dimensions of future work	151
5.6 Summary	151
6: References	153

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Situation of the ‘liminal’ layer of sexuality in-between the physical reality and the virtual environment, in the form of reflective discursive practices.....	3
Figure 2 – An illustration of the situation of liminal sexual understandings between the physical reality and the virtual realm.	5
Figure 3 – Situation of the research domain in the overlapping area between the fields of Islam, Sexuality, and Technology.	8
Figure 4 – The application of the theoretical model within the scope of the research domain.....	10
Figure 5 – Visual presentation of the structure, and the chapter interrelatedness within the thesis, with a reference to the argument development.	17
Figure 6 - A conceptual overlap of the existing literature within the concerned fields.....	22
Figure 7 - The Treachery of Images by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte. <i>Note:</i> image downloaded from < http://www.hostingnewmedia.com/artists/artwork-page.php?id=104 >.....	39
Figure 8 - Social networking spiral. <i>Note:</i> Adapted from “A Theoretical Framework for Building Online Communities of Practice with Social Networking Tools,” by C. N. Gunawardena, M. B. Hermans, D. Sanchez, C. Richmond, M. Bohley, and R. Tuttle, 2009, <i>Educational Media International</i> , 46(1), 3-16.	57
Figure 9 - A case study design within the frames of an interactive research design model.	64
Figure 10 - A circular graph depicting the sexuality-forming dynamics of the interaction between physical reality and online environments.....	75
Figure 11 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	76
Figure 12 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	95
Figure 13 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	111
Figure 14 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	117
Figure 15 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	120

Figure 16 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).	135
Figure 17 – An illustration of the structural interconnection between theoretical model and the scope of the research domain.....	141

List of Tables

Table 1: Comparative results of the use of ‘cinsel ilişki’, ‘seks’, and ‘sex’ in Turkish sexual confessions conducted by the author between April 21 st , 2011 and May 18 th , 2011.....	101
Table 2: Comparative results of the use of ‘ters ilişki’, ‘anal seks’, and ‘arkadan + verb’ in Turkish sexual confessions	107
Table 3: Comparative results of the use of ‘eşcinsel’, ‘gay’, ‘hemcinsel’, and ‘gey’ in Turkish sexual confessions	108
Table 4: Discursive embodiment of sexual values in different domains – a brief comparison outlining future work.	150

1: Introduction

As closely as I can remember, the idea for this thesis emerged from my general observations about differences in representational practices related to language and cultural values between online environments and physical reality. These representational differences become particularly overt when considering a predominantly Muslim country, such as the Republic of Turkey. Having lived in the territory of Turkey for seven years (1999 – 2006), I can claim to have experienced myself, the need for different self-representations in various social settings. This issue of differences in representational practices between the online and the physical world repeatedly continued engaging my interest throughout the years to an extent that I decided to focus my research on it.

The specific scope of differences in articulation and representation of sexuality in physical and electronic environments came as a result of a graduate level course assignment in which students were asked to explore a phenomenon that goes beyond their own comfort zones. In my attempt to meet the objective of the assignment and go beyond my own comfort level, I recalled the Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces¹ – online digital spaces, where users share their sexual endeavours and fantasies. Apart from having provided a concept for my assignment, these sexual narratives embedded in my mind an idea, which I have tried to formulate for a long time – that social repression of sexuality in physical reality correlates with, and is mirrored by in its inverse, the

¹ I use “cyberspaces” as a collective term for all the possible types of online digital spaces and domains that can be used for sharing information. This is done as per King’s suggested rules for online research ethics (1996) further discussed in chapter 3.

dimensions of articulation in online environments. I write this thesis in an attempt to answer the challenging question: How can we understand the online reporting of sexual acts and fantasies as an indicator of the formation of a social and conceptually different layer of sexuality situated betwixt and between the real and the virtual?

1.1 Purpose, Problem, and Focus of the Project

In this thesis, I attempt to address this question with the specific purpose of investigating the interrelations between emerging forms of online sexual discourse and reorganization of sexual understandings within electronic media and within an Islamic cultural setting. This thesis provides a discursive analysis based on the assumption that the possibility for a liberal online reflection of sexual practices can lead to the development of a socially mediated understanding of sexuality that does not conform to the sex-related norms conducted by Islam. I consider this new layer of socially shared sexual understandings to form the existence of a “liminal” (V. Turner, 1977) collective sexuality. This form of liminal collective sexuality is situated in-between the real and the virtual – taking part in physical reality as embodied sexual acts and achieving the level of social cognition or shared social understandings in the form of discursive practices online:

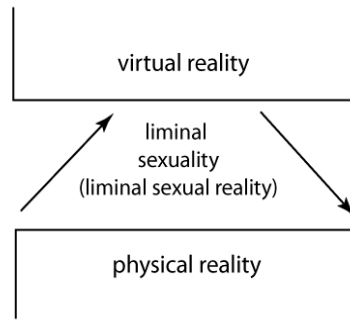


Figure 1 – Situation of the ‘liminal’ layer of sexuality in-between the physical reality and the virtual environment, in the form of reflective discursive practices.

This is a layer where the shared social cognition and private sexual drives mingle with each other to reorganize existing sex-related structures. In this way, sex is transformed from a private practice to a public and social discourse. As a result, the image formed is an image of a conceptually different social and sexual reality.

The analysis presented argues that the online social reflections of (real) physical practices of sex carry the signification of an emerging sexual culture and sexual understanding. This emerging understanding conveys fundamental differences from the prevailing Islamic norms that guide the articulation of sexuality in physical reality. The interconnectedness of the virtual and the real identifies the hybridization of a collective formation of sexuality – a phenomenon that is going to be explored throughout this thesis. My argument is based on interpretation and critical discourse analysis of sexual narratives shared on Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. Such an interpretive approach to the delicate matter of sexuality in an Islamic setting allows for the development of multiple perspectives and the bridging between culture, language, and

environment. An interpretive method, such as critical discourse analysis, allows me to look beneath the obvious surface representations, enabling me to explore patterns of representation that are not a part of traditional power relations – social and religious (Foucault, 1982), for example - prevailing in physical reality. In addition, I include a framework of social, cultural, and media theories, which are used in assessing and evaluating the study.

An in depth investigation of sexuality in light of Islam and technology, forms a natural continuum emerging from the relationship between Islam and modernity, and Islam in the context of globalization. Online sexuality in a Muslim cultural setting is a product of a conflict of values that requires further analysis. This conflict is generated between the following agents: (1) Islamic religio-social norms and their predicament with modernity on one side (Tibi, 2009), and (2) personal sexual drives, combined with (3) the exchange of sex-related content on the net, on the other side. Based on an analysis of these three agents, this thesis is positioned to build upon exploring the relationship between: the expression of sexual drives, Islam as a socio-cultural system, and online environments as a medium of relatively free flow of information and communication beyond geographical boundaries. Considering the multiple points of intersection between these, this study is concerned predominantly with the emerging layer of sexual understanding that is taking place in-between the physical reality and the online realm. This layer of liminal sexuality reflects on the complex scheme of interactions and levels of indulgence in sexual discourse that do not belong specifically to the physical or virtual environments, but are shared between both.

The challenge of the argument presented in this thesis follows from the overall context in which the study is situated – specifically, the inseparability of social tensions, politics, Islamisation, and secularism among many others. From this perspective, sexuality is a variable that is moulded in relation to non-polar powers of cultural values, prevailing worldviews, modernization, and technological progress. The analysis of these tensions requires an understanding of sexuality not as a single entity with a horizontal developmental progress, but as an iterative accumulation of knowledge that changes shape and structure in relation to the social environment. This is to acknowledge the fact that sexuality in the specific context of the Republic of Turkey has multiple forms and appearances. For the sake of clarity, I shall emphasize that the case illustrated here focuses on the form of sexuality that structures a layer of social sexual discourse located between the physical reality and the virtual realm.

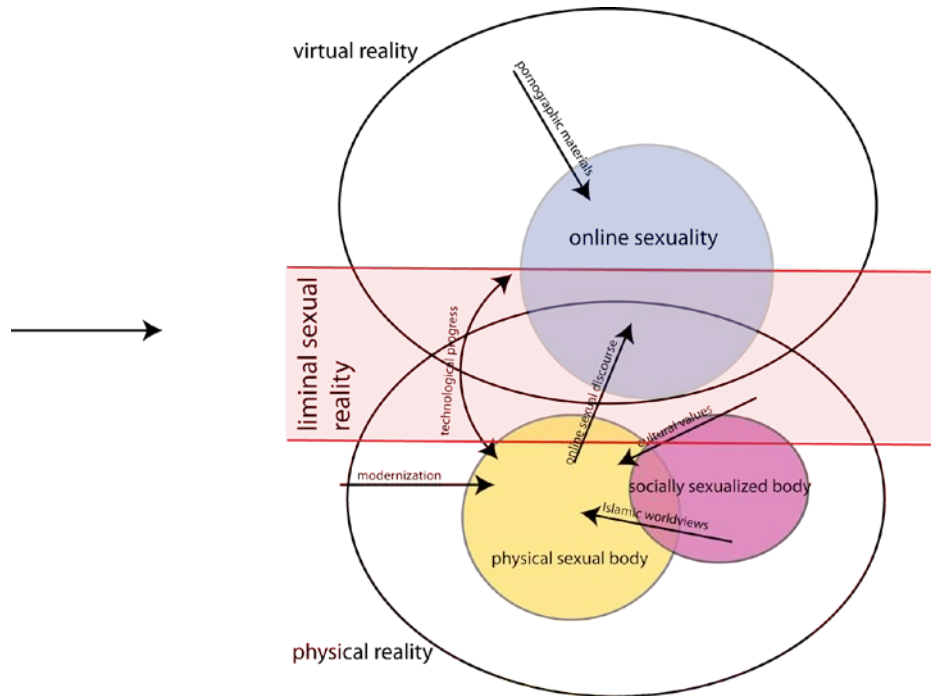


Figure 2 – An illustration of the situation of liminal sexual understandings between the physical reality and the virtual realm.

The inquiry into this research domain, which is based on the overlapping fields of Islam, sexuality, and communication technology, requires an interdisciplinary approach that has its distinguished roots within the literature history of all these three disciplines. Existing studies in the field of sexuality have conceptualized the influence of social norms and codes underlying the formation of sexuality (Chodorow, 1994; Epstein, 1991; Foucault, 1982). Social research has linked variations in ‘performance’: the physical articulation of sexuality, to socio-cultural processes, economic choices, and similarities in social characteristics (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). While many studies have addressed the relationship between sexuality and technology (Gordo-López & Cleminson, 2004; O’Riordan & Phillips, 2007), along with sexuality and Islam (Combs-Schilling, 1989; Dialmy, 2010), this thesis bridges sexuality, Islam, and technology together in a form that explains how their interdependencies are creating emerging forms of practice and social knowledge. This perspective is particularly important as the increasing technological effects upon societies and the decreasing role of social institutional powers online create conditions where the social aspects of the intimate life may reveal itself in its most sensational and striking forms.

In the case of collective sexuality and online environments, the concept of ‘communicating’ sexual acts facilitates the transcendence from the individual content of sexual narratives to a multi-dimensional narrative that includes the online medium, the patterns in representational practices, and the existence of an online community. These elements form the metanarrative of a liminal layer of sexual understanding. Despite the fact that online narratives are based on verbalization of individual experiences of sex, this thesis seeks to form an understanding of the (para-) social context within which these

private experiences are being articulated and inscribed. I approach this liminal layer of sexual understanding as a community of practice (Paechter, 2006; Wenger, 1999) where the online, digital environments are used as a means of social extension of the sexual acts of the online community members. Within this framework, the linguistic and socio-cultural practices of representation are of particular interest, and are used as a supporting material towards the main argument of this thesis. This explication and analysis are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.2 Research Domain

The research for this exploratory and descriptive case study, which focuses on sexuality, online environments, and Islam in the context of Turkey, is guided by the understanding that social foundations of sexuality can be reformed and changed through the influence of environments that contain alternative social practices and knowledge. When a physical social reality is difficult to alter, sexual codified behavioural norms, such as those found in normative sanctioned sexual practices in Islamic Turkey, are both transformed and embodied in alternative forms of ‘realities’ – in the case presented here, a liminal reality situated between the physical and the virtual. Thus, the conceptual framework of this study is a product of the analysis of interactions between three predominant factors:

1. Sexuality constructed by social formations and private libidinal drives;
2. Islam – the religio-socio-cultural system of inherited behavioural traditions;

and

3. Technology as embodiment of online environments and as a medium of information exchange and a mediator of a digital / virtual reality.

This research is situated at the intermediate point between the three constructs or fields of sexuality, Islam, and technology mentioned above. At the intersection between these three fields, there is a space that belongs simultaneously to all and at the same time to no single field. This area transforms the knowledge and practices through its intersection and is described, analyzed and evaluated within this thesis.

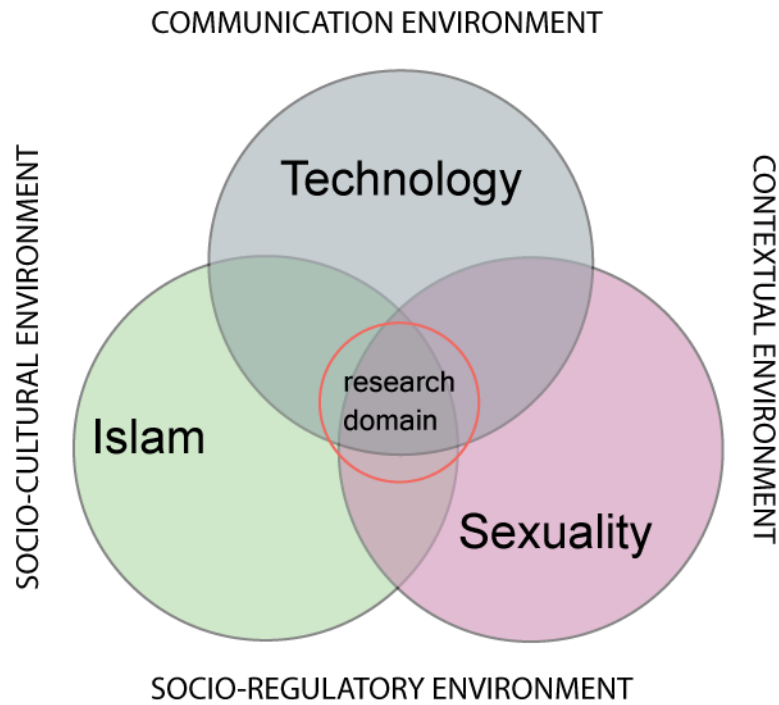


Figure 3 – Situation of the research domain in the overlapping area between the fields of Islam, Sexuality, and Technology.

As illustrated in Figure 2, each conceptual field corresponds to and is closely related to an *environment*, depicted on the outer edge of the quadrant, that links relationships between conceptual entities. Each of these four elements is considered within the dimensions of this thesis:

1. On the left, Islam is situated within a socio-cultural environment;
2. At the top, Technology is situated within a communication environment;
3. On the right, sexuality is situated within a contextual environment (the focus of this study);
4. At the bottom part of Figure 2, Islam and sexuality are treated as two inseparable components of a unity that constitutes a part of the *socio-regulatory* environment.

The purpose of this study – specifically, exploring the emerging layer of new sexual understandings in the intersecting areas of sexuality, technology / online environments, and Islam requires a theoretical model and a plan for the study that maps the levels of varying effects resulting from the interaction between these fields. To meet this requirement, I have adopted a theoretical model for learning in online communities proposed by Gunawardena et al. (2009). It suggests a spiral model for learning (or knowledge construction) that is iterative as well as generative, and is suited to analyzing online communities in which social practices result in practices of knowledge building. This model engages the following phases (in an ascending order):

1. First level – CONTEXT
2. Second level – DISCOURSE
3. Third level – ACTION
4. Fourth level – REFLECTION
5. Fifth level – REORGANIZATION

6. Sixth level – SOCIALLY MEDIATED META-COGNITION

The specific levels within this theoretical model and their mapping to my analysis of online sexual communities in the context of Islamic culture will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. In this introductory section, I situate this model within my research domain, as illustrated in the figure below:

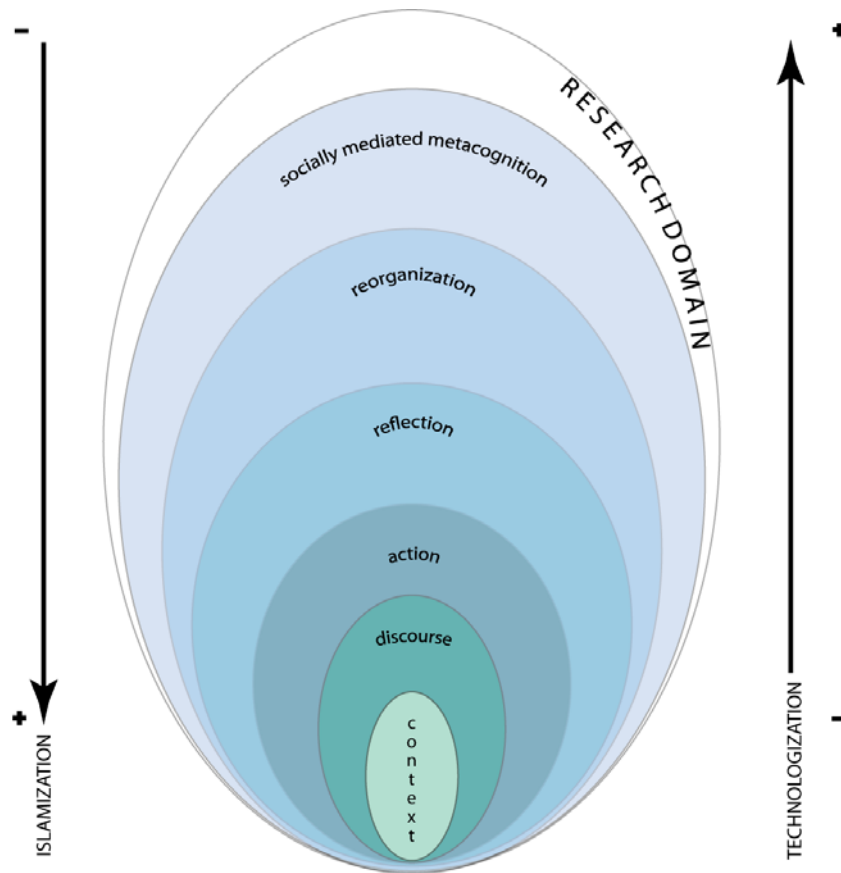


Figure 4 – The application of the theoretical model within the scope of the research domain.

As seen in Figure 3, this theoretical model maps the phases of learning and knowledge construction in online environments to 1) the correlation between ‘technologization’ and ‘Islamization’ in the context of sexuality; and 2) extrapolates this knowledge construction to the research domain itself, illustrating the transformative

nature of the intersection of the three areas within this research. It mediates the iterative development of the argument and situates the variables outlined in Figure 2, within a methodological process that delineates the scope of the study.

1.3 Research Objectives

The questions posed in this thesis present an inquiry into the subject of sexuality that is framed within three perspectives: (1) Islam, as a socio-cultural system, and (2) technology as the embodiment of online environments, combined with (3) analysis of reported private practices of sex. These three frames are united within a single integrated approach. By conducting this study, I hope to build on previously existing knowledge in the concerned fields and gain further comprehension of the particular context within which members of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces articulate and enact sexual practices and understandings that are otherwise considered ‘inappropriate’ in physical reality. This existing tension between ‘allowed’ and ‘forbidden’ sexual forms in an Islamic cultural environment, along with existing evidence of the reorganization of sexuality online, constitutes a phenomenon that is not yet well understood and therefore demands further investigation. The limited number of literature sources within the field of Islamic sexuality, and the even more sparse resources on Islamic sexuality in a technological context define the theme of this thesis as a matter of urgency.

1.4 Definition of Key Concepts

Sources of Islam:

By these, I refer to the immutable sources of Islam that structure its basis as a religious system, and then consequently as a cultural, legal, and political systems. The

term immutable is used here to describe these documents as primary and unchangeable sources of Islamic knowledge and practice. These are:

1. The Qur'an – the primary immutable source of Islam, consisting of 6666 ayat's (verses) and 114 surah's (chapters), and containing the basic norms of morality. It is considered an "immutable" source because of the belief in its direct origination from Allah (Armagan, 2003).
2. Sunna – the second immutable source, consisting of the deeds, and passive or active responses of the Prophet Muhammad. It is organized in (and consists of) 9 hadith's - the verbal documenting of the deeds and the statements of the Prophet (Armagan, 2003). It is considered immutable and unchangeable, because of the impossibility of the deeds being replicated (ibid).

In the literature, the concepts of Sunna and Hadith are used interchangeably, resulting in a dual labelling of the secondary source – some using Sunna (Armagan, 2003; Filali-Ansary, 2003), while others referring to the Hadith's themselves as a mapping to this secondary source (Iqbal, 2002).

Islam as a socio-cultural system:

The most common connotation of Islam is related to its dimensions as a religious system. Undoubtedly, Islam has originated as a religious system that shapes or defines followers' belief systems, particularly those in relation to a source of religious authority – which is referred to in Islam as 'the almighty Allah'. Yet, in the historical process of

development, Islam has also evolved into a system of socially shared values. As a result, along with its original appearance as a religious system, Islam has gained the status of a socio-cultural and a legal system, amongst others. In this thesis, I deal with Islam predominantly in its socio-cultural dimensions, defining it as a system that

“[...] denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”(Geertz, 1973, p. 89)

Within this definition, and within the perspective of Islam as a socio-cultural system, I include the fabrication of social politics that aim at regulation of social dynamics.

Islamic vs. Muslim:

For the sake of clarity, I emphasize that Muslim and Islamic are not synonymous concepts. ‘Muslim’ refers to active beliefs and practices of Islam in the religious sense (Imam, 2001), while I am using the term Islamic to refer to the contemporary socio-cultural practices

Internet culture:

“If the Internet can be understood as the site of any culture at all, it is not, presumably, culture in the sense either of an elitist enclave or of a homogenous social sphere. The culture that the Net embodies, rather, is a product of the peculiar conditions of virtual acquaintance that prevail online, a collective adaptation to the high frequency of anonymous, experimental, and even fleeting encounters familiar to anyone who has ventured into a newsgroup debate.” (Porter, 1996, p. xi)

From this perspective, by *internet culture*, I mean the collage of cultural markers that are influenced by and influence the Internet users.

Socially mediated meta-cognition:

Meta-cognition refers to “one’s awareness of thinking and the self regulatory behavior that accompanies this awareness” (Driscoll, as cited in Gunawardena et al., 2009, p. 11). Based on this definition and within the context of this thesis, *socially mediated meta-cognition* refers to the mutual ability to analyze, reflect on, and mediate a shift in sexual understandings within the framework of an online community and as a group of social awareness.

Sexuality:

“Sexual nature, instinct, or feelings; the possession or expression of these.” (“Oxford English Dictionary,” 2010) In this thesis, the concept of sexuality is embedded in a debate around the socio-cultural context that molds sexual understandings, rather than psychology or health -based behavioural models (Izugbara, 2005).

Collective sexuality:

The socially shared sexual understandings that are marked from the beginning by the social relations of production, class, gender (Willis, 1987). In other words, the term ‘collective sexuality’ reflects on the hegemonic social and cultural norms and the socially-regulatory eroticism that shape and define social understanding and articulation of sexuality.

Liminal sexuality:

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.” (V. Turner, 1977, p. 95)

There is no concrete sexuality attached to the purely physical body. The formation of sexuality is a hybridization of the physical body with the socio-cultural organization of reality. Based on this understanding, by 'liminal sexuality' I mean the sexual body that is constructed as a result of the interaction between (1) Islamic cultural norms, (2) sexual discourse in online environments, and (3) private practices of sex in physical reality. I call this sexual body 'liminal' as it does not distinctively belong to physical reality or the online environments, but is situated between and betwixt the 'real' and the 'virtual.'

Homosexuality:

The quality of being "related to, or characterized by a sexual propensity for one's own sex; of or involving sexual activity with a member of one's own sex, or between individuals of the same sex."("Oxford English Dictionary," 2010)

Polyamory:

"The fact of having simultaneous close emotional relationships with two or more other individuals, viewed as an alternative to monogamy, esp. in regard to matters of sexual fidelity; the custom or practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships with the knowledge and consent of all partners concerned"("Oxford English Dictionary," 2010). In this thesis, the term "polyamory" is not specifically associated with any of the following sexual cultures: bisexuality, BDSM, Pagan, computer enthusiasts, dedication to communal living (Klesse, 2006).

Promiscuity (equivalent to promiscuous sexual behaviour):

“[T]he frequent, casual changing of sexual partners.” (“Oxford English Dictionary,” 2010). Although the term “promiscuity” is generally identified with a wide range of sexual activities, such as sex outside the boundaries of marriage, sex in public spaces, sex with multiple partners, non-genital sex (Klesse, 2005), for the purpose of this thesis, the word ‘promiscuity’ is used within the term of ‘frequent and/or casual changing of sexual partners’. This term is not associated with (any) gender, race, ethnicity, or moral stance on the act of frequent changing of sexual partners.

1.5 Synthesis of Chapter Content

This section presents the structure and organization of the study, with a brief overview of the chapter content.

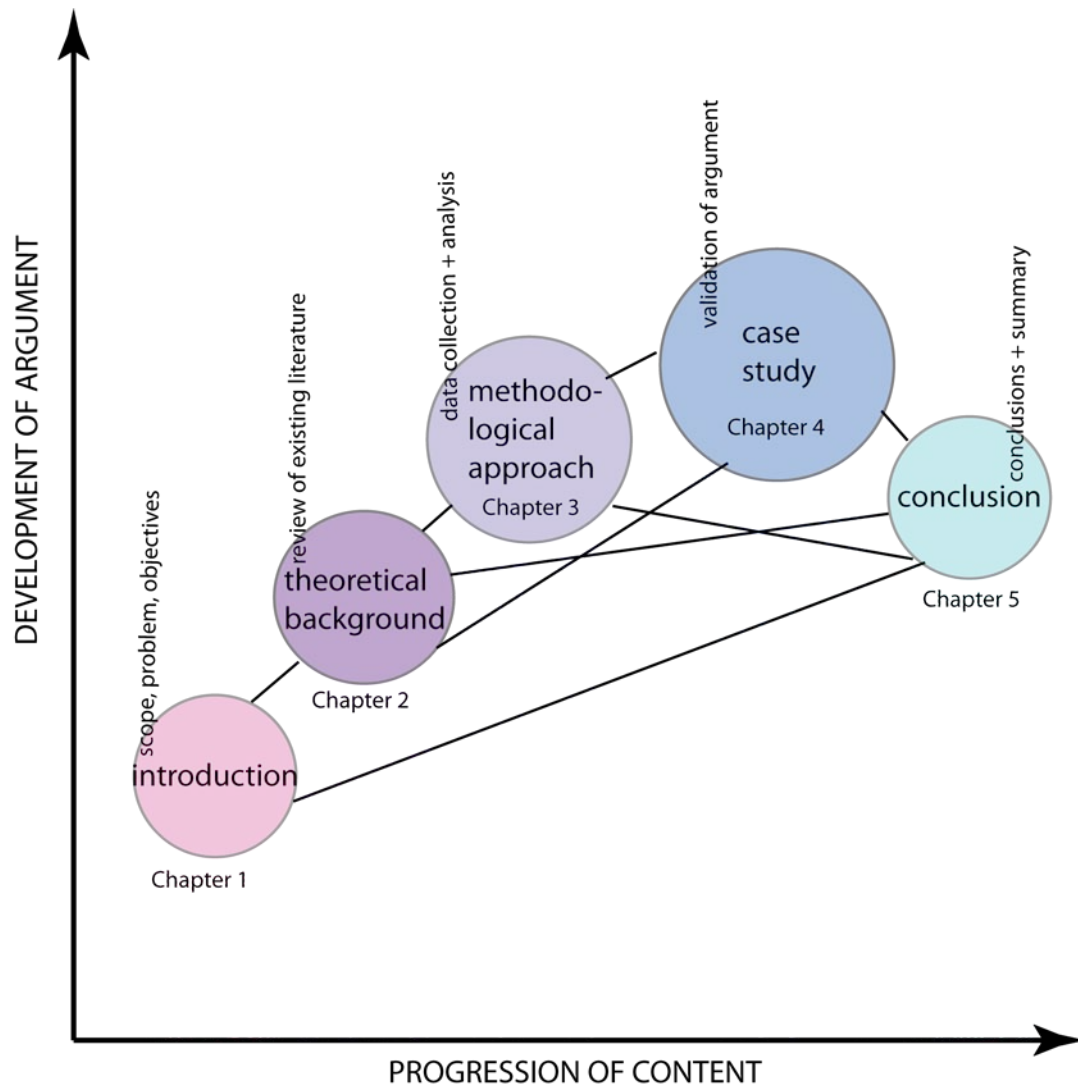


Figure 5 – Visual presentation of the structure, and the chapter interrelatedness within the thesis, with a reference to the argument development.

Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

The Introduction presents the major themes, scope, and problem of the thesis. It provides a short overview of the topic and situates the study within the research domain and existing literature. The conceptual frame of the domain is also outlined here.

Chapter 2 – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 frames the study outlined in the Introduction by locating each of the three dominant fields within the body of existing literature from three dominant angles, exploring sexuality from:

1. A social-sciences perspective;
2. A media perspective;
3. An Islamic perspective.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the major fields concerned with the scope of this thesis, and their interplay. This interplay is mapped to the structure and theoretical approach of the study, as per the adopted model presented by Gunawardena et al. (2009).

Chapter 3 – METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the presentation and explanation of the methodological approach used for data collection and analysis in this thesis. It serves to underpin the validity of development of the analysis and the conclusions made. It attaches the theoretical framework to a set of procedures and methods of analysis that set the agenda of the study. This chapter develops the relationship between the notion of case studies as an “object of study” (Stake, 1995), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001) as a method of investigation.

Chapter 4 – THE FORMATION OF A LIMINAL AND SOCIALLY META-COGNITIVE LAYER OF SEXUALITY: A CASE STUDY

Following the structure and objectives provided in the previous chapters, Chapter 4 examines and analyses the development of a layer of sexuality situated between the physical reality and the virtual realm. It is based on an applied discursive analysis of

sexual narratives shared on the Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. Basing on critical, social and media theory, Chapter 4 applies an interdisciplinary approach to sexuality, defining it as a “floating signifier” (Lévi-Strauss, 1987). In this definition, construction of meaning depends on the specificity of the medium. From this perspective, the formation of social layers of sexual understanding is defined not only by underlying socio-cultural conventions, but also by the act of mediation and structural characteristics of the medium within which articulation of sexuality emerges. Specifically, this chapter aims to illustrate and examine the discrepancies in representation and performance of sexuality between prevailing Islamic norms in material reality and digital environments as represented by sexual confession cyberspaces in the territory of the Republic of Turkey.

The data analyzed illustrates that public and social sexual discourse online involves the formation of a new layer of sexual understanding that is located in-between the real and the virtual and that is characterized by a body of social cognition. The reported sexual practices otherwise forbidden by Islam and expressed as normative, do not conform to the Islamic social regulatory mechanisms in physical reality, yet centralize a ‘new norm’ through the production of sexual scenarios within an online community of practice. The findings in this chapter constitute the heart of this research and provide evidence and analysis for the answers to the proposed research questions, which deal with the understanding of online reporting of sexual episodes as an indicator of the formation of a social and conceptually different body of sexuality situated betwixt and between the real and the virtual.

Chapter 5 – CONCLUSION

At the end of the study, Chapter 5 summarizes the preliminary conclusions, limitations of the study, and areas for future work. These are embedded in the context of reorganization of social space and social regulatory mechanisms. The reader is reminded of the relationship between purely physical sexual body, socially sexualized body, and technologically mediated online environments. This multi-fold relationship is concluded to constitute a layer of 'liminal' sexual reality.

2: Theoretical Background

“Discourse, therefore had to trace the meeting line of the body and the soul, following all its meanderings: beneath the surface of the sins, it would lay bare the unbroken nervure of the flesh. Under the authority of a language that had been carefully expurgated so that it was no longer directly named, sex was taken charge of, tracked down as it were, by a discourse that aimed to allow it no obscurity, no respite.”

(Foucault, 1990, p. 20)

In the developmental process of the study of sexuality, Michael Foucault’s multi-volume work entitled *History of Sexuality* was the first to emphasize the importance of discourse as a transformative practice for sexuality. In this thesis, I focus on Foucault’s analysis of the practice of confession in the production of a discourse of sexuality. Foucault asserts that the ‘desires of the flesh’, become objectified and multiplied in the practice of confession, and that the production of discourse also transformed the role of sexuality (Foucault, 1990).

Reflecting on the role of discourse through contemporary forms of ‘confessions’ in technology –mediated online environments, this thesis draws many of its insights from the studies of social sciences, media, and Islam. The role of this chapter is to present the notion of sexuality as an embedded subject of investigation within these disciplines and to reflect on the existing body of literature from the perspectives of these central areas of inquiry.

The intention of approaching the construction of sexuality through the examination of multidisciplinary viewpoints demonstrates both explicit and implicit interconnectedness between these viewpoints, and also illustrates the overlap between the concerned fields. This thesis illustrates the conceptual overlap between the fields of technology, sexuality, and Islamic theories within the existing literature and shows how this overlap creates an emerging and under-theorized domain of study.

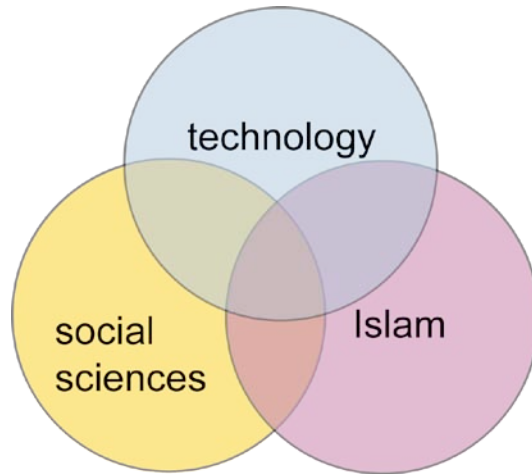


Figure 6 - A conceptual overlap of the existing literature within the concerned fields.

In addition to focusing on theories within these three established disciplinary fields, this chapter also bridges these perspectives into a theoretical framework. The resulting study of ‘representational’ practices is derived from the application of this framework.

2.1 Literature Review

“Modern structures have been globalized throughout the world, to also map the Islamic world, but the values of cultural modernity have not been successfully universalized. Ordinary Muslims conceive modernity either as a cultural threat to beware of, or as a political challenge to deal with. The debate on modernity has been going on since the Islamic revivalism of the nineteenth century. Most modern Muslims are positive about

science and technology under conditions of globalization. However, some of these Muslims make the accusation of an ‘epistemological imperialism of the West.’ Unlike the medieval Islamic rationalists, who viewed epistemology as human and universal, the contemporary Muslim accusers of ‘epistemological imperialism’ fall behind this early Islamic standard and are caught in their own constructed particularism.”(Tibi, 2009, pp. 315-316)

Set within the general context of interaction (and tension) between technology-driven Western modernity and Islamic cultural values as captured by Tibi, I explore the cultural change appearing in sexual understandings as a result of technological mediation. I argue that in the liminal realm between physical and virtual realities, sexuality as a basic human drive tacitly transgresses the Islamic resistance for social change to discover and accommodate the sexual “epistemological imperialism of the West” (ibid). In this general scenario, it should be mentioned that Turkey, in contrast to the rest of the Islamic world, has put a deliberate effort to open itself towards Western values (sometimes successfully, sometimes not). Lewis captures Turkey’s unique openness to Westernization by providing the following explanation:

“Linked with the political is what one might call a historical explanation - that Turkey, of all the Muslim countries, has had the longest and closest contact with the West, dating back almost to the beginnings of the Ottoman state. Turkey, for long the sword and buckler of Islam against the West, made a deliberate choice for westernization, and for a Westward political orientation.” (B. Lewis, 1994, para. 28)

Lewis’ formulation of Turkey’s openness toward Western values differentiates Turkish socio-cultural and political stage from the rest of the Islamic cultures. This differentiation is important as it provides a deeper insight and explanation of the relative flexibility of Turko-Islamic sexual understandings and their potential for a radical shift.

Based on this possibility for fluctuations in Turkish sexuality and within the body of this section, I examine the key ideas and perspectives of sexuality as a social entity and representational practices that are of concern for this study. This overview of existing literature provides the conceptual background of my main argument, which explores sexuality as a liminal body emerging from the interaction between physical reality and sexual discourse in online environments. I draw upon social sciences, media, and scholarly-Islamic views as well as theories of representation. These views mediate the understanding of sexuality in the context of social reality, online communication environments, and representational practices.

2.1.1 Sexuality from a Social Sciences Perspective

The subject of sexuality has progressively becomes a concern of many academic disciplines over the past number of decades. The social sciences, like other disciplines, have adopted new theoretical layers which have supported extended social and cultural understanding of sexuality. During this time, sexuality has gained status as a social issue, and conceptualized as a product of socio-cultural construction. The acknowledgement of the existence of sexuality as a topic of scholarly study within the social sciences has underpinned the discursive imagination that highlights the social manufacturing of sexuality. As Epstein formulates:

“Over the past twenty years, a radical new theoretical perspective on the meaning of sexual behaviour and sexual identity has been consolidated. This ‘social constructionist’ perspective is an interdisciplinary enterprise, but sociology played an important early role, especially through the contributions of symbolic interactionism and labelling theory to the study of sexuality. By refusing to treat sex as “natural” or as a biological given, constructionism has posed significant challenges to conventional thinking about sexuality. It has located sexuality in relation to other social institutions; emphasized the importance of subjective meanings in the

study of sexual conduct; and demanded a greater attention to the historical and cultural specificity of sexual typologies [...]” (1991, p. 1)

This formulation of sexuality within the field of social sciences, and particularly sociology, shows the potential of sexuality as a topic of social and academic discourse. We can articulate specific fragments and modulation of sexual behaviours within the social institution. Situating the study of sexuality within the social sciences allows us to understand and map the social tensions under which sexuality is being articulated, performed, produced, and represented.

In the following four sub- sections, I examine existing views within the social sciences relating to the social construction of sexuality. These views include Baudrillard’s concept of sexuality as a sign of sexuality, Foucault’s examination of sexuality as discourse, the ‘Bourdieuian Turn’ which presents sexuality within a socio-political construct as gender-power relations, and Judith Butler’s analysis of sexual ‘performativity’ as a representation of social hegemony. In each subsection, I describe how these social theories of sexuality are applied to my own research, and how these theories illuminate my own argument within the case study.

2.1.1.1 Jean Baudrillard and the Sign as Disembodied Sex

Baudrillard’s discourse on sexuality is revealed through his reflections on the body as a sign (1998), as a cultural object (1990), and the body “under the sign of sexuality” (1993, p. 101). Baudrillard argues that signs mark the body, which defines the skin as a surface of signs. In Baudrillard’s concept of the relation between signs and body, sexuality is linguistically revealed through binary oppositions between a sign and its counter-sign of difference. For example, Baudrillard suggests that the word sets

‘naked / dressed’, ‘male / female’ serve as an illustration of binary oppositions. In these ‘sign’ systems, sex and sexuality are viewed as economy – whether as “*an element of the economy of the subject*, an objective finality of the subject itself obedient to an order of finalities”(1993, p. 115), or as an upper level of political economy. Baudrillard further describes the contemporary inscription of the body as reifying unconscious or prelinguistic content, bringing the unconscious forward to be seen more pervasively within culture:

“The body organized under the sign of Eros represents a more advanced phase of political economy. Here the reabsorption of symbolic exchange is as radical as the alienation of human labour in the classical system of political economy. If Marx has described the historical phase where the alienation of labour power and the logic of the commodity necessarily resulted in a *reification of consciousness*, today we could say that the inscription of the body (and of all symbolic domains) into the logic of the sign is necessarily doubled by a *reification of the unconscious*.”(1993, p. 118)

Baudrillard’s view of sex and sexuality as economy, signs, and signifying practices provides an in-depth discussion of sexuality as a practice of representation (in Baudrillard’s terms and within this specific context – signification), and as a social product - economy. Both of these perspectives are relevant to this study as they reveal the ambivalent nature of sexuality as a socially generated entity and as a product of practices of representation in the form of signs. Baudrillard’s view of translation and transformation of sexuality into signs provide the traction essential to the investigation of sexuality as a practice of re-presentation and representation in online environments.

2.1.1.2 Sexuality and Discourse

In its most general meaning, discourse refers to linguistic practices and activities that are specific to a social issue (Allan, 2011), or similarly, the “actual instances of

communicative action in the medium of language” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 2). Discourse is a constructive practice of self-positioning within a domain of subjectivity, such as expression of attitudes, emotions, concepts. Discourse is an active or passive process of connotation, acquired in the process of communicative acts.

According to Bourdieu, discourse requires a certain level of consciousness as well as specialized institutions and agents for its formation (1977). Not every speech or verbal expression can be classified as ‘discourse.’

One of the major critical analyses of the link between sexuality and discourse comes from the French philosopher Michael Foucault. In his multi-volume work entitled *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that sexuality is a product of social and historical discourse, along with liberation initiated by discourse itself. In opposition to the Freudian view which argues that sexuality has been shaped and molded by social repression of polymorphous – perverse impulses (1989), Foucault examines sexuality in terms of linguistic procedures, or as an “insatiable desire to hear it speak and be spoken about, quick to invent all sorts of magical rings that might force it to abandon its discretion”(1990, p. 77). From Foucault’s perspective, sexual discourse constitutes the social formation of sexuality. Interestingly, this forces the social subjects engaged in this specific discourse to be “a function of the statement itself” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 43).

By adapting Foucault’s definition of discourse regarding sexual practices – specifically, the sexual ‘confession’ as socially discursive mechanism, I can situate the primary argument of this study within a framework of practices of *online* sexual confessions that enact and exemplify the existence of a liminal layer of sexual understandings in the context of the Republic of Turkey. The examination of technology-

mediated forms of online sexual ‘confessions’ as discourse or “a multiplicity of discourses” (Foucault, 1990, p. 33) enables the tracking of sexuality as a process of social production, presentation, transformation, re-production, and re-presentation – in short, “telling with greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell” (Foucault, 1990, p. 60)

If we consider a phenomenological approach towards sexuality as an entity in flux since its experience is continually responding and evolving alongside social practices and understanding, we can think of sexuality as the increment of many singular sexualities. In Foucault’s analysis, this extends the limits of sexuality to infinite forms. Foucault’s approach to sexuality as a discursive practice and a product of linguistic exchange recognizes the multiplicity of sexuality and the social characteristics that underlie and shape it as a *floating signifier*. From this perspective, sexuality is not a concrete entity filled with static referents, but a variable whose value is shaped, constructed, and reorganized through time and contexts:

“This is the essential thing: that Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and an increasing valorization of the discourse on sex; and that this carefully analytical discourse was meant to yield multiple effects of displacement, intensification, reorientation, and modification of desire itself. Not only were the boundaries of what one could say about sex enlarged, and men compelled to hear it said; but more important, discourse was connected to sex by a complex organization with varying effects [...]” (Foucault, 1990, p. 23)

In this excerpt, there is an immediate sense that Foucault has a more or less reverse approach to sexuality that takes the “valorization of the discourse on sex” as a point of departure and “the modification of the desire” (ibid) as an ending place. In contrast to the prevailing framing of sexuality as a primarily psychodynamic and

secondarily a social institution, Foucault's approach recognizes the social profile before the psychodynamic one:

valorization of sexual discourse → modification of the desire

as opposed to

private sexual practices → social reflection

Foucault's approach to sexuality as *a discourse or a multiplicity of discourses* should not be isolated from the specific context he provides in *History of Sexuality Volume I* – in particular, the religious practice of confession as a discursive mechanism. This context allows the tracking of roots of modern sexuality into religion. Having framed origins of sexuality as a religious understanding, Foucault extends the relationship between socially regulatory, authoritarian mechanisms (religion) and sexual (self-) understandings.

Foucault's reflections resonate with the claims presented in Chapter 4 – specifically that online sexual discursive practices influence and reorganize the private and collective understandings of sexuality. In Foucault's rhetoric, this causes the emergence of new layers of social sexual consciousness. In the context of the Republic of Turkey, the relationship between sexuality and religion is revealed in an implicit manner, meaning that the cultural authority of Islam as a socio-cultural system suppresses sexual discourse in physical reality which results in an abnormal sex-related discursive erethism

(an abnormal tendency to become aroused quickly). This is precisely why sex-related discourse is multiplied apart from the cultural power of Islam, in a space that both extends and limits the boundaries of physical reality.

2.1.1.3 The Bourdieuan Turn: Gender-Power Relations

In an overlapping terrain between sociological, anthropological, and psychoanalytical knowledge, Bourdieu argues that sexuality and sexual identity are defined by symbols and regulated by gender-power relations. Bourdieu locates the social factors of formation of sexuality not in a single standpoint, but a social structure where the sexual self is developed around the idea of embodiment, symbolic forces, and social organizations external to the individual:

“The child constructs its *sexual identity*, the major element in its social identity, at the same time as it constructs its image of the division of biological and social indices. In other words, the awakening of consciousness of sexual identity and the incorporation of the dispositions associated with a determinate social definition of the social functions incumbent on men and women come hand in hand with the adoption of a socially defined vision of the sexual division of labour.”(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 93)

Bourdieu’s description of the formation of sexuality is based on exposure to the organizational structures of societies. Bourdieu addresses the *relationship* between the psychodynamic and social construction of sexual understandings. Although Bourdieu links formation of sexuality closely to social construction of gender and power, he reserves a specific place to the process of socialization of sexuality.

Bourdieu’s approach to sexuality as a product of institutional practices such as gender and power relations within the limits of a perfectly constructed *habitus* does not provide a logical explanation for “all the practices between gender and sexuality, the

contradictions, plays, experimentations, swappings, ambiguities and passings both within gender and between gender and sexuality (which, of course, are always informed by class, race and age) ” (Skeggs, 2005, p. 27).

Expanding on the multiple critiques addressing the gaps of his work, Bourdieu emphasizes the sexual significance of power in his book *Masculine Domination* (2001). He insists on the revitalization of the social formation of sexuality that was lost in the process of investigating sexuality as an independent existence outside the boundaries of a socially inscribed cause and effect relationship:

“The constitution of the sexual as such (which culminates in eroticism) has caused us to lose the sexualized cosmology that is rooted in a sexualized topology of the socialized body, of its movements and displacements which are immediately charged with social meaning – upward movement being, for example, associated with the male, through erection or the upper position of the sexual act.” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 7)

Bourdieu's notion of domination and social power may be seen as applicable to many aspects of social life and sexuality, but definitely not as an ‘umbrella’ theory encapsulating and explaining all sexuality-related social phenomena. For example, ‘universal’ taboos, such as incest, are not explicitly a result of power relations, but as Freud formulates it, a protective mechanism towards practices that endanger the physical existence of societies (1989).

In his series of essays entitled *The Social Contract and the Discourses* (1993), Rousseau reflects on Athenian Democracy, describing it as tyrannical Aristocracy (which is parallel to the concept of power.) He claims that in case of social repression "the body of the society is really divided into other bodies." (Rousseau, 1993, p. 134) If we apply this statement to Bourdieu's concepts of gender-power relations, it may be suggested that

masculine domination will face a counter-reaction from divisive groups (such as feminist activists, for example), and the dynamics of social masculine domination consequently including sexuality, will not be applicable to/ within these particular groups. From this perspective, Bourdieu's work may be considered controversial because it does not supply a model for types of sexualities and sexual practices that do not obey a gender- power scheme.

Bourdieu's work has been criticised because it does not distinctly address the correlation between dominance, submissiveness and gender. Despite its weaknesses however, Bourdieu's reflections on social organization of sexuality provide a valuable insight on sexuality as a product of power relations, and the erotic significance of power. With regard to sexuality, I will use his notion of power relations as a structural element defining the boundaries of 'sexuality/ authority' interplay. This specific interplay effectively explains the connection between sexuality and Islam as a social and regulatory mechanism.

2.1.1.4 Performativity

The understanding of the function of 'gender' in isolation from 'sex' and 'body' has prevailed in sociological doctrines for quite a long time. This view helps us grasp the way, sociologists reflect on the interrelation between sex-gender-body, where the 'body' as a social entity is given the least attention, if any at all (Shilling, 2003).

In contrast to this view, the gender theorist Judith Butler argues that 'sex' is socially and culturally formed through the repetition of socially-controlled normative actions over time. She claims that

“...the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies, and more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of consolidation of the heterosexual imperative.” (Butler, 1993, p. 2)

In this regard, the social regulations of sex are not simply inscribing the body, but defining sexual differences in favour of heterosexual imperatives. If we break Butler’s argument down, we will end up with the following variables: (1) dominant hegemonic norms promoting heterosexuality; (2) materialization of the body’s sex; and (3) materialization of sexual differences. Of interest here is Butler’s approach to heterosexuality which is inscribed into the body through the repetition of dominant forms of hegemonic norms. She calls these repetitions of stylized social acts of “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names – ‘performativity’” (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Performativity, in her theory, is considered the key element that defines (hetero) sexuality. Her explanation of homosexuality is based on the idea of the subversion of hegemonic ideas.

In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler introduces the idea of the ‘culturally intelligible’ body. She argues that cultural markers are inscribed on or in the body, which makes the body recognizable by other members of society. From this perspective, the inscription of the body is a process of textual production, in the broadest sense of the ‘text’ concept. Viewing the body as text that can be both ‘read’ and ‘written’, leads to the conclusion that the body is the mediating environment within which the reiteration of cultural markers appears. Based on this understanding, this thesis is going to explore the case, where sexuality as a textual production of social norms detaches from the physicality of the body to be re-inscribed into a different setting of mediation – the online environments. Of great importance here is the re-inscription of cultural texts into an

alternative environment, which leads to different social coding, thus resulting in new 'textual' forms.

Butler's ideas are of significance to this study, because of the way she constructs the relationship between social norms and sexuality, claiming that sexuality is a socially pre-defined (by practices of performativity) cultural entity.

While sexuality has been considered with the social sciences and humanities, it is also referred to within the literature as effected by and mediated by technology. The second major section heading within this literature review, explores the literature with regard to sexuality as a technologically mediated entity.

2.1.2 Sexuality as a Technologically Mediated Entity

Online electronic media have introduced new levels of social interaction and communicative practices. As a result, many social, economic, and political structures have been affected radically by online practices and structures. This process of technology's impact through gradient blurring and merging of social institutions on a local and global scale provides ground for rethinking the signification of pre-existing social and culture norms, helping us to acquire new understandings of modern societies. Much emphasis and academic rigour has been placed on the re-formulation of fundamental concepts such as identity, nationalism, and diaspora in online environments.

The organizational logic of electronic media provides a terrain that is hardly limited by time or space. This condition legitimizes new perspectives that bring critical distance to the physicality of life, and enable individuals to gain a reflexive insight on their own subjective positioning within life, society, or cultural and institutional

obstacles. This kind of reflexivity allows for creative reformulation of the self-, self-practices, and definitions of identity, agency and self-fashioning outside the social hegemony as it is represented in everyday life.

In this context of online media practices, the distantiation from the physical self and apparatuses of social control allows for the negotiation of different forms of self-presence that may or may not be tolerated in physical reality. If we add to this general discussion the specific scope of sexuality, it becomes possible to apply this reflexive distantiation to the physical body in electronic environments, thereby liberating sexual subjects from the stigmas, expectations, and hegemonic normative practices prevailing in physical reality. This process in its turn shapes new forms of sexual awareness.

The following sections review the present standpoints in the literature with regard to sexuality in online electronic environments.

2.1.2.1 The Online Sexuality

Current viewpoints in the conceptualization of online sexuality can be divided into two major streams: (1) a pathological perspective, and (2) a “socially-explorative” perspective (Cooper, Scherer, Boies, & Gordon, 1999). The pathological perspective seeks an understanding of online sexuality in terms of deviant practices, such as child pornography, misrepresented sexual identity, or addictive practices (Durkin & Bryant, 1995; VanGelder, 1985).

While the pathological views are of less concern for this thesis, the essence of the socially-explorative perspective has a valued position with regard to the main argument presented in this study. The socially-explorative perspective situates sexuality in the

context of a global information stream supported by fast and easy communication (Newman, 1997), and a reflective role for the physical properties of the body (O'Brien, 1999). The online sexual dynamics that emerge from the context of changing, altering or even negating the social assumptions and politics that surround the physical body, have considerable impact on experience of sexual self – presentation and a consideration of the *self* in general, as formulated by Sherry Turkle:

“When they log on, they may find themselves playing multiple roles; they may find themselves playing characters of the opposite sex. In this way, they are swept up by experiences that enable them to explore previously unexamined aspects of their sexuality or that challenge their ideas about a unitary self.”(1999, p. 646)

The impact of the partial liberation of the self from the socially defined constraints on the ‘social’ physical body positively influences and stimulates the exploration of experience in relation to sexuality and conception of the self. In her relevant works, Turkle explores online sexuality in terms of (1) freedom; (2) an aspect of the self; (3) accountability; and (4) deception. As an example, she points to online gender-swapping as a practice that enables a sensitive inner matter to find self-expression, without compromising the values associated with the persona, or alternatively, as an experience of freedom (Turkle, 1995). In another example, Turkle describes the communal acceptance of group sex in virtual environments, also noticing that the “boundaries between the virtual and the real are staunchly protected” (1995, p. 231). It is in this context that the concern of accountability for actions in real life and cyberspace comes into question. This issue becomes of particular importance, when the governing ‘real’ social expectations get applied to virtual self-presentations, which may induce feelings of deception:

“Life on the screen makes it very easy to present oneself as other than one is in real life. And although some people think that representing oneself as other than one is always a deception, many people turn to online life with the intention of playing it in precisely this way. They insist that a certain amount of shape-shifting is part of the online game. When people become intimate, they are particularly vulnerable; it is easy to get hurt in online relationships. But since the rules of conduct are unclear, it is also easy to believe that one does not have the right to feel wounded.”(Turkle, 1995, p. 228)

In Turkle’s description, the interrelations between the real (feeling wounded) and the virtual (various forms of self-presentation) have been characterized by overarching schemes of social expectations: emphasizing the social expectation that expectations online should be avoided. Turkle sets the prevailing dynamics within online sexual communities which argue for lack of social expectations, because multiple and false self-presentations are made possible. Her formulation of the relationship between detachment from social norms placed upon the ‘real’ body regarding self-presentation and social expectations is what positively contributes to this thesis, specifically, the idea that online environments enable liberated sexual practices through agency mediated by online experience of sexual practices.

2.1.2.2 Internet Sexual (RE)presentations

The characteristics of the Internet as an electronic environment define the need for transcription of physical objects, places, actions, phenomena - or in general, references to ‘anything’ – into words, images, sound. These practices of transcription form what media theorist Stuart Hall calls “systems of representation” (1997). In its broadest sense, the concept of representation encompasses the idea of ‘standing for’, or substituting the subject of reference with a sign. According to Hall, signs on their turn are organized into systems – languages - that transmit meaning:

“Signs are organized into languages and it is the existence of common languages which enable us to translate our thoughts (concepts) into words, sounds or images, and then use these operating as a language, to express meanings and communicate thoughts to other people. Remember that the term ‘language’ is being used here in a very broad and inclusive way. The writing system or the spoken system of a particular language are both obviously ‘languages’. But so are visual images, whether produced by hand, mechanical, electronic, digital or some other means, when they are used to express meaning. And so are other things which aren’t ‘linguistic’ in any ordinary sense [...]” (S. Hall & Open University., 1997, p. 18).

Hall’s formulation of systems of representation is an important insight into the functional characteristics of the Internet – a medium that is almost or entirely composed of representations in the forms of image, words, sound that in Hall’s and Manovich’s terms form the ‘language’ of new media (S. Hall & Open University, 1997; Manovich, 2002).

The critical mediating role of representation between sign and subject of reflection triggers the question of the plasticity of representation, specifically the accountability of representation to be true to the original. This requires the careful investigation of the differences that may appear during the process of decoding the message mediated by practices of representation. For example, the famous work *The Treachery of Images* of the Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte shows the conceptual limits of the relationship between representation and object of representation. By exposing a picture of a pipe accompanied by the text “This is not a pipe”, Magritte plays upon the automatic decoding of messages transmitted through practices of representation. In fact, he is right that the presented image of a pipe is not a pipe, but a picture of a pipe, or a representation of a pipe.



Figure 7 - The Treachery of Images by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte. *Note:* image downloaded from <<http://www.hostingnewmedia.com/artists/artwork-page.php?id=104>>

The limits of the relationship between representation and original are a subject of a vigorous scholarly interest. In his work, *Of Grammatology* (1998) for example, Jacques Derrida explores the interplay between reflection and source, and concludes that no representation is true to the original:

“Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes, one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than the shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected which lets itself be seduced narcissistically. In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring.” (1998, p. 36)

These particular dynamics appearing within the relationship between reflection and reflected, or representation and original are of particular importance when considering sexual self (re)presentation in online environments. The disappearance of the

origin within a reflection of controlled self-presence and self-presentation sets the dimensions of anonymity. What we may call a metaphorical death of the physical body (the disappearance of the origin) in electronic environments enables the articulation or representation of a desired form of sexual self, which reflects on interpersonal sexual dynamics liberated from hegemonic social and cultural orders. This manufacturing of an alternative online sexuality based on and mediated by practices of self-representation is labelled by Waskul as “alter-sexuality” (D. D. Waskul, 2002), referring to:

“[...] a special category of sexual experiences that stand over and against the sexual experiences of everyday life; they are sexual experiences that are bounded within a sphere of experiences that can be comfortably maintained as separate and distinct from everyday life; they are sexual experiences that may not be directly related to the person’s sexuality as it is experienced in everyday life; it is a kind of liminal experience where both intimacy and sexuality may be reinvented in a context of loosened temporal, physical, and normative constraints.”(2002, p. 207)

Waskul’s definition of *alter-sexuality* rests upon the separation from sexuality as experienced in everyday life and the discrepancies in sexual tastes that may occur as a result of the loosened social norms.

The notion of online alter-sexuality as formulated by Waskul, along with Derrida’s reflection on representations’ breakage from the original source define the scope of this thesis – specifically, the transformed sexual understandings that appear as a result of textual representations of sexual acts that mediate the loss of the physical body in online environments.

While the first section of this literature review examined sexuality as it has been considered with the social sciences and humanities, this second section has explored the literature around sexuality as it has been affected by and mediated through technology.

The third major section heading within this literature review follows, exploring the literature regarding sexuality within Islam culture particularly as it relates to Islam within Turkey. This last section completes the three major domains explored within this thesis: sexuality, technology and Islamic culture.

2.1.3 Islam and Sexuality

In this thesis, the cultural relationship between Islam and sexuality describes two overlapping and interconnected framings to outline the discrepancies between:

1. Sexuality performed in material reality, and
2. Sexuality as an object of technologically mediated representation and liberated modes of social understandings.

While the second framing constructs the main body of research conducted within this study and will be examined in detail in Chapter 4, the first framing – specifically, sexuality performed and articulated in an Islamic cultural setting – is the emphasis of this literature review section. It is important to explore the cultural and social norms of Islamic beliefs regarding sexuality, in order to illustrate how technological mediation as a form of social discourse has radically altered the expression and experience of normative hegemonic Islamic notions of sexuality.

For many, the two concepts of Islam and sexuality are rendered as controversial when examined together. In this thesis, however the bridge between these two is an important construct of the main argument. For the sake of clarity, I shall emphasize that I refer to Islam as a socio-cultural system, rather than a religious one. Within this

framework, Islam is not treated as a system of reference to a stable historical object or entity, but rather as a part of a nexus between:

1. Practices bound up with an already established social tradition,
2. The discourse of one's own self-positioning within the limits of this tradition, and
3. The situation of the coordinates of 'different' or 'forbidden' scenarios involved in the process of structuring the sexual "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977)

From this perspective, Islam as a socio-cultural system in the context of the development of collective sexuality is the conjunction of reiterative social practices that structure, control, and - in general – form the normative dimensions of public articulation of sexual understandings, behaviour, and practices. This socio-cultural framing of Islam encompasses its potential to serve as a political figuration or a political discourse of social structures. According to Rita Stephan (2006), the reiterative Islamic social practices regarding sexuality are based on fabricated political understandings aiming at social control and distribution of power. She argues that the repression of sexual discourse in Middle Eastern countries is a result of and a means to hegemony and "dominating power relations" (Stephan, 2006, p. 161). Similarly, the Turkish feminist activist and writer Pinar Ilkkaracan sees repression of sexuality in Islamic countries as a political matter and as a socially regulatory mechanism:

"Sexuality and gender equality, matters that are inextricably linked, have been highly politicized issues in almost all Middle Eastern nations [...]. Although a general consensus on the need for modernization efforts in the technical, administrative and economic domains has been remarkably

visible [...], reforms targeting gender relations and the private sphere have remained notably controversial. While modernists have in general argued for gender equality and, to a degree, for sexual liberation, traditionalists / Islamic conservatives have subsequently and deliberately attempted to exert their control on issues related to sexuality, struggling to preserve their interpretation of their respective society's 'religious and moral values,' and to maintain, or in some cases regain their dominance especially in the private sphere, namely, regarding the status of women in the family and the regulation of sexual behaviour." (Işık Karacan, 2008a, pp. 1-2)

This specific understanding of the political and socio-regulatory dynamics regarding sexuality in Islamic countries, allows the suggestion that sexuality in an Islamic social context is an entity of social oppression. The socio-cultural and political context illustrates the transformation of oppressive Islamic religious sexual norms into oppressive socio-cultural norms. This transformation explains why Islamic sexual regulatory norms are applied to large demographics of people residing in Muslim countries regardless of their 'believer' or 'non – believer' statuses. Expanding on this notion of the social adaptation of religious virtues, Islam as a socio-cultural system presets the state of collective consciousness to the point where personal sexual understandings are dropped in favour of adhering to social expectations. This leads to, what Samir Khalaf calls "dissonant sexual codes" (2006, pp. 7-12). He argues that the many dimensions of globalization, especially through Internet-based electronic settings, have accelerated the intensity of conflict between meaningful sexual self-identities and social morality in Muslim societies. Khalaf emphasizes that in Islamic socio-cultural settings, the domain of sexuality "has been subjected to conflicting and dissonant expectations and hence has become a source of considerable uncertainty, ambivalence and collective anxiety" (2006, p. 7).

These formulations of Islamic collective sexuality as ‘oppressive’ and ‘dissonant’ are significant positions that support my effort to explore the discrepancies in articulation and representation of sexuality between physical social reality and the Internet environments.

2.1.4 Sexuality, Internet, and Turkey

The previous section presented the socio-cultural and political dynamics within which sexuality in Islam has been and continues to be shaped. However, it should not be forgotten, that within the large domain of Islam as a cultural, religious, and political system, there are practices and patterns of behaviour that differ between Muslim communities. As Pinar Ilkkaracan argues:

“Discourses on sexuality in Islam often fail to consider the differences in practices in different Muslim communities as well as the spaces of negotiability created by social taboos and silences related to sexual behaviour” (2001, p. 62).

To account for these differences, this section explores and summarizes the formation of collective sexuality specifically for the territory of the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey has a unique place in the Islamic world, because of its adoption of secularism and the Continental legal system while maintaining its status of a Muslim country. Situated between the crossroads of Western and Eastern social, political, and economic exchange, Turkey’s cultural dynamics have been shaped by both Western and Eastern influences (Kucukcan, 2003). On many occasions, these vibrant dynamics have led to clashes of interests, national identity, and political belonging. Because of this, Turkey has had to deal with the uneasy task of balancing between secularism in the political / governmental/ jurisdictional sphere and Islam as a religious (for the majority of

the population) and socio-cultural system. While the country is governed legally by the secular virtues adopted from Continental Europe, Islam remains “a necessary social cement for the cohesion of the society” (Sencer, 1996, p. 43).

When applied to collective sexuality and sexual understandings, the clash between secular and religious assumptions becomes particularly overt. From this perspective, apart from sexual assaults, sexual practices that are defined within the sources of Islam as ‘deviant’ do not constitute legal crimes. For example, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and adultery are not legally sanctioned, which is in opposition to other Islamic countries where these are considered legal crimes. However, at a socio-cultural level, Islamic sexuality- regulatory norms continue to define moral virtues. Non-conformity to these Islamic sexual norms may trigger social ridicule, exclusion, and devaluation. In rural areas, the disregard of sexuality-regulatory norms may even lead to honour crimes. The victims of these honour crimes are generally female individuals (Bilgili & Vural, 2011).

Based on a study conducted among *male* university students, Essizoglu et al. (2009) classify the sexual understandings of young Turks as “conservative”². According to this study, only 2 out of 382 (%0.52) students reported a simultaneous attraction to both genders (in conformity with the social stigmas that surround male homo-, or bisexuality) while 19 did not provide an answer to the related question. The remaining data is related to other social sexual stigmas and is divided into two categories: data obtained from students, who claim to “conform to their religious duties” and students, who claim to “not conform to religious duties”. According to the sets of data:

² The study is conducted and published in Turkish. Data is translated into English by the author.

1. 61.1% of the religious group and 38.5% of the non-religious group believe that homosexuality is an “illness”;
2. 66% of the religious group and 77% of the non-religious group do not agree with the statement that “women should possess (be recognized as having) equal sexual power to men”;
3. 47.2% of the religious group and 30.4% of the non-religious group agree with the statement that “anal sex is a perversion”;
4. 79.8% of the religious group and 31.9% of the non-religious group agree with the statement that “pre-marital sex is a sin”.

In their data analysis section, Essizoglu et al. (2009) conclude that homophobia and conservative sexual views continue at a high rate among male university students due to limitations set by religious beliefs and socio-demographic factors. In the limitations section of the study, the authors mention that despite the well-known fact that zoophilia is a widely practiced sexual activity in non-urban areas, this issue was considered out of the scope of the study, and thus not included.

Although the study greatly contributes to the otherwise scarce data available on the subject of sexual understandings prevailing in the territory of the Republic of Turkey, the inclusion of only male participants reveals another sexuality-related social stigma – the one that attaches null sexuality to female individuals. I consider this fact to be a ‘hidden’ assumption of the study and a deprivation of female individuals of sex-related expression. Capturing ‘conservative’ sexual understandings without participation of female demographics, points out to the stigmatic social perception of female sexuality as

an entity controlled by male power, which as such may be considered well represented by the statistics obtained from male sexual understandings. Pinar Ilkkaracan provides an explanation that underlies this stereotype: “Female sexuality, if uncontrolled, is portrayed as leading to social chaos (*fitna*). Social order requires male control of women’s bodies and sexuality” (2001, p. 62).

Within the context of the oppressive and, in comparison to Westernized understandings ‘conservative’ nature of sexuality in Turkey, Khalaf’s formulation of dissonant sexual codes (2006) remains applicable. From this perspective, it is logical to assume that the tension created by the dissonance between private sexual drives and social regulations will result in a need for alternate routes to expression, representation, and even ‘venting’. A quantitative study conducted by Ogan and Cagiltay (2006) on the use of the Turkish Internet site ‘itiraf.com’ (a site where members can post what they consider ‘embarrassing’ stories) find traces of the use of the Internet and the confession site specifically for the aim of sexual venting:

“Another frame for understanding the interest in Itiraf.com is the religious one. While it may seem far-fetched for people to confess sexual indiscretions in a public forum in lieu of seeing a psychologist or a religious leader, it may drive some to use this website. The relative anonymity of the confessors provides an incentive. Given that the dominant religion in Turkey (Islam) does not accept the concept of original sin and therefore does not require private or public confession, and given that few people in Turkey go to psychologists or psychiatrists for help with their personal problems, a confession website should be appealing to Turks.” (2006, p. 818)

The use of online media as a sexual ‘vent’ in the Republic of Turkey is a result of social, cultural, and religious mechanisms that prevail and structure the conduct of morality in physical reality. While the normative constraints in physical reality may

produce social censorship, the characteristics of online media provide a platform for discreet para-social interactions. Therefore, in this specific context, the use of online media creates what Victor Turner calls a “liminal entity” (1977, p. 95):

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transition.” (ibid)

Each element of Turner’s definition of liminal entities exemplifies sexuality as reflected in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces as a body in transcendence. The transcendental sexual body (as any transcendental phenomenon) has “spatial, temporal, and social dimensions” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 37). The specific definition of liminality as outlined by Turner emphasizes the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of sexuality and defines it as a *liminal* entity:

1. Spatial dimensions of the transcendent sexual body

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions [...]” (V. Turner, 1977, p. 97). The transcendent location of liminal entities is relevant to the notion of sexuality as investigated in this thesis, because of its situation between the ‘real’ of the physical world and the ‘virtual’ of the online environments. Stated differently, what I exemplify as an emerging form of ‘liminal’ sexual body is situated between the real and virtual, nurturing itself from both realities.

2. Temporal dimensions of the transcendent sexual body

“[Liminal entities] are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (ibid). The naturalization and normalization of sexual acts otherwise prohibited by Islamic norms in online digital environments convey the idea of transgression – the sense that a limit is being crossed, trespassed, and violated. The violation, and simultaneously normalization of forbidden practices of sex initiate a double movement - on the one hand naturalizing the unnatural, while on the other hand violating the unnatural. These are apparently contradictory dynamics that co-exist well in a liminal terrain. These contradictory dynamics testify to a transitional moment during which the moral condemnation of forbidden practices of sex is refused, while the rebelliousness involved in naturalizing desires against social conventions is relished.

3. Social dimensions of the transcendent sexual body

“[Liminal entities’] ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols [...]” (ibid). In the case of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, sexuality as a liminal entity is addressed in various and alternative modes of textual representations, shift in language structures, and modification of vocabulary. The changes emerging in language use will be examined in detail in subsection 4.2 of Chapter 4. Turner’s “rich variety of symbols” (ibid) is exemplified in socially shared linguistic sexual representations, which are “capable of ‘making present’ a variety of objects that are spatially, temporarily and socially absent from the ‘here and now’” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 37).

These three dimensions (spatial, temporal, and social) of the transcendent sexual body as reflected in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces exemplify it as a *liminal* entity. The function of online ‘confessing’ is not a simple reproduction of sexual deeds and fantasies; rather, it has to be seen as a constructive part of a ‘liminal’ sexuality that is situated between the real and the virtual. This liminal sexuality consists of layers of liberated sexual understandings, which parallel and co-exists with normative codes prevailing in physical reality.

2.2 Summary

This chapter presented selected literature that provides important background material regarding views of sexuality from social, media, and Islamic perspectives, and reveals the need to bridge this domain knowledge in order to develop a coherent analysis of sexuality and its representation in technologically mediated environments in the context of Turkish Islamic culture. This chapter has been developed in a linear way in order to lay the groundwork for the propositions of key ideas utilized in my research argument proposed in the next Chapter. It is a part of this summary section to bridge the link between these selected views on sexuality as well as to review their importance and contribution to the study. The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis requires the adoption and envision of the proposed perspectives on sexuality as a coherent whole. The essentialization, mix, and match of these perspectives constitute the formula to a successful bridging and summarization of key issues. The most important emphasis from the social science perspective is the treatment of sexuality as a product of social relations and hegemonic norms. This view reflects the communal foundation of sexuality both as an entity directed by the collective consciousness and as a key factor in shaping personal

preferences. The highlights from the media perspectives on sexuality are (1) the possibility for anonymous exploration of previously inexperienced sexual depths; and (2) the break from the original socially ordained body, supported by the practices of representation. Both of these factors provide a platform for liberation of the sexual self. The literature engaging with the topic of Islam and sexuality suggested that Islam, as a religious and a socio-cultural system, suppresses sexuality both at personal and social levels.

My argument related to the development of liminal sexuality as existing in-between physical reality and the virtual mediated realm in the context of Turkey, is based upon the central interconnection of all three major perspectives drawn above. The response to my research questions and objectives is embedded in the socio-techno-Islamic mix derived from these main views. Based on this mix, the main supposition of this study is:

The oppressiveness of Islam as a socio-cultural system with regards to sexuality pre-defines the need for sexual liberation that can be expressed and developed in a socially shared and safe setting. The characteristics of online environments provide the opportunity for anonymous expression, distantiation from the social norms that define a social physical body, and para-social interaction. As such, online environments constitute an ideal medium for sexual ‘venting’ and re-inventing the experience of the sexual self through sexual discourse.

3: Methodological Framework and Research Design

The design of this thesis is concerned with creating a theoretical and methodological framework that captures the foundation of “liminal” (V. Turner, 1977) sexuality in the Republic of Turkey in a systematic way. Of particular importance for this study is the formulation of sexuality as a liminal entity that exists in-between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. These layers of liminal sexuality parallel and coexist with sexual understandings prevailing in physical society. The main argument is based on the discrepancies between the articulation and representation of sexuality of social physical reality and online digital environments, along with the patterns of interplay between these two settings. Liminal sexuality can be described as a subject of representational and *re-presentational* practices forming a layer of expression that articulates and documents a sexual social consciousness which consequently is enacted in private physical sexual acts. This definition of liminal sexuality fundamentally differs from the sexual-regulatory norms prevailing in social physical reality. The diverse practices of sexual representation, re-presentation, and articulation along with the discrepancies they present inform the design and methodological approach of my research. This study aims at deconstructing sexual narratives and decoding what exists beyond them. A qualitative approach to analyzing data from online confession cyberspaces affords a broad and critical understanding of the key issues of this investigation. My claim of the existence of a layer of liminal sexuality or liminal sexual reality that goes beyond the thresholds of

electronically mediated discursive practices requires an interpretive qualitative approach and a paradigm that will enforce a deconstructive line of inquiry. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a post-structural perspective embody and enforce this line of research inquiry as they map out the production of knowledge and consciousness in social constructs, including the use of language, and social-power relations (Fairclough, 2001; Foucault, 1978).

The examination of online environments as a mediated means and representational form of social cognition falls within the framework of CDA and a post-structuralist paradigm. Within this study, online environments function as both a research terrain and a research tool. Online settings and their characteristics allow for less institutional framings and social restrictions. As such, the use of electronic domains as both a research terrain and a research tool provides for richer and more ‘democratic’ data (Christians & Chen, 2004). Data obtained from the internet provided by anonymous users contain more detailed and reflective information associated with sensitive social topics (Hookway, 2008).

Because of the strictly qualitative characteristics of the argument, the research design of the study follows a holistic and non-linear methodical approach. The structure of the study is based on iterative procedures of “tracking back and forth between the different components of the design” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 3). Maxwell provides more details of what he calls an ‘interactive’ research design model:

“The activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threads are usually all going on more or less simultaneously, each influencing all of the others. This process isn’t adequately represented by a linear model, even one that allows multiple

cycles, because in qualitative research there isn't an unvarying order in which the different tasks or components must be arranged." (2005, p. 2)

This study is designed around the idea of following the research objectives and addressing the research questions in a holistic, non-sequential and pragmatic way – meaning that the research design of the study takes the form of a bricolage dealing with issues as they emerge. I emphasize that the bricolage research design of this study is also triggered by the consistently fluctuating, constantly updated information present on the net. As Denzin formulates it:

"The interpretive bricoleur understands that online research is an interactive process shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and that of the people in the setting. [...]"

The result of the interpretive bricoleur's labour is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a hypertext, a reflexive, collage or montage; a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a montage, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole." (2004, p. 3)

The iterative, or in Maxwell's terms 'interactive' (2005) model of this study accounts for the fluctuating content of the internet-based research. This iterative model provides for flexibility and more adequate reflection on the continuously changing and expanding dataset.

3.1 Research Questions

During the seven years spent living in the territory of the Republic of Turkey, I have noticed that online spaces such as the internet, perceivably mediated the production and distribution of more and more liberated social conversations within a Turkish cultural context. This perceived observation was reinforced by many examples, but became particularly overt and explicit with my discovery of the Turkish sexual confession

cyberspaces. “This cannot be written by a Turk!” was the spontaneous thought that struck my mind during my very first iteration with these particular types of cyberspaces. What appeared to me at that time as ‘striking’ was not the specific details of the sexual content, but the ease of language that flowed, conveying a liberated and even relaxed attitude towards sex. At that time, and in my astonishment, I called a Turkish friend of mine to ask if (my friend) had heard of these sexual confession cyberspaces, and the reply I got was “Shhhhhh!” – the conversation was intentionally rerouted. For years afterward, I continued asking myself which sexual attitudes were ‘real’ – the repressive ones articulated in physical reality, or the ‘virtual’ ones, expressed, re-presented, and re-embodied online. It took me some time to realize that these sexual ‘realities’ are not mutually exclusive, meaning that the existence of the one does not correspond to the death of the other(s). Instead, they are simultaneous and continuously interacting entities, and the appearance of a layer of liminal sexuality situated between the ‘real’ and the virtual is the result of these constant interactions. Based on this presumption, the design of this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How can we understand the meanings of reported sexual acts online as an indicator of the development of a layer of liminal sexuality, situated in-between the ‘real’ and the virtual within the context of the Republic of Turkey and Islam as a socio-cultural system?
2. In what ways do sexual narratives online contradict the sex-related norms established by the tradition of Islam?

These primary research questions are central to the design of the study as they serve as guidelines throughout the research process. They construct a frame of reference

that dictates the focus, context, research objectives, conceptual model, and the organization of this thesis.

3.2 Theoretical Model

The design of this study requires a theoretical model that enables a systemized critical reflection and conceptualization of the layers that constitute the parameters of a simultaneously ‘para-real’ and ‘para-virtual’ liminal sexuality. I was in search of a model that would inform my research design while specifically addressing the research objectives of the study.

In order to address these issues, I have adopted a theoretical model for online learning proposed by Gunawardena et al. (2009) to my own analysis of online sexual representation as an indicator of cultural knowledge building. This model articulates the phases of learning in online environments and reflects on the process of accumulation of knowledge in a systematized and segmented manner. The adoption of a theoretical model for online learning within the context of a study of liminal sexuality is grounded on the presumption that liberation of sexual understandings as documented online is based to a great extent on the process of online learning. Here, the process of learning is shaped by the pure act of verbalization and textual re-presentation of sexual acts or fantasies, and by the transformation of the sexual self into transparently-shared, low-context signifiers. The model proposed by Gunawardena et al. seems to efficiently capture, conceptualize, and segment the phases that indulge in the development of a socially shared, sexual meta-cognition.

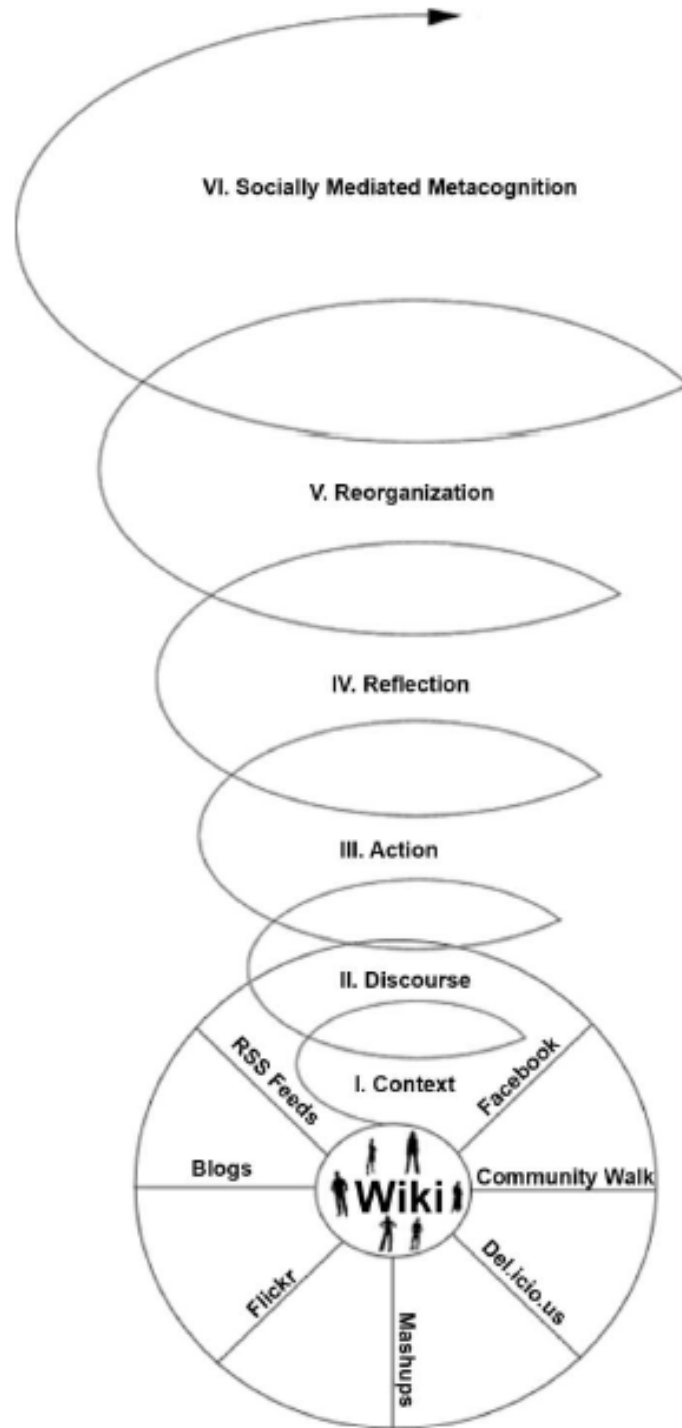


Figure 8 - Social networking spiral. *Note:* Adapted from “A Theoretical Framework for Building Online Communities of Practice with Social Networking Tools,” by C. N. Gunawardena, M. B. Hermans, D. Sanchez, C. Richmond, M. Bohley, and R. Tuttle, 2009, *Educational Media International*, 46(1), 3-16.

This spiral model provides the phases of online learning in a hierarchical and evolving order. While I adopt the labelling and conceptualization of the phases, I treat these as iterative entities with no definite or distinguished hierarchical arrangement. By not following the hierarchical structure of the model focussing on the iterative and interaction between the phases, I am able to provide a more adequate reflection on the process of formation of a liminal sexuality. As observed in the sexual confessions (examined in details in the following chapters), the formation of liminal sexuality is not a process following a linear progression, but rather a segmented, multidimensional iteration with intervening stages of development.

The spiral model by Gunawardena et al. (2009) proposes six phases in the online learning process:

1. Context

It is proposed that the process of social consciousness is triggered and influenced by the online environment, specifically the context of the specific type of cyberspace and the individuals that use it.

2. Discourse

This phase reflects on the action of creating and negotiating meaning, as well as the use of language to determine meaning. All users of an online environment contribute to the formation of meaning by bringing their life experience, knowledge, and understandings into the online community.

3. Action

This phase initiates the process of formation of new social understandings and cognition. Online community members share key issues with each other.

4. Reflection

This phase reflects on the shared individual experiences of community members and the formation of social cognition. It focuses on the assimilation and integration of unfamiliar points of view and understandings.

5. Reorganization

The phase of reorganization is a natural continuum of the reflective process. The developed new understandings of online community members are brought together to contribute to the advancement of previously identified key issues.

Community members readjust meanings and orders in the process of creation of a social reality. This process is characterized by the interplay between historical and novel perspectives. The mediation of this phase by online digital environments contributes to the easier advancement of shared ideas and reflections and leads to the expression of social meta-cognition.

6. Socially mediated meta-cognition

This phase corresponds to the formation of mutually shared novel understandings and reasoning within the online community.

This model presents a broad guideline for understanding how social cognition is developed in online environments. The application of this model to the study of liminal Turkish sexuality is based on the recognition of the link between learning (as social cognition) and the formation of sexuality (again as social cognition.) The spiral model

proposed by Gunawardena et al. (2009) provides for a systematic approach to the understanding of the formation of liminal sexuality in a clearly delineated and holistic way, acknowledging all the constructs taking place in the process: (1) the share of technology in the specific context (as reflected in ‘Context’ and ‘Reorganization’); (2) the contribution of individual ideologies to the discursive practices (phase: *Discourse, Action, Reflection, and Reorganization*); and (3) the social schemata underlying the formation of meta-cognition (phase: *Discourse, Action, Reflection, Reorganization, and Socially mediated meta-cognition.*) This model critically reflects on the iterative creation of para-virtual and para-real liminal sexuality as an unfolding, continuous, and multi-dimensional process.

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis as a Method of Investigation

For the sake of meeting the objectives of this study, I emphasize that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used within the broader context of what Schutz calls *Verstehen* – specifically, “the particular experiential form in which common-sense thinking takes cognizance of the social cultural world.”(as cited in Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 4). Within this broad context of *Verstehen* or ‘understanding’, CDA is used as a linguistic approach that reflects on relations of struggle or conflict (Wodak & Meyer, 2002). In other words, CDA is used as an analytical framework of ‘naturally occurring’ language that aims at the deconstruction of language “beyond sentence grammar” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 4). In contrast to Discourse Analysis which has been classified as micro-scoped for its predominant focus on language details and *description* of social structures (Dijk, 2001), CDA investigates language activities as “not merely a

reflection or expression of social process and practices, [...] [but as] a part of those processes and practices.”(Fairclough, 2001, p. 19).

One of the main methodological functions of CDA is to produce knowledge of social phenomena by connecting language activities to social structures through the mediation apparatuses of discourse itself and socially shared, common assumptions:

“The relationship between text and social structures is an indirect, mediated one. It is mediated first of all by the discourse which the text is a part of, because the values of textual features only become real, socially operative, if they are embedded in social interaction, where texts are produced and integrated against a background of common-sense assumptions [...] which give textual features their values.”(Fairclough, 2001, p. 117)

Fairclough’s suggested model of a double level of mediation addresses the multidimensionality of the relation between language use/text production and social and cultural production. This model suggests that CDA can investigate texts at multiple levels. This model of double mediation becomes a decoding guideline of texts. Applied to this specific study, it provides a framework for understanding the Turkish sexual narratives online via the generative discourse these narratives produce. This framework is also consistent with the theoretical model of the study (adopted from the model proposed by Gunawardena et al., 2009) which organizes the deconstruction of online Turkish sexual narratives at multiple levels (discussed in the previous sections). The investigation of ‘common assumptions’ for this study emerges from the comparison between the articulation of sexuality in physical reality and textual representation of sexuality in online environments. The phases of investigation proposed in Gunawardena et al.’s model are also consistent with the three stages of critical discourse analysis as identified and formulated by Fairclough (2001):

1. *Description* of text;
2. *Interpretation* of text – interpretation of the existing interplay between language acts represented in texts and interaction;
3. *Explanation* of the dynamics between interaction and social context;

CDA aims at the investigation of linguistic and extralinguistic acts and patterns in a naturalistic setting. CDA focuses on mundane and naturally occurring speech to reveal how meaning evolves between individuals participating in a conversation (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Online settings provide a rich platform for observation of behavioural patterns and analysis of textual information within the context of a ‘natural’ setting, with no intrusions from the observer/ researcher. From this perspective, textual information obtained online forms an ideal dataset for discursive analytical techniques.

It should be emphasized that this section underpins methodological approaches and not specific tools of investigation. These approaches contribute to a better analysis and understanding of discursive texts within the context in which they emerge.

3.4 Case Study

In this section, I build on the notion of case study as a research approach. By so doing, I aim to provide a better explanation of the design of this study, and to embed my research objectives in a transparent approach to knowledge production as well as within a wider interpretive tradition of inquiry. Despite the various existing arguments against case studies as a reliable research strategy (Abercrombie, S. Hill, & B. Turner, 1984; Campbell & Stanley, 1966), a case study method allows for a constructivist approach to knowledge in areas that might otherwise stay hidden. According to Yin (2002), a case

study inquiry (1) seeks an understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the distinction between phenomenon and context is hard to make; and (2) recognizes the multidimensionality of a situation with more variables of interest than data points. Thus, the case study inquiry acknowledges the significance of phenomena as an inseparable part of a wider scope and provides a holistic approach to capturing a more comprehensive image. A case study provides a rich and flexible platform for the purpose of *Verstehen* (Schutz, as cited in Weiss & Wodak, 2003) and CDA as a method of analysis.

The central presumption of this study is that online digital environments support the development of a liminal form of sexuality that does not conform to the sexuality-regulatory norms set by Islam as a socio-cultural system in physical reality. This presumption requires the design of a case study that is both descriptive and explanatory and follows a pattern-matching technique (Yin, 2002). In this study, I use “pattern of specific variables” (Yin, 2002, p. 116) defined prior to the data collection. This set of “patterns of specific variables” is acquired from the theoretical model I have adapted for this study (discussed in the previous sections) – in particular, each phase from the model equals a specific variable. Thus, the study deals with CONTEXT, DISCOURSE, ACTION, REFLECTION, REORGANIZATION, and SOCIALLY MEDIATED METACOGNITION as specified variables defined prior to data collection. In this situation, the variables are treated as “elements of explanation,” which “stipulate a presumed set of casual links” about a phenomenon (Yin, 2002, p. 120). For this thesis, the elements of explanation are built in a narrative form and incorporate a framework of social and linguistic theories, among others.

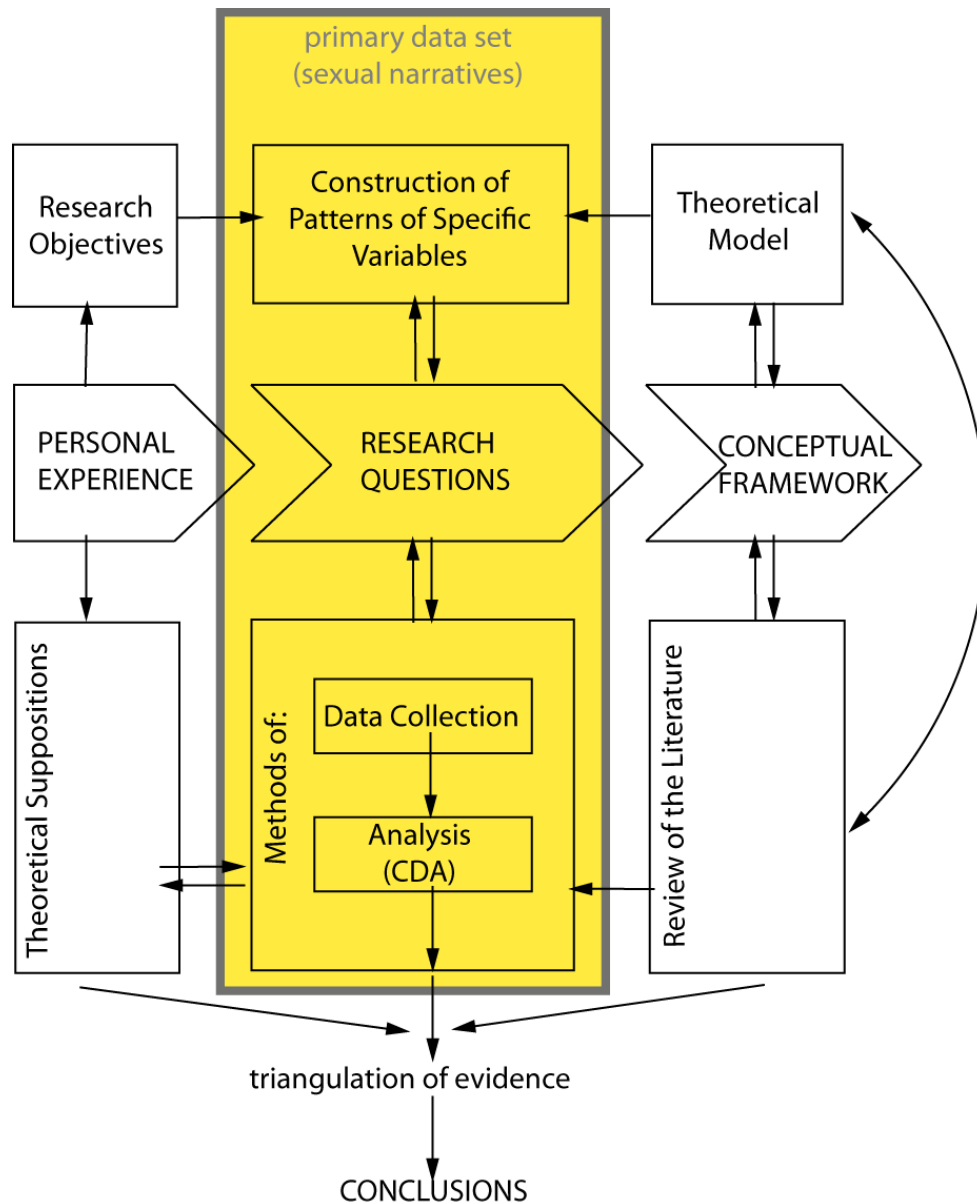


Figure 9 - A case study design within the frames of an interactive research design model.

Figure 7 provides a clear visualization of the design of the case study situated in the broader context of an interactive research design model. The research questions are located in the center of the figure because of their critical influence on the whole structure and organization of the research design. The figure also visualizes the interactive connections between the elements of the study.

A successful case study is based on convergence of multiple sources of data (Yin, 2002). For the benefit of this study, I triangulate (1) data (sexual narratives) collected from Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces; (2) theories from existing literature sources; and (3) personal experience.

As I use ‘personal experience’ both as a foundational element of the parameters of this study and as a source of evidence, in the following paragraphs I provide some brief background information that reflects on my relation to the social world I study.

Personal Experience and Reflexivity

The research objectives and academic goals of this thesis emerge from my personal and academic experience obtained from seven years spent living in the territory of the Republic of Turkey. My Bachelor’s degree in Civil Law obtained at the University of Istanbul has provided me with an understanding of the rich and complex relations between culture, politics, religion, and legal norms as reflected in everyday social realities and interactions. These specific understandings have shaped and continue shaping my theoretical assumptions. I should point out that ‘personal experience’ is a starting point and a vehicle to comprehending reality. As such, it does not differ in validity from other qualitative research methods of analysis. Personal experience or reflexivity is “the desire for presence in qualitative research” (Freitas, 2008, p. 470). Reflexivity thus predicates the research process on the elements that define the researcher as a social human being. What reflexivity represents is “a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its

findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p. 15).

In her book “The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling”, the Turkish writer Nilufer Gule describes the concept of reflexivity specifically for the context of Turkish culture and language:

“The move toward new forms of interpretation and hybridization between the particularistic and universalistic, the local and global, situates us on a terrain that is not designated, determined, and mediated by social scientific language.[...] [This] also necessitates a repositioning of the researcher with respect to ‘local’ context and native language. The weakening of the master-narratives of modernization and emancipation changes the role of intellectuals from transmitters and defenders of universal values to that of interpreters of hybrid, paradoxical, multidirectional social realities.” (1996, p. 7)

Thus, reflexivity determines the way in which the researcher decodes reality from a stance of individual consciousness in order to construct new theoretical knowledge outside the framework of the scientific notion of objectivity.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The Internet is a rich environment of user-generated content. As such, it has become a preferable medium of research investigation for many. As a relatively new phenomenon, the internet-based research tools and practices are still being invented, while traditional research methods are being readjusted (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Some of the advantages of using online data include expediency, massive samples, identifiable topic based samples, low costs, and readily availability, among many others (Christians & Chen, 2004).

For this study, data was collected using ‘lurking’ and purposeful sampling of Turkish sexual narratives shared online.

3.5.1 Lurking

Lurking is defined as the practice of reading online posts of a newsgroup, forum, or list with the specific aim to understand the topics and specific dynamics within the online group / community before starting actively participating and offering one’s own contribution (Chen, J. Hall, & Johns, 2004). The benefits of ‘lurking’ as a research mechanism are described as necessary socialization, acculturation, and learning about the common practices of an online group (Chen et al., 2004; Mann & Stewart, 2000).

I have been gathering data for this research through the practice of lurking for more than 5 years. Additionally, I have actively engaged with online groups on several occasions. This has provided me with both participant observation status as well as tools for longitudinal reflective and analytical discourse practices related to social research.

3.5.2 Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a non-random method for data collection. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech:

“If the goal is not to generalize to a population but to obtain insights into a phenomenon, individuals, or events, as will typically be the case in qualitative research, then the researcher purposefully selects individuals, groups, and settings that maximize understanding of the phenomenon. As such, the most common method of sampling in qualitative research is purposeful sampling.” (2007, p. 111)

Miles and Huberman (1994) have classified multiple strategies for purposeful sampling and data collection. Among these, this study is based on *multiple-case sampling* which is

characterized by collection of data that matches the underlying theory; the cases are assumed to tie into the *conceptual ground* of the study, as opposed to fitting into a *representative ground* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Sampling is based on an explicit sampling frame that is guided by the research questions (& sub-set of research questions), the pre-determined set of patterns of specific variables (Yin, 2002), and the conceptual framework – either pre-specified or emergent (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

During the five and more years of observation and active or passive engagement with the online communities structured around Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, I have read and screened more than 10,000 confessions. In this process, I have noticed that confessions follow certain patterns of scenarios and social issues of engagement. These repetitive patterns form what may be called ‘taxonomy’ of online sexual confessing. Because of the scope and limits of this thesis, I have selected 37 sexual confessions as a supportive material to my arguments and claims. I chose these specific confessions because they vibrantly represent and exemplify the major patterns of online sexual confessions. Stated differently, the selected confessions are not exceptions, but unambiguous and straightforward examples of the mainstream confession patterns.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The data collected for the completion of this study was gathered from the public domain. This means that the set of data used in this study is available to anyone who has access to the internet (and for some specific cyberspaces is of age 18+.) According to Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Policies and Procedures, paragraph 1.4:

“Research in the public domain about a living individual, based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works,

performances, actuarial materials, or third party interviews, is not required to undergo research ethics review. However, such research requires ethics review if the individual is approached directly for interviews or for access to private papers. The 'public domain' includes all information that is available under FOI (Freedom of Information) legislation in British Columbia and Canada, whether or not the information has been exposed to the public." ("R20-01.pdf," n.d., p. 2)

Based on this paragraph, as all data used in this study is available in the 'public domain', research ethics review was not deemed necessary.

During the investigation process of methods and strategies about online social research, I came upon literature engaging with ethical issues associated with gathering data from blogs, mailing lists, forums, and similar alternative forms of cyberspaces hosting online groups. There were two prevailing viewpoints regarding the use of data in the public domain: (1) utilitarian rationalism, and (2) feminist communitarian ethics (Chen et al., 2004). While followers of utilitarian rationalism argue that online participants are responsible for their own actions and safety, which requires no protection from the researcher, feminist ethics advocate for researchers' ethical obligation to protect the online participants and contribute to the positive development of the community (ibid.)

Most literature sources suggest that a 'netiquette' is observed (Chen et al., 2004; Mann & Stewart, 2000). From this perspective, different sources provided different limits to the 'netiquette': varying from informed consent and protection of the anonymity of the online members, to actually 'citing' the content and crediting the user / member as content authors (Brownlow & O'Dell, 2002). Chen et al. (2004) provide categorization of the topic groups as high, medium, and low risk. High-risk topic groups engage with high level of disclosure of traumatic information, such as in the cases of addictions,

depression, and transgender individual supportive groups. When dealing with high-risk topic groups, confidentiality should be given extra priority. Medium-risk topic groups deal with “personal experiences which are not as traumatic or stigmatized as those in the high-risk topic groups” (Chen et al., 2004, p. 169). In medium-risk topic groups, issues of confidentiality, trust and disclosure of information are not as prioritized as in the high-risk groups. Low-risk topic groups are defined to deal with general personal experiences, such as body art, personal beliefs, or infertility. Using information from low risk groups requires the adoption of “basic manners and attention to common ‘netiquette’” (Chen et al., 2004, p. 170).

King (1996) proposes different frames for action for various types of online research. He suggests that for deceptive or non-reactive methods of online data collection where the researcher publishes selected notes, the reporting of results should conform to the following rules:

- “1. Remove all headers and signatures.
2. Remove all references within the citation to any person’s name or pseudo-name.
3. Remove all references to the name and to the type (e-mail, BBS, etc.) of the group.
4. Do not make any specific reference to the location of or exact type of forum studied.
5. Store the original data in a safe manner and make it available to other qualified researchers who may wish to validate the findings.” (King, 1996, p. 127)

This study does not follow a utilitarian rationalist approach to online research ethics and is dedicated to keeping the identity of online sexual confessors confidential.

Based on the type of information obtained from Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces and the perceivably non-traumatic nature of the confessions, I assess the sexual confessions as ‘low-risk’ topic groups. Based on that assessment and my dedication to “basic manners and common ‘netiquette’” (Chen et al., 2004, p. 170), this study conforms to King’s rules of reporting the research results. Thus user pseudonyms, specific type of groups, specific types of cyberspaces are not revealed.

3.7 Summary

This chapter described the methodical, methodological, and ethical considerations that informed and structured the design of the study. It was intended to bring clarity to the practical and theoretical procedures that taken together construct the research framework of this thesis. The purpose of this research framework is to systematically locate the research questions and objectives in the context of (1) the study itself; (2) the social world that is being explored; (3) and the wider academic tradition of qualitative research.

4: The Formation of a Liminal and Socially Meta-cognitive Layer of Sexuality: A Case Study

This chapter explores the development of a socially meta-cognitive layer of liminal sexuality situated between the ‘real’ of the physical world and the ‘virtual’ within cyber and internet culture of the Republic of Turkey. The conclusions presented in this chapter are based on (1) mapping the interaction between private and social sexual vectors presented in physical reality and online environments; and (2) discursive analysis of sexual narratives shared online.

To understand the relevance between the internet culture as a social platform for exchange of information and foundations of sexuality in an Islamic community, it is necessary to identify the factors that constitute socially acceptable forms of sexuality within the Republic of Turkey. In this chapter, I argue that the exchange of sexual values between physical reality and online environments results in the formation of a socially meta-cognitive, *liminal* layer of sexuality. I suggest that this layer contains a socially shared sexual cognition that is conceptually different from the sexual understandings prevailing in the normative physical reality shaped by Islamic morality and socio-cultural codes of conduct.

The content presented in this chapter is based on two basic frames of reference. The first one conceptualizes the formation of individual and collective sexuality in physical environments from the perspective of Islam as a dominant religious and socio-

cultural system in Turkey. The second frame analyzes online sexual narratives and discourse to reveal new forms of socially shared sexual cognition.

For the sake of clarity, I emphasize that Islam is used primarily as a reference to a system of cultural symbols that construe and convey a *model* for reality (Tibi, 1990). I focus on Islam mainly as a socio-cultural model with deeply enrooted traditional values, and secondarily as a set of religious beliefs³. This understanding of Islam as a primarily socio-cultural system allows for a deconstruction of sexuality as a socially shared entity between believers, non-believers, and practitioners of other religions within the territory of the Republic of Turkey. Thus, Islam is treated as an episteme defining sexual norms and the prevalent consciousness of sexuality in physical reality.

What is important in terms of the development of the social dimensions of sexuality is its cultivation around an axis of regulatory norms. The function of these regulatory norms is the assurance of a set of socially acceptable *limits* of sexuality. In Muslim societies, these norms can be traced back historically to the sources of Islam. Despite the historic nature of Islamic religious origins, sexual regulatory norms have preserved their social influence through the ages (Imam, 2001). From this perspective, Turkish sexuality within its social dimensions becomes an externalized and disciplined representation of suppressed sexual drives, shaped by dogmas and stigmas introduced by long-standing religious rules.

In this chapter of my thesis, I examine the development of a *liminal* layer of socially shared sexual meta-cognition through a semiotics perspective. I discuss how the

³ Undoubtedly, Islam as a religious system is in the origin of all other dimensions of Islam (e.g. political, socio-cultural, legal); however, the socio-cultural dimensions of Islam are considered more relevant to the scope of this study.

dissonance between individual drives and socio-cultural regulations in Turkish physical reality is resolved through the development of this liminal layer of sexuality, which is embedded and embodied both in physical reality and the online, virtual realm. My argument is based on tracking the continuous interplay between the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ worlds. This interplay can be represented by the following iterative stages:

- Social repression in physical reality initiates the need for socially shared sexual discourse in a safe, alternative environment. In this thesis, I explore online settings as safe alternative environments;
- Socially shared, online sexual discourse triggers liberated sexual attitudes and understandings;
- The liberation of sexual attitudes is reflected in actualization of specific sexual practices as private acts in physical reality; these sexual actions are at least in part an explicit result of online sexual discourse;
- Actualized sexual practices are reported back in online environments.

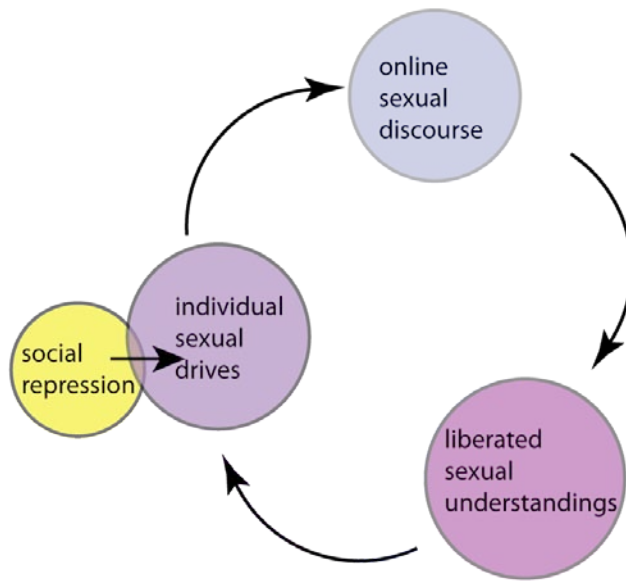


Figure 10 - A circular graph depicting the sexuality-forming dynamics of the interaction between physical reality and online environments.

My attention is focused on the structural phases, which construct the social meta-cognition of the *liminal* layer of liberated sexual understandings (as adapted from Gunawardena et al., 2009): (1) context; (2) discourse ; (3) action; (4) reflection; (5) reorganization; (6) socially mediated meta-cognition.

4.1 Context

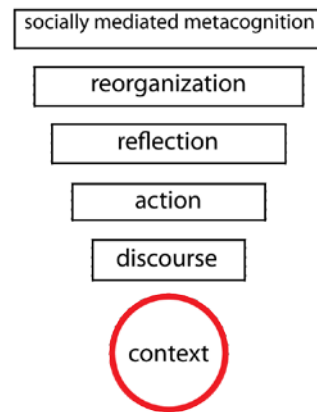


Figure 11 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

The early 1990s marked the beginning of much wider accessibility of the Internet. The movement of online information across cultures with little reference to geographical boundaries led to new reflections on identities, formation of reality, and new individual as well as social self- realizations. The Internet as a medium with its affordances and specificities allowed its users to voluntarily become involved in discourses that estranged them from their own ‘being’, worldviews, and stereotypes. The Internet facilitated a multiplication of the self (a self-reflexive process of observing the self in socially embedded norms) through self-externalization and the ability to distance the self from established social and cultural practices.

It is this notion of ‘multiplication of the self’ mediated by electronic communication that frames the argument of this thesis. In this study, I focus specifically on the deconstruction of the dynamic shifts in personal and ultimately social values. I

propose that the exposure to sexual discourse in online environments generates a range of consequences – from liberation of expression to actual adoption of ‘forbidden’ practices in what may be called ‘real’ intimate life. Because these more liberated sexual understandings are a reflective result of the continuous interaction between ‘real’ intimate practices and online discourse, they are situated in-between physical reality and the virtual environments that produce, what I call a ‘liminal sexuality.’ As such, this liminal sexuality is based on (1) discursive, socially shared, and technologically mediated constructions, on one hand; and (2) a projection in physical reality – in the form of embodied practices of sexual acts, and/or changed individual sexual understandings.

The findings of this study are based on interpretation and discursive analysis of descriptions of sexual acts, endeavours, and fantasies shared on Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. Despite a relatively small sample of sexual narratives (thirty seven confessions selected out of a large number of confessions I have screened and read), through purposeful sampling, these narratives are treated as representatives of a wider social landscape, and social dynamics that go beyond individual discernment, and are the basis of the analysis and conclusions drawn within the thesis. From this perspective, the selection of sexual confessions reflects upon intense social structures and organization of reality providing information rich samples for in depth study.

The Turkish ‘sexual confession cyberspaces’ follow the tradition and model of confession sites, which according to Ogan and Cagiltay are an important part of Turkish popular culture and a key to understanding Turkish organization of society (Ogan & Cagiltay, 2006). The profiled ‘sexual’ confession cyberspaces are seen as a major platform for sharing sexual experiences that otherwise remain hidden, covert and covered

from social representations. Indeed, these sexual narratives become a fertile channel for verbal exchange that unveils significant indications of how sexual understandings are shifted, modified, generated, and reproduced. The sexual objects, situations, acts, and fantasies that become a thematic subject of technologically mediated representation along with the specifics of representational practice itself delineate a complex system of signs. This ‘semiosis’ behind the sexual narratives encodes social structures, power relations, the politics of sexual desire, and the erotic significance of cultural repression.

4.1.1 Short Overview of Turkish Sexual Confession Cyberspaces

“I got acquainted with a couple through one of the cyberspaces⁴ I am a member of. The guy in this couple appeared to be bisexual. They (both the girl and the guy) asked me if I would agree to have sex with the guy in front of his girlfriend. I agreed. We talked via MSN and they wanted to see me. I switched my webcam on. They did not switch theirs. After that, they asked for my phone number and called immediately. I chatted with the girl and she told me they liked me and wanted to meet with me. We met on Saturday in a cafeteria. Both of them were cute. An hour later, we were at their place. The girl didn’t mess up with anything. She was just watching us and masturbating with a dildo. I had sex with the guy and later I watched them having sex. I had a really nice day. From now on, I am going to spend every Saturday with them. I will meet them tomorrow; I am impatient to see what more we are going to experience.”

(A male confessor)

In order to frame this explication, I begin with a short introduction of features of the sexual confession cyberspaces analyzed within this thesis. Sexual confession cyberspaces are online digital spaces, where users are able to share sexual fantasies and endeavours, or otherwise connoted acts of sexual ‘confessions’. Some of these confessions are

⁴ The type of cyberspace is intentionally not revealed, although explicitly mentioned by the confessor. See Chapter 3 (King, 1996), Ethical Considerations.

believed to be inexpressible in the context of Turkish Islamic physical (non-virtual) reality because of socially induced dogmas of guilt or shame. These cyberspaces create a spectacle for the user and a platform for sharing the “*need for facing the realities of life*” as one confessor suggests. Most of the sexual confession cyberspaces share the same manner of posting information: in its most general form, confessions are shared from newest to oldest and include the username of the confessor, his/her location and age⁵.

4.1.2 Online Community

The discussion of the presence of a liminal layer of sexuality within a broader *social* context undoubtedly leads to the identification of the power of the community. The recognition of the existence of a virtual or online community allows me to analyze the notion of sexuality as a product of sociality, social order, and cultural politics. Moreover, such a reading of sexuality illustrates the ramifications of the dynamic relationship between self, social identification, and social construction of sexuality. As Feenberg noted in a conversation: “What happens in these online communities [...] is not so much a disembodied sex act as an identity forming dynamic that liberates sexual subjects from the burden of stigma and shapes a new self-awareness” (Feenberg, 2011b). The conceptualization of an online community as a socially mediated symbolic order provides for a generalization of the results regarding the shifting definitions of sexual selves.

According to Zygmunt Bauman:

“[...] community is a ‘warm place’, a cosy and comfortable place. It is like a roof under which we shelter in heavy rain, like a fireplace at which we warm our hands on a frosty day.[...] In a community, we all

⁵ For ethical consideration, only the gender of the confessor is revealed where and if deemed necessary. Location and age are excluded from this study.

understand each other well, we may trust what we hear, we are safe most of the time and hardly ever puzzled or taken aback. [...]

What the word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting.

In short, “community” stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess.” (2001, pp. 1-3)

The term ‘community’, or in the context of this thesis - online community, names the utopian mirroring of the image of society and the norms it imposes. A focus on the context of sexual expression within an online community defines the social scope and construction of both individual and collective sexuality within a safe environment. Thus, the existence of an online community that supports sexual expression has the potential to reveal libidinally prevalent, but socially repressed practices of sex. Over time, these tendencies of sexual expression constitute the tradition of the community. It is precisely the potential of this tradition that sets the boundaries of an alternative, simultaneous, and *liminal* socially shared sexuality. I shall emphasize that the core of the supporting online community resembles an autopoietic system, which

“is organized like a network of processes to produce components that (a) continually regenerate, through transformations and interactions, the network that produced them, and (b) constitute the system as a concrete unit in the space in which it exists, by specifying the topological domain in which it produces itself as a network.” (Maturana and Varela as cited in A. Mattelart & M. Mattelart, 1998, p. 134)

From this perspective, the online community provides the production and support of a network which defines the structure and systematic rules for communication. These rules for communication establish what Feenberg and Bakardjieva call a “communication model” (2004c, p. 4). Feenberg and Bakardjieva suggest that it is precisely the

communication model that defines the formation of online communities and that transforms “computer networks into an environment within which a way of life can be elaborated.” (2004c, p. 5).

In the specific case of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, the presence of an underlying online community is evident through five attributes that sociology and philosophy assign to online communities: “(1) identification with symbols and ritual practices; (2) acceptance of common rules; (3) mutual aid; (4) mutual respect; (5) authentic communication” (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004c, p. 5). In the following subsections I exemplify each of these five categories using postings from sexual confession cyberspaces, illustrating how Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces adhere to the concept of online community as cited by Feenberg and Bakardjieva. I then summarise the results by illustrating how these categories outline the significance of the existence of online communities.

4.1.2.1 Identification with Symbols and Ritual Practices

The online communities structured around and within Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces impose two distinct frames of reference: (1) the *idea* of ‘sexual confession’, or in Turkish ‘erotik itiraf’; and (2) the articulation, representation and re-presentation of sex-related instances⁶. Let me start with the idea of sexual confessions as ‘erotik itiraf’ (pl. erotik itiraflar, i.e. sexual confessions). From a socio-linguistic perspective, the Turkish word ‘itiraf’ implies an intimate sharing of a story that is of significance to either the one that reveals it or to an audience. What distinguishes the word ‘itiraf’ from its

⁶ By instance, I mean any story, situation, endeavour, act, fantasy, object - fictional or real - that may serve as a subject of confession.

English translation ‘confession’ is the act of moral intimacy and obligation for honesty between the confessor and the audience, along with a social significance of the act of confessing. The notion of ‘erotik itiraf’⁷ implies a duty of honesty in the act of revealing a sexual act as a sin. The initial socio-linguistic notion of ‘erotik itiraf’ sets the conceptual boundaries of the ‘erotik itiraf’ type of cyberspaces as a place for articulation, representation, and re-presentation of sex-related instances. From this perspective the concept of *sex* serves as a guideline that defines the “symbols and ritual practices” (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004c, p. 5) of the online community. It is precisely the act of (online) confessing that evidences the identification with these symbols and practices. This is an example from the large number of sexual confessions found on the net that evidences the identification with symbols and practices of the online community:

“I meet with my sex partner generally at weekends, and his performance is so satisfactory that I sometimes experience two orgasms in a row. I am crazy of how he takes control over me and actually posses me. It is spectacular – screams and chills... He likes it when I perform oral on him, I like it too, just the thought of it gets me excited.

The only negative part is when we check-out of the hotel. Everybody understands what we have done, that’s why I try to avoid eye contact with them. What can I do, I love sex!”

(A female confessor)

The actual content of this sexual narrative, along with the ease and flow of the language, evidence the identification with symbols and ritual practices of the online community. This becomes evident through the description of the contrasting experience of sexual embarrassment in social physical reality (as reflected in the content of the

⁷ The literal translation of ‘erotik itiraf’ is ‘erotic confession.’ My translation as ‘sexual confession’ comes from the social connotation of the expression ‘erotik itiraf’ as ‘sexual confession.’

narrative that describes checking out of the hotel room) on one side, and the naturalness of the act of verbalizing the appreciation of sex in online environments, on the other side.

4.1.2.2 Acceptance of common rules

Most of the cyberspaces that I studied allow membership of individuals over 18. Pedophilic and zoophilic content is strongly forbidden. These regulations are enforced by the cyberspaces' administrators. The imposition of common rules by cyberspaces' administrators is dictated by the sex-related nature of these online communities. Online communities that revolve around the idea of mature subject matter are strictly censored and monitored by the Internet service providers (ISPs), because of the potential they contain for distribution of materials to minors (Jacobs, 2003). From this perspective, the acceptance of common rules imposed by an authority is not an attribute that defines online communities as a *community*. It is the rules that are proclaimed by the community itself that define it as such. In the case of Turkish sexual sites, the accepted common rule requires confessions with a strong sexual flavour.

“Imitating the format of common MSN viruses, I sent a message to all my female friends on my MSN contact list today. The message had the following content:

‘Hello! Don’t you want to share your most interesting and wildest sex stories? [Address of the cyberspace attached here]⁸.’ I hope, my female friends will click on this. This behaviour of mine is going to continue...”

(A male confessor)

This confession reflects upon one of the accepted common rules – the confessor implies that the cyberspace is a terrain for *sharing* and that the content of what is shared

⁸ The exact address of the cyberspace was removed from the confession for ethical reasons (King, 1996).

focuses upon “the most interesting and wildest sex stories.” This reveals the communally negotiated norm of categorization of sexual narratives (as wild and interesting) in order to match the expectations of the online community members.

In another case, a confessor complains that the sexual narratives not incorporating specific to Turkish alphabet letters (such as “ş”, “ğ”, “ç”, for example) do not get published. In response to this post, a member shares: “*This is not a sexual confession, or even simply a confession. You are never going to learn this job⁹.*”

These narratives exemplify how the online community members negotiate, maintain, and observe communally shared rules and norms – specifically, that sexual confessions have to convey sex-related matters, with high expectation set on the ‘interestingness’ and ‘wildness’ of the stories.

4.1.2.3 Mutual Aid

Feenberg and Bakardjieva define the notion of mutual aid as an implication of “a world in which generosity is justified by a basic commitment of fairness on all sides.”(2004c, p. 5). Although this definition, and especially the concept of ‘fairness’, are too broad to be exemplified by specific sexual narratives, the high level of tolerance towards a broad range of sexual practices, endeavours, and fantasies evidences the balancing of ‘fairness’ to the diverse sexual tastes of the online community members. The understanding of the notion of ‘mutual aid’ in its most general sense and outside the scope of ‘fairness’ determines the way in which support between community members can be tracked and decoded. An observed common practice in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces is the sharing of negative sexual experiences. This sharing of negative sexual

⁹ ‘To learn a job’ is a Turkish expression meaning ‘to learn to do something properly.’

experiences aims to protect other community members from repeating the same mistakes or experiencing similar negative situations. This ‘community-oriented’ pattern of confessing, along with explicitly stated or implicitly induced concern for other community members, exemplifies the existence of willingness for ‘mutual help.’ Let me use a story as an example:

In his confession, a male individual reveals how he has missed experiencing sex with his wife prior to their marriage. After getting married, he finds out that his wife is unable to satisfy his sexual fantasies, but it is already ‘too late’ for a change. His confession is concluded with the following sentences:

“To all friends on this [cyberspace], who believe in shared experience – here is my humble advice: Share all your fantasies and desires with your partners prior to marriage. Otherwise, you will end up like me...”

This confession bridges three major elements: (1) personal experiences of sex; (2) the social context within which the verbal representation of the sexual experience appears; and (3) the connection built between narrator/ confessor and audience by the provision of a ‘humble advice’. What the confessor calls ‘humble advice’ serves as an indicator of ‘mutual aid’ and concern, and exemplifies this aspect of the existence of an online community.

4.1.2.4 Mutual Respect

“Mutual respect requires civility.” (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004c, p. 5) Civility can be described as the manners, morals, and the etiquette (Carter, 1998) of society. Following these suggestions, online performance of civility is based on an expressive articulation of manners and etiquette. In the context of Turkish sexual confession

cyberspaces, manners are constructed through and embedded within text. This textual construction of etiquette carries two significations: first, the text serves as a form of virtual presence, presentation, and self-presentation; second, the text constitutes the fabric of manners, which (if properly constructed) enhances the positive recognition of self-presentation.

An interesting example of the presence of mutual respect in Turkish sexual confession online communities include the cultural significations used to articulate a communal spirit through the explicit inclusion of the female members. Frequently, sexual narratives explicitly address the female part of the community by the use of collective calls, such as ‘dear lady friends’ (in Turkish ‘sevgili bayan arkadaşlar’):

“Dear Lady Friends, if you do not receive comments on your shared stories, please don’t get angry and don’t feel bad [...]”

(A male confessor)

At a lingo-cultural level of communicative interaction, such a call is intended to show respect to the female representatives in the audience. The collective call ‘dear lady friends’ contains a double inscription of what is culturally recognized as *civility* – first, a general acknowledgement of the presence and existence of female actors; and second, the recognition of female individuals as representatives of the ‘vulnerable’ gender. These inscriptions of gender relations and consequently, power relations, require the social performance of ‘gentlemanliness’ by male individuals – even in the virtual realm. The social performance of male gender roles in the form of ‘maleness and masculinity’ (or what in Butler’s terms would constitute the reiteration of the heterosexual imperative) is

crucial for the acceptance of individuals within an online community where female members compose an active audience.

4.1.2.5 Authentic Communication

Authentic communication, revealed and substantiated through textual representation of sexual behaviours, requires an epistemological approach to the stance of the collective formation of the sexual self. Authentic communication through textual articulation, I suggest, calls for consideration of the symbolic significance of sexual representations as holding erotic power. The erotic power of mediated sexual discourse provides a specific epistemology of power, an epistemology confirmed through the depolarization of libidinal desires and social organization of sexuality. Thus, Turkish sexual confessions that are perceived as communicative acts illustrate the process of a social production of sexuality that embraces libidinal desires as a critical aspect of social production. But the significance of confessions as a means of communication is not only about the social production of sexuality. It is also about the erotic power of sexual discourse – the erotic power that triggers the shift, liberalization, and greater enlargement of human understandings.

The literalization and externalization of sexual behaviours through public communication is significant because this process opens the door for various forms of sexual understandings. These understandings constitute the network of socially accessible desires and set the terminus of what Feenberg and Bakardjieva label as “authentic communication” (2004c, p. 5). I examine the following confession as an illustrative case of authentic communication within the context of online communities:

“Rose¹⁰, I can assure you that all the [cyberspace] members are following your stories with greatest pleasure.”

(A male confessor)

This narrative draws attention to the manner in which a non-explicitly emphasized ‘collective’ voice of an individual member speaks for the others in the collective community and ‘assures’ Rose of their attitude. Both the subject of this specific confession (Rose) and the confessor are representative figures of a relative authority, virtual objects of a social ordering, and exemplars of the rules that guide the authenticity of communicative acts. This is implied by the following two elements that this confession contains:

- Rose obtains the ‘assured’ attention of all members – this statement implies that Rose’s shared narratives involve a mastered understanding of how the needs of the community should be addressed. Stated differently, getting all members’ attention exemplifies the distinctiveness of Rose’s stories. As conformity to communicative codes and normative behaviours is instrumental to inclusiveness (Travers, 2000) in online communities, it can be suggested that Rose’s position as a distinguished and recognized member is based on her successful capturing of the rules of authentic communication.
- The confessor’s voice serves as a ‘collective’ voice of the online community members – this illustrates the imposition of private views as public. Put differently, the ‘collective’ voice of the confessor reveals a

¹⁰ Member name changed for ethical considerations.

suggested stance that individual members could and should have a role in the organization of communicative acts.

These two instances revealed in a single confession exemplify how the organization of online community and the formation of a communal spirit are dependent on the preset communication laws of a community, and that authentic communication is required and valued as a structural connective tissue within the community.

4.1.2.6 The Significance of the Existence of Online Communities

During my search for sexual narratives, I came upon a confession that clearly illustrates the role of the online community both as a unit of support, and erotic significance:

“Right now, I am having virtual sex with my girlfriend [...] More sincerely, I am split between chatting with her and writing this [this confession] here, on this [cyberspace]. Even though we don’t know each other, dear [cyberspace] members, it feels as if we have always been together [...]”

(A male confessor)

This confession clearly exemplifies the institutionalization (systematic formation) of an *online* community through both (1) technical mediation - the acknowledgement of the specific cyberspace, and (2) social virtual presence – the presence of [cyberspace] members. This sexual narrative articulates the spirit of communal feeling and belonging, and more significantly - the erotic power of communal belonging. The decoding of the communal spirit as ‘erotic power’ mediated through the performance, virtual presence, and *being* of the online community members, provides a platform for a better understanding of the formation of liminal sexuality as a product of sociality; or more

precisely, the understanding of online ‘sexual confession’ communities as erotic charge serves as a key to a “measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meanings, and a shared history and identity – in short, to a particular culture.”(Etzioni, 2004, p. 225).

The notion and dynamics of online communities illustrate the conjunction between social context, sociality, and the development of sexual understandings. As Bakardjieva and Feenberg suggest, online communities are generally a democratic rationalization of the technological medium (2002a). This democratic rationalization of the Internet through communal spirit results in a blurring of boundaries between private libidinal desires and the public world.

The theoretical conception of the interdependence of sociality and sexuality was examined in the literature review chapter of this thesis. This section was intended to practically exemplify and underpin the social construction of sexuality as reflected in online communities. The existence of Turkish online communities that come together around the axis of sexuality indicates the development of collective, socially shared sexual understandings within a transcendent space between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. The presence of online ‘sexual confession’ communities is important for this study for two reasons: (1) it exemplifies the emergence of a new layer of liminal sexuality as a *social* phenomenon; and (2) creates a platform for generalization and social applicability of the research findings.

4.1.3 ‘No Physical Body, No Judgement’

In order to better understand the *need* for the development of multiple, simultaneous, and liminal sexual realities, in contrast to simply liberating the articulation of sexuality in physical reality, we need to investigate the relationship between conflicts of personal values and religious norms in societies where religion has preserved its status as a powerful tool for codifying the social dimensions of life.

“...religion, in its rites, elicits the acting-out of sentiments upholding fundamental norms and values and thereby re-establishes them in the consciousness of its adherents. In reciprocal reinforcements, religious beliefs sanctify norms of conduct and supply their ultimate justification, and religious rites elicit and act out attitudes expressing, and thus strengthening, the awe and respect in which such norms are held. Thus, religion provides, through its sanctification and renewal of basic norms, a strategic basis for social control in the face of deviant tendencies and the expression of impulses dangerous to the stability of the society.” (O’Dea, 1983, p. 13)

The systematic and historical imposition of sexual restrictions in Islam has created a negatively charged social attitude towards what are considered ‘deviant’ sexual practices, those that fall outside of the restrictive norms defined by Islam, and which from the perspective of fundamental Islamic beliefs are considered to constitute a social threat. This specific historical set of restrictions regarding sexual practices predefines a kind of structural resistance to developing changes within the parameters of socio-cultural climate as it exists in physical reality in the context of Turkey. In addition to the prevailing sexual taboos defined by Islam, and perhaps because of these taboos, Nilufer Gole adds that the culture of Islam is established around “secrecy” and “non-verbalization” of private affairs, thus leading to a society of silence, which is highly anti-liberal in its very institutionalization (1996, p. 52).

From this perspective, the conflict between individual sexual drives, social organization, and religious dogmas requires a deeper resolution, one that can take place beyond the restrictive norms of socio-physical reality, in a terrain that is safe and distanced from physical reality. Because the physical socio-cultural reality is difficult to alter, the focal point of restricted individual drives is switched to the manufacturing of an alternative, simultaneous, and liminal socio-cultural (sexual) reality. The requirements of this process are easily hosted by the generic features of online digital environments. This explains why a liberated understanding of sexuality is taking at least in part, in online communities.

In the development of a liminal sexual reality, I should acknowledge the complex influence of online direct and indirect communication as a (in this case) veiled extension of the exteriority of information flow within a social structure. For the sake of clarity, I define online communication (direct or indirect) in the context of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces as a network of sharing of sexual narratives. These shared sexual narratives literalize sexual behaviours, and thus form the metanarrative of a liminal sexual reality.

These insights inevitably pose the question about the features of online digital environments that stimulate the appearance of a sexual culture that contrasts so strongly with the dominating socio-religious norms. Janet Murray explains the use of online environments as mediations of liberation that provide “participation with a mask”(1997, pp. 112-113). Horton and Wohl provide a similar, but more sophisticated explanation of the same phenomenon from a sociological perspective calling it “... a repeated pattern of parasocial interactions that is based on ‘intimacy at a distance.’” (as cited in Nabi, 2009,

p. 225). From this perspective, it is the para-sociality of online communication that allows the development of liberated sexual understandings. This perception of para-sociality of virtual interaction/communication can be illustrated by the following confession:

“[...]Why am I always asked if I am a real woman as soon as I open my web cam? – Because the Internet is the ideal medium for gays [in this context meaning men with female physical appearance] hiding their real identity [...]”

(A female confessor)

This confession clearly captures the relationship between online environments and the ‘anonymous’ body as an instance of performance. Or, as Travers suggests “...in cyberspace we can at last “succeed” in leaving the body behind”(2000, p. 15). The technological mediation of the self has resulted in a blurring of real and fictional, which in turn has created a deep questioning of what aspects of the self are constituted through the specific attributes of body and persona, representation and self-presentation, and presence and absence. This blurring is what many consider to be a result of ‘disembodiment’ (Turkle, 1995; Ward, 2001), or ‘anonymity’ (Chesney & Su, 2010; Wayner, 1999).

While the notion of disembodiment in online environments suggests that the absence of a body is instrumental towards a liberalization of the mind, the concept of ‘disembodiment’ as a mode of liberalization is not convincing, because (1) at the end of the chain of technologically mediated actions there is always a body; (2) self-presentation through representation in online environments is again a form of transformed embodiment – for example: in textual self-presentation/ representation, the body of the

text is a kind of embodiment; (3) the lack of a body does not explain the *virtual* presence, where presence depends on *being* and *being* depends on presence (Heidegger, 1977).

On the other hand, viewing disembodiment as an aspect of anonymity implies another model of online communication that seems to better explain why community members reveal their liberated views specifically in online technologically mediated environments. Based on the notion of the term ‘disembodiment’ as being better understood as an aspect of anonymity where the body is present but hidden from view in order to protect the self, I propose an approach to the notion of anonymity from the stance of a philosophy of representation. Representation as a symbol, as a new form, and as a body defined by its own being marks the disconnection between the source of representation and the representation itself (Derrida, 1998). Stated differently, no representation is identical or true to the original. In the case of the practices of verbal representations that are used in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, the very textualization of the sexual acts initiates the breakage from the origin. As Barthes puts it:

“As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.” (2002, p. 101)

It is specifically this breakage from the origin that (1) defines the parameters of anonymity in the context of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces; and (2) contributes to the liberalization of the mind.

4.2 Discourse

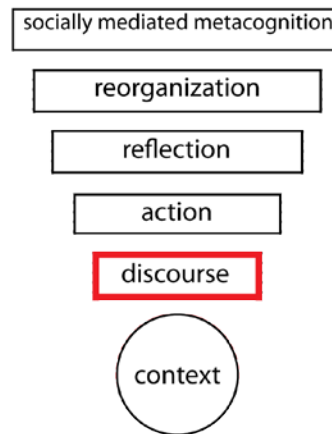


Figure 12 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

Discourse is the phase of the process of online learning where members of an online community *negotiate meaning* (Gunawardena et al., 2009). In the context of this definition, I treat the negotiation of meaning as based on social “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 2009), in which discourse participants are unaware of their ideological and background assumptions (Fairclough, 2001).

The negotiation of meaning emerges when individuals within a group are expected to exchange information (Foster, 1998). In the specific context of confessing through textual formulation of sexual behaviours, the *negotiation* of meaning becomes a part of an extended social and cultural system of (1) modifying and adjusting language as a means of representation to match the communication codes of the community (linguistic level of discourse); and (2) sharing sexual experiences as a social positioning and semantic conveyance of ideology through language (social level of discourse).

According to Foucault, sexual discourse extends the boundaries of language to become an *instrument* of its exercise:

“... sex has not ceased to provoke a kind of generalized discursive erethism. And these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise. Incitements to speak were orchestrated from all quarters, apparatuses everywhere for listening and recording, procedures for observing, questioning, and formulating. Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized.” (1990, pp. 32-33)

Foucault describes the institutionalized verbosity of sexual discourse as a requirement of the civilization. In direct relationship to this goal, I consider the state of collective sexuality in Islamic countries and the initiation of sexual discourse as a precursor to my study. As described in the previous sections of this thesis, sexuality under Islamic cultures in physical reality is represented as a non-verbalized entity. Foucault’s vision is relevant to what is considered as Islamic ‘online’ sexuality. The institutionalization of *online* sexual discourse is established not by the civilization itself, but by the acceptance of common rules that are defined explicitly by the online sexual communities *themselves*. Foucault’s argument is powerful in its recognition of sexuality as a turbulent social dynamic that triggers social engagement. The acute difference suggested between Western and Islamic collective sexualities is not the dimensions of social engagement, but the level to which social institutions either *manifest* or *suppress* sexual articulation. The historically situated repression of Islamic sexuality in the technologically mediated internet culture of twenty-first century physical reality leads to an extreme dissonance between social and private values (Khalaf, 2006). This dissonance

and the degree of repression delimits the boundaries of virtual sexual communities (Feenberg, 2011b), which leads to the multiplication and intensification of discourses on sex in online environments.

In the relationship between discourse and its textual representations, particularly with regard to textual representation of sexual instances, I introduce the idea of *text* as a *textual transformation* defined by its own exteriority (Derrida, 2004). Derrida suggests that texts are implemented as a semiotic system of textual referrals to other texts, and thus create their own *exteriority* of meaning (ibid). This *exteriority* allows a kind of epistemological structure to emerge. In the case of Turkish sexual narratives, the replication of meaning through textual networks of signification creates the boundary between the texts of sexual narratives and the reality of socio-sexual imperatives of sexual behaviour. The textual content of the online sexual narratives positioned within online communities are able to construct their meaning's "own exteriority" (Derrida, 2004, p. 29). From this perspective, Turkish sexual narratives form a textual network of semiotic replays of cultural, social, religious, psychodynamic values (texts). This textual semiotic replay of values constitutes its own 'exteriority', or its own textual 'reality', which is able to create a political potency of emergent collective social and liminal sexual narrative that counters the physical 'boundary' conditions of normative sexual imperatives of Islamic Turkey.

Based on the framework of conceptual ideas regarding sex as discourse and its ability to form a textual reality as outlined by Derrida (2004), my focus in this section is to analyze and explore the 'verbose' (Foucault, 1990) representations of sex as reflected in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. The purpose of this section is to investigate the

textual formulations, representations, re-presentations, and exchange of sexual episodes that construct sex as a discursive practice. It is discourse itself that transforms sexual practices from private knowledge to a public and social experience. Considering the role of discourse as a *social conversation* and a *textual reality* in the process of transformation of Turkish sexuality, my analysis encompasses the linguistic and social levels of discursive practices borrowing from both Derrida's concept of textual *exteriority* and Foucault's concept of the need for textual *verbosity*.

The following two sub-sections examine discursive practices within Turkish sexual confession sites, from the perspective of 1) the linguistic and 2) the social.

4.2.1 Linguistic Levels of Discursive Practices

“A word without meaning is an empty sound; meaning, therefore, is a criterion of ‘word,’ its indispensable component. It would seem, then, that it may be regarded as a phenomenon of speech. But from the point of view of psychology, the meaning of every word is a generalization or a concept. And since generalizations and concepts are undeniably acts of thought, we may regard meaning as a phenomenon of thinking. It does not follow, however, that meaning formally belongs in two different spheres of psychic life. Word meaning is a phenomenon of thought only insofar as thought is embodied in speech, and of speech only insofar as speech is connected with thought and illuminated by it. It is a phenomenon of verbal thought, or meaningful speech – a union of word and thought.” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 212)

Vygotsky's formulation of the unitary relation between ‘word’ and ‘thought’ refers to a perspective where language and words may be considered are implicated in the process of reproduction of thought through speech and creation of meaning. Despite Vygotsky's explanation of this relationship in terms of psychic and psychological dynamics, the creation and embedding of meaning in language is primarily a social process (S. Hall & Open University., 1997).

As Hodge and Kress suggest, the structure of language is its ability to conceptualize reality (1993). The fundamental categories of any given language correspond to ‘models’ which are concerned with the interrelationship between objects and events (ibid). From this perspective, any syntactic, morphologic, semantic, phonetic, orthographic¹¹ change in language corresponds to a change in a related social model.

This section analyses the parallels between emergent modes of language use and its efforts upon social change, based upon the conceptual connections of language structures that define the relationship between language and social institutions. I explore the transformations that appear in *language use* and correlate their motivation through examples of what I term the ‘orthographic Turkification of English’.

In order to introduce this concept, it is important to clarify the concept of orthography. Orthography is a branch of linguistics, which engages with the study of spelling in accordance with accepted language conventions (“Oxford English Dictionary,” 2010). This is particularly important in this instance because Turkish is a highly phonemic-orthographical language, which means that each sound tightly corresponds to a certain letter (Öney & Durgunoğlu, 2008).

In this analysis, I want to engage with a more detailed relationship between the orthographic ‘Turkification’ of English words and the corresponding dynamics of social change. The orthographic Turkification of English is a two-level process, which includes: (1) adoption of English words, and (2) the orthographic modification of these words.

Let us consider the first phase of the process (the adoption of English words) within the context of Turkish language use as a cultural institution. The affirmation of the

¹¹ These categories serve as examples among the numerous linguistic categories.

‘purity’ of Turkish language is considered a part of national politics and is regulated by the Turkish Language Society¹². One of the roles of the Turkish Language Society is to find replacements for words borrowed from foreign languages (G. Lewis, 2002). The practice of replacing foreign words with purely Turkish equivalents evidences a tendency towards cultural protectionism, or as Lewis puts it, a tendency towards “keeping with the phonetics, aesthetics, and grammar” (2002, p. 155) of the Turkish language. For example, the word ‘computer’ which is globally recognized and adopted (with insignificant phonemic adjustments) in many languages, has the Turkish equivalent ‘bilgisayar.’¹³ Similar examples can be given with the words ‘positive’ and ‘negative’, that have been translated in pure Turkish as ‘olumlu’ and ‘olumsuz’ respectively. They are rarely found in their foreignism forms of ‘positif’ and ‘negatif’. The significance of this phenomenon is that the words carrying the ‘pure’ Turkish morphological roots are the preferred means of expression in everyday life.

Similarly, the Turkish equivalent of ‘sex’ is ‘cinsel ilişki.’ Following the logic of Turkish linguistic and cultural protectionism, it can be suggested that the expression ‘cinsel ilişki’ would be a preferred means of conveying meaning in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. However, my initial observations indicated that the orthographically modified version of the English word ‘sex’, i.e. ‘seks’ (in accordance with Turkish language phonemic rules) is the preferred means of expression. A search of ‘cinsel ilişki’, ‘seks’, and ‘sex’ within the database of sexual confessions of one of the investigated cyberspaces returned the following results:

¹² In Turkish “Türk Dil Kurumu”, also known as TDK.

¹³ Literally meaning ‘a counter of knowledge’.

SEARCH TERM	NUMBER OF CONFESSIONS IMPLEMENTING THE SEARCH TERM
Cinsel ilişki ¹⁴	34
Seks ¹⁵	1487
Sex	438

Table 1: Comparative results of the use of ‘cinsel ilişki’, ‘seks’, and ‘sex’ in Turkish sexual confessions conducted by the author between April 21st, 2011 and May 18th, 2011.

As seen from the table, the Turkified phonemic-orthographic form ‘seks’ of the English word ‘sex’ is a preferred means of expression. The discourse on sex within Turkish sexual confessions as a *discourse on ‘seks’* represents a cultural shift evidenced by the preferred mode of expression through the production of signs. The phonetic unity of ‘sex’ and ‘seks’ defines the encoding of difference in the *sign* as a letter and a written entity, or stated differently – the encoding of *sign* as *text*. This important shift in cultural expression can be likened to Derrida’s concept of grammatical aggression. The difference between ‘sex’ and ‘seks’ articulates a “graphic and grammatical aggression, [which] implies an irreducible reference to the mute intervention of a written sign” (Derrida, 2004, p. 7). From this perspective, the difference between written signs is what defers presence (ibid) – the presence of a modernistic *Turkish* understanding of sex as ‘seks’, an understanding that also corresponds to new ethical stances that do not conform to established taboos.

¹⁴ Search includes grammatical suffixal variations of the word

¹⁵ Search includes grammatical suffixal variations of the word

The textual orthographic Turkification of English words in sexual confessions also relates to the notion of text as a semiotic network referring to other texts, a textual transformation which marks a text's own exteriority (Derrida, 2004). In the context of sexual confession cyberspaces, the 'other texts' stand for western representations of sexuality (widely present on the net in various media forms – e.g. pornographic images, movies, texts). The process of 'textual referring to other texts' is exemplified by the adoption and preferred use of English words, instead of 'pure' Turkish words (as in the case of seks vs. cinsel ilişki). The orthographic modifications and Turkification of English words evidence a process of identification with the verbal representations. From this perspective, the referent of 'sex' as 'seks' is not something external to language, but *is constructing itself in language*, a very important distinction.

The analysis of the role of orthographic Turkification of English words was based on the example of the usage of the word 'seks.' The intention of focusing on one single word / instance is in order to begin with a simple example thereby avoiding confusion, especially for readers who are not acquainted with the specifics of Turkish language. I should emphasize that the word 'seks' is not the only example of Turkification of English words. Other instances of orthographic Turkification include the following referential cognates of English words (among others):

- 'travesti' – a transvestite
- 'masturbasyon' - masturbation
- 'kondom' – a condom
- 'vibratör' – a vibrator

- ‘monotonluk’ – monotony (in terms of lack of variety and interest, tedious repetition and routine regarding sexual life.)
- ‘ strapon’ – a strap-on

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I presented Foucault’s idea of social valorization of sex through discourse - the process, which characterizes sex as a special domain with its own norms. In the case of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, we deal with textual representations of sexual instances, a para-social form of textual discourse, which basically refers to the abstraction of sex through text. Let me repeat Derrida's conceptualization of text:

“[...] a *text*, a network of textual referrals to *other* texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly “simple term” is marked by the trace of another term, the presumed interiority of meaning is worked upon its own exteriority.” (2004, pp. 27-28)

In the sense of *text* as a network of textual referrals, the notion of referential text should be treated in a broad sense – as a web of cultural, political, social, psychodynamic values, understandings, and knowledge. From this perspective, a textual sexual confession is not just a confession, but a reflection and product of all the texts (meaning values, knowledge, understandings) that underlie it and to which it refers. So, a sexual confession maps and illustrates the path to other cultural references, references that are normally invisible, hidden, non-verbalized in an Islamic physical reality.

Text is constructed by signs (words, letters, grammar structures, among others.) I will engage again with the example of sex and 'seks'. The orthographic difference between ‘sex’ and ‘seks’ articulate a "graphic and grammatical aggression" (Derrida, 2004, p. 7). This linguistic aggression turns the referent ‘sex’ into the linguistic sign

‘seks’. In this example, the notion of ‘sex’ as the *signified* and ‘seks’ as a *signifier* is evidence that *sex* (in terms of sexuality) constructs and transforms itself through language. From this perspective, the described linguistic dynamics form a circular process where sex is constructing language and language is constructing sex.

This sub-section has provided an analysis of the linguistic level of discursive practices within Turkish sexual confession sites, illustrating the use of language as a mechanism of cultural change. The next sub-section examines the social level of discursive practices.

4.2.2 Social Level of Discursive Practices

The social level of discursive practices comes from the extension of language beyond descriptive practices. Such an approach recognizes what in Butler’s terms would construct the ‘performative’ power of language that is created, transmitted, and reproduced within communities. The reproduction of language as a practice of performance within communities defines the rituals and cultural habits of its members. From this perspective, language becomes one of the main differentiators of a communal subculture. In the case of Turkish online communities, sexual subcultures exist through text. This defines the codes of the communities as ‘textual’ rather than of, for example, a sartorial style¹⁶. In this sense, the articulation of style in Turkish online communities is defined in specifically linguistic frames. The linguistic abstraction of sex as a confession, and as a text, is accompanied by discourses and practices of contextualization, which

¹⁶ For more details, see D. Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Reference suggested by A. Feenberg.

define sex and sexuality as a social and non-clinical entity through sharing of ‘lived’ experiences of sex.

In this section, I explore the social level of sexual discourse, as a publicly available representation of private sexual instances. The social level of discourse encompasses direct or indirect reflections on unconscious or ‘tacit’ social and political ideology. As Fairclough suggests:

“...if one’s concern is with the social values associated with texts and their elements, and more generally with the social significance of texts, description needs to be complemented with interpretation and explanation. Notice also that neither the dependence of discourse on background assumptions, nor the ideological properties of these assumptions which link them to social struggles and relations of power, are generally obvious to discourse participants. Interpretation and explanation can therefore be seen as two successively applied procedures of unveiling, or demystification.” (2001, p. 118)

Following Fairclough’s research framework for capturing of ‘text-social organization’ relations, I base my analysis primarily on *Turkish* use of English sexual labels as an indicator of the socio-political significance of sexual confessions.

Social apparatuses define and regulate life within a society. Human beings belong to numerous and diverse social structures and as such make up the various social units that enable social structures to come alive. The survival and orientation within these structures becomes possible through acts of systematic classification and typology. Classifications are based on identification of common signs, while typology is grounded through the defining features and characteristics of the social organization (Etzioni, 1964). Social organizations are artefacts, or consciously created constructs, in which the primary aim is to regulate, coordinate, and discipline the actions of the organizational group, or of the individuals within the group (ibid). From this perspective, I treat online

sexual communities as informal social organizations. As language within this specific sexual social organization is the primary and only means of communication, I suggest that language exemplifies the performative power which regulates, constructs, and reconstructs the sexual online communities as social organizations. It is the performative power of language that situates the social positioning of online community members within the socio-cultural context of the community. Goffman calls this process of social positioning “footing” (as cited in Kramsch, 1998, p. 42). One of the ways of defining one’s ‘footing’ is through code-switching (ibid). Code-switching is an indicator of group membership and is defined by the implementation of two or more languages within one conversation (Auer, 1998). I approach the process of code-switching as a practice of social positioning by providing several examples.

Let me start with the instance of ‘anal seks’ as an exemplification of code-switching. The informal Turkish equivalent for this specific sexual practice is ‘ters ilişki’. The literal English translation of ‘ters ilişki’ can be approximated as ‘wrong connection.’ At the socio-linguistic level, the expression ‘wrong connection’ contains a negative moral judgement within its own linguistic body. The condemnation of this act is reflected in the presence of the word ‘wrong’ within the expression. Another informal Turkish expression referring to this sexual practice is ‘arkadan + yapmak / vermek / becermek / istemek / girmek’, which literally means ‘to do / give/ copulate/ want/ enter from behind.’ What becomes apparent in the online sexual confessions is the predominant use of the Turkified English label ‘anal seks’ to signify this specific sexual practice. A search of the database of one of the sexual confession cyberspaces returned the following results:

SEARCH TERM	NUMBER OF CONFESSIONS IMPLEMENTING THE SEARCH TERM
Ters ilişki	5 ¹⁷
Anal seks	246
Arkadan + <i>contextualizing verb</i>	45

Table 2: Comparative results of the use of ‘ters ilişki’, ‘anal seks’, and ‘arkadan + verb’ in Turkish sexual confessions

Before proceeding to an analysis of the practices of code-switching, I want to consider another specific example of code-switching using the word ‘gay’, whose colloquial use in English refers to same-sex sexual orientation. The Turkish equivalent of the word ‘gay’ is ‘eşcinsel’ or ‘hemcinsel’. An initial overview of the sexual confessions indicated the predominant use of the word ‘gay’ to refer to homosexual individuals, or individuals that are attracted to same sex partners. It should be noticed here, that according to Turkish language phonemic rules, the word ‘gay’ should be transcribed as ‘gey.’ A search of the database of one of the sexual confession cyberspaces returned the following results:

¹⁷ Within this number, two confessions belong to one and the same community member

SEARCH TERM	NUMBER OF CONFESSIONS IMPLEMENTING THE SEARCH TERM
Eşcinsel (or eş cinsel) ¹⁸	14
Gay	86
Hemcinsel ¹⁹	31
Gey	0

Table 3: Comparative results of the use of ‘eşcinsel’, ‘gay’, ‘hemcinsel’, and ‘gey’ in Turkish sexual confessions

These search results contain two important perspectives:

1. The English word ‘gay’ is the word used predominantly to reference individuals with same-sex sexual orientation, also referred to as homosexual.
2. The word ‘gay’ is not phonemic-orthographically Turkified (in the form of ‘gey’), which evidences a lack of linguistic identification with the term. In contrast to the Turkification of ‘sex’ in the form of ‘seks’, the prevalent use of the word ‘gay’ signifies a two-fold dynamic. The first fold, as witnessed in the ‘pure’ adoption of this English term, evidences the transgression and surpassing of the social taboos and ‘non-verbalization’ with regard to homosexuality. The use of the word ‘gay’ as a code-switching practice illustrates an accumulated acceptance of homosexuality. The second fold, however, reflects on the lack of orthographic Turkification of the word ‘gay’. This lack of

¹⁸ Search includes grammatical suffixal variations of the word

¹⁹ Search includes grammatical suffixal variations of the word

Turkification of this term creates a *distinction* between (1) *acceptance* of such sexual identities, and (2) *identification* with these. This distinction reflects on a still present social distance with regard to homosexuality. This phenomenon is analyzed in detail in section 4.5.1 of this thesis.

An additional instance of code-switching can be given with the linguistic word couple ‘sex’ (‘seks’) and ‘cinsel ilişki.’ This linguistic matching was presented in detail in the previous section of this chapter.

These specific examples of code-switching represent a broader practice of the incorporation of English sexual labels used specifically in online environments as ‘borrowings’ into Turkish language. The following conversation between two community members of a sexual confession cyberspace exemplifies the social dynamics triggered by the practice of code-switching:

Member A: “Can you put somewhere around a dictionary, so we can understand the meaning of ‘bdsm’, ‘pissing’, ‘strapon’ (strap-on), ‘swinger’, ‘vs’ directly from this [cyberspace]. I am tired of referencing google.”

(A male confessor)

Member B: “For the sake of easy access ;)

1) bdsm: b&d: bondage and dominance_ [bondage and dominance substituted with Turkish words]_ or bondage and discipline _[explanation in Turkish] ‘to tie with a rope and to rule in a stiff manner’

s&m: sadism & masochism _[sadism and masochism repeated with Turkish phonemic-orthographic modifications]

d&s: dominance & submission_ [dominance and submission substituted with Turkish words]

2) pissing: comes from English and means to pee. Here, it refers to people who like peeing during sex or who like to be peed upon during sex.

3) strapon: a penis that is tied to the waist and is generally used by women.

4) swinger: changing spouse

If I have positively contributed to this [cyberspace], I will be really happy...”

(A male confessor)

The practices of code-switching, as evidenced in this conversation, mark a gradual lexical penetration of English into Turkish. This linguistic phenomenon is associated with modernization of Turkish society within a wider context of globalization and exchange of cultural values (Büyükkantarcıoğlu, 2004). From the perspective of Goffman’s notion of ‘footing’ as self positioning and articulation of style in a highly textual subculture, code-switching closely correlates with the negotiation of a ‘modernized’ and ‘westernized’ status (Acar, 2004) in online sexual communities. The presence of modernity in sexual understandings conveys and correlates to a liberated attitude towards divergent practices of sex. From this perspective, this conversational example enacts a distinctive frame of political opposition toward Islamic normative sexual values through acceptance, recognition, and clear ‘western’ labelling of forbidden sexual practices.

4.3 Action

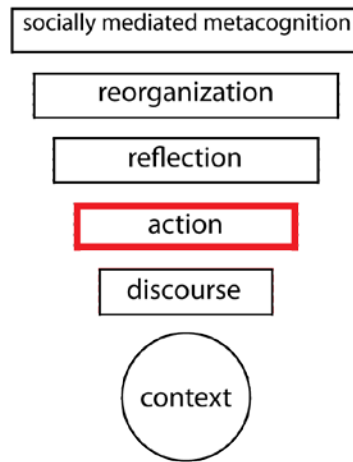


Figure 13 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

Following the Discourse phase, Gunawardena's model articulates the Action Phase as the next stage in the iterative and cyclical process of learning within online communities. During the Action phase, community members identify a goal and connect with other members sharing the same objective (Gunawardena et al., 2009). In this section, identifying goals and connecting with others within an online community setting is considered again within the concept of "tacit knowledge" (Polanyi, 2009). This specific understanding underpins construction of sexuality as a process of conscious and/or unconscious knowledge production. From this perspective, I understand *action* to be the voluntary act of online confessing as a form of consciously or unconsciously generating sexual discourse. The process of generating discourse on sex is, in its own nature, is an *action* against Islamic norms prevailing in physical reality.

4.3.1 Mediated Adoption of a Catholic Practice in an Islamic Cultural Setting

The question of online dimensions of sexuality requires the tracking and formulation of the effects of new media on Islamic societies, and in this case the Islamic society of Turkey. Which features of online environments and the Internet culture stimulate (online) confession, an act that is historically embedded within Christian practices of absolution, but has not entered the religious practices of Muslim communities? What evoked the need for confessions in the medium of the internet characterized by both communication and isolation?

These questions require a three-level- investigation: (1) treating the Internet as a medium of rich and easily accessible sexual content of various types - explicit and implicit; (2) interpretation and processing of the sexual content by Turks in a framework that is differentiated from the normative socio-cultural dimensions of Islam; and (3) as a consequence of the previous two levels, the need for a permissive environment and a community that serves as a venting opportunity for repressed sexuality and allows a mediated sexual liberation within the terrain of an online digital environment. This last level, which reflects upon the permissive environment afforded by the Internet, is widely associated with the notion of anonymity and disembodiment, although I argue for the articulation of an embodied anonymity which is inclusive of the value of the body, particularly as it relates to expressions of sexual acts²⁰. The typology of this level rests on defining forms of involvement that provide a platform for para-social interaction within the context of a permissive online mediation.

²⁰ A detailed discussion on anonymity and disembodiment was provided in the previous sections of this chapter.

Pragmatically speaking, the first and second level of this investigation model (the internet as a medium for rich sexual content and the processing of sexual content in a framework different from normative Islamic constraints) are a result of the continuous distribution of Western models of reality (including what is presented as Western sexual reality) via the Internet. Under the Western model of sexual reality, we can include the recognition of divergent types of sexual practices – visualised, intensified, substantiated in many forms; in short, the whole assortment of mediated presentation of sex on the Internet constructs a Westernized type of a semiotic fantasy. Duff exemplifies this in an explanation of mainstream pornography:

“A good deal of mainstream pornography certainly does make claims to truth about sexuality. One could argue in fact that much of mainstream pornography’s relationship to truth borders on an obsession with authenticity and the reality of the depiction. Care is taken to assure the consumer, in the text or discourse that accompanies the visuals, that everything they might expect to be true of the women who appear in pornography is very true indeed: soft core models really do find it liberating to remove their clothing in order to tantalize men; and hard core performers love repeated gagging and excruciating anal sex.” (2010, p. 690)

There seems to be an endless semiotic fantasy, a substantiated illusion when it comes to the Internet culture forming the spectators’ sexual being and tastes. The illusion, which the spectators may experience as Western sexual reality segments and isolates sexuality from other social institutions, including the apparatus of religion. From this perspective, Internet culture supports the collapse of religious sexual stigmas in favour of ‘sinful’ libidinal activities.

Online sexual confessions come into play when we consider the process of sexual “intensification of experiences extending down to their physical components, the optimization of effects by the discourse that accompanied them.” (Foucault, 1990, p. 70)

What Foucault calls “intensification of experiences” (ibid) is clearly exemplified in the following confession:

“I read too many of these confessions and got sexually stimulated. As a result, I became a member of several dating sites. I like mature and sexually enthusiastic women, and started chatting with several of these. I even met with one of them. We had sex several times and tried lots of fantasies. At the end, I got my way, she got her way. Result: After trying so many new things, I am back here again...”

(A male confessor)

This confession illustrates the role of discursive practices as intensifier of physical experience of sex. From this perspective, the adoption of the practice of confession in an Islamic cultural setting repositions the Internet user from a passive experiencer of Western sexual reality to an active creator of such a reality.

4.3.2 From a Sin to a ‘Mediated’ Norm

Within the context of sexuality in Turkey, the dissonance between ‘individual’ and ‘social’ results in an intrapsychic conflict. According to Brenner “an intrapsychic conflict never disappears. What happens is the compromise formations arising from the conflict are altered in the direction of normality.”(1985, p. 157).

From this perspective, it is easy to see why the Internet and online environments play such a central role in the liberalization of the sexual self in Turkey. Online environments serve as a way of defining and controlling the performance of individual

sexual drives (compromise formation) in a direction no longer considered deviant in the specific context (normalization). In fact, the “direction of normality” (ibid) in sexual expression in online environments can be considered a consequence of the following phenomena:

1. The Internet is a ‘porn-permissible’ medium, which sets the standards for sexual normality to ‘high’, meaning that the risk that a sexual activity be considered a deviation is low. The identification with sexual practices presented on the net²¹ serves as a structuring basis of the relationship between (1) widely accessible online pornographic materials requiring an interpretation beyond the framework of Islam, and (2) the re-presentation of divergent sexual instances in Turkish online confession cyberspaces.
2. The anonymity feature of online environments has radically changed the relation between individuals, social performance, and social organization allowing an authority-free venting through sexual narratives within a supportive community and a reorganized social order.

From this perspective, the act of sexual confessing within a social organization, such as an online community seems to generate the effects of what Bourdieu calls *doxa* – the conformity between objective order and the subjective principles of organization of experience:

“Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different mechanisms) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents’ aspirations, out of which arises the *sense of limits*,

²¹ This reading is based on Freud’s “Representation by means of identification” (1965, p. 321)

commonly called the *sense of reality*, i.e. the correspondence between objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order.” (1977, p. 164)

The act of confessing in Turkish cyberspaces influences the development of sexual understandings through new practices of discursive contextualization. It is precisely these practices of contextualization that define sex as a social experience and a social institution with a unique *sense of limits* and *sense of reality* - in general, with its specific and liberated experience of *doxa*. From this perspective, *doxa* established in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces normalizes and standardizes sexual practices considered ‘unnatural’ by Islamic culture.

The following confession illustrates the flexibility of the *sense of reality* that mediated sexual discourse creates:

“For the last 3 months, my sexual life has been spinning around alcohol, sexual confessions, and porn sites for mobile phones!”

(A male confessor)

This sexual narrative contains several important emphases: (1) the mingling of what may be considered ‘real’ sexual life with the worlds of online sexual realities (as in mediated sexual confessions and porn sites); (2) the act of verbalizing the situation and creating a naturally appearing social experience by sharing the narrative within an online community; and (3) the implicit recognition of social sexual discourse (sexual confessions) as structural experience and mediated norm of sexual life. This confession clearly illustrates the shift appearing in the *sense of limits* by converting what in physical reality is considered a sin into a mediated norm.

4.4 Reflection

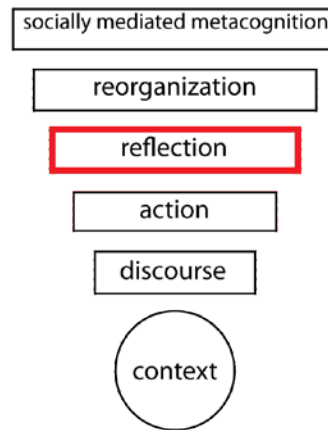


Figure 14 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

Following from the phase of Action, the next phase of Reflection considers how the exchange of individual experiences of community members as a foundational basis of social cognition constructs a community of reflective practice within Turkish sexual confession sites. It focuses on the sharing, assimilation and integration of unfamiliar points of view and understandings. **Reflection** in online communicative interactions is the tacit, conscious, or unconscious recognition of transgression. By transgression, I mean the excess beyond what society has defined as boundaries and limits. In Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces

“...the limits to [...] experience and the taboos that police them are never simply imposed from the outside; rather, limits to behaviour are always personal responses to moral imperatives that stem from the inside. This means that any limit on conduct carries with it an intense relationship with the desire to transgress that limit.” (Bataille as cited in Jenks, 2003, p. 7)

What defines human sexuality as a non-animal entity is the sense of limit, control, and repression of libidinal desires. The notion of transgression comes into play when the idea of what is socially defined as a sexual sin is crossed, trespassed, or violated. This violation of the forbidden is precisely what delimits the erotic significance of sexual norms. From this perspective, online sexual confessions act upon two operational dynamics: naturalizing the ‘deviant’ on one side, and simultaneously violating sexual prohibitions, on the other side. These two operational dynamics are paradoxical in their nature, yet they harmoniously co-exist in online realms. In this two-fold phenomenon, online community members refuse the disciplinary boundaries of social sexual institutions while also utilising the pleasure involved in disobeying moral and social conventions.

It is online community members’ recognition (conscious or unconscious) of the simultaneous transgression and normalization of deviance that constitutes the phase **Reflection** in online communication and processes of learning.

As supporting evidence, I include several sexual narratives that convey a level of reflection regarding (1) the shift of sexual boundaries, and (2) the transgressive nature of sexual confession cyberspaces. I consider these examples to mirror the change in social order in a direct and explicitly verbalized manner. In other words, the analytical natures of the following narratives are carried within the body of the text as *description* and the “formal properties of the text” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21). The following confessions provide analytical content that can be ‘directly’ read and perceived by the audience:

“I think that the Internet has an immense influence on sexual life, especially in societies that are intensely dominated by taboos. The internet makes access to sexual information easier; connecting and getting

acquainted with other people becomes also easier. Because of this, some men do not trust women that date via the net²². However, they do not realize that they make themselves also available through the net. This is not a fair treatment. I have been divorced for four years and I got connected (had sex) with many women, who I met via the net. We wanted and got together (had sex together). Isn't this the way things should work? Contrary to many, I will find somebody via the net and will get married again. Long live virtual environments!"

(A male confessor)

"I don't know if I should write this, but I feel the urge to share it. I am an attractive woman and wherever I go I get males' attention. Only my husband is unaware of me. I live in a very monotonous marriage. Our sex life is miserable. Despite my infinite efforts, I am not able to fix this on my own. Tonight, after making some radical decisions, I found a partner from some escort services. From 8pm to 11pm, I fulfilled all the sexual appetite I have been gathering for the last 5 years. I did and was done all the things that my husband sees as inappropriate. I feel both very calm and guilty now. The responsible for this situation are: first, my husband, and second, our society that generates and maintains all these taboos. [...] I want to thank [this cyberspace] for giving me all the courage to do something of the kind and for making me realize that by not doing it, I was actually mistreating myself."

(A female confessor)

"This is not a true confession, but...10-15 years ago, finding a woman that is willing to practice anal sex was a real miracle. Time has passed; new generations know much better what they sexually want. People managed to get out of the box. Anal sex has become a normal procedure. You can see this even by just reading here, on [this cyberspace]. A lot of women share their first anal sex experiences. They say they appreciate and want this practice. But no woman explicitly confesses "I love anal sex." This is because 'out-fashioned' taboos are transformed into different 'in-fashioned' taboos. If you, dear friends, can understand this, we can really liberate ourselves."

(A male confessor)

The level of analysis present in these sexual narratives recognizes the shift of boundaries and the transgressive nature of online confessions and cyberspaces. Contrary

²² Meaning, questioning these women's sexual morality

to the tendencies in mainstream confession style toward representing sex in the light of play, the analysis here presents sex as a society-changing dynamic, and as a manifestation of self- liberation.

4.5 Reorganization

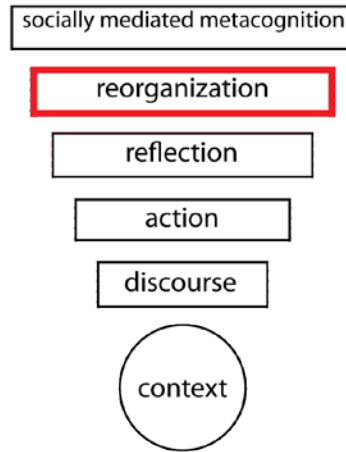


Figure 15 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

“Sexual standards in Islam are paradoxical: on the one hand, they allow and actually are an enticement to the exercise of sexuality but, on the other hand, they discriminate between male and female sexuality, between marital and pre- or extramarital sexuality, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality.”

(Dialmy, 2010, p. 160)

This section entitled **Reorganization** follows the spiral model of learning in social networking proposed by Gunawardena et al (2009) by continuing to articulate the phases of online learning in an evolving order. I follow this model in order to provide reflection on the process of formation of a liminal sexuality in the context of sexual confession cyberspaces in Turkey. As stated earlier, the formation of the liminal sexuality is not a

process following linear progression, but rather a segmented, multidimensional iteration with intervening stages of development.

This section stresses the shift in the *reorganization* of sexual understandings between the ‘real’ physical reality and the ‘virtual’ within cyber and internet culture of the Republic of Turkey. The concept of reorganization captures the discrepancies between Islamic sexual norms and sexual practices described, presented, and represented online. I consider these discrepancies to exemplify the reorganization of sexuality as a social institution.

The method employed within this section is the identification of major sexual categories that construct taboos in physical reality. I treat these categories of social taboos as patterns of specific variables (Yin, 2002). These patterns of specific variables have been constructed prior to the study and correspond to the following socio-cultural taboos as they enforce normative limits on sexual behaviour in Muslim Turkey:

- Homosexuality and bisexuality
- Pre-marital sex and virginity
- Non-coital practices of sex (also referred to as anal copulation or sodomy)
- Female polyamory (also referred to in the negative moral sense as promiscuity)

These specific categories have been selected over other possible categories because of their observed prevalence within the Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. I illustrate the breakage of the link to social taboos associated with these specific patterns

by providing examples of counter-practices as described and represented in online sexual narratives. These counter-practices are important in defining newly articulated practices within online communities, and the erotic potency of shared communication and information among community members.

4.5.1 Homosexuality and Bisexuality

“My brother confessed to me that he was a gay. I was at his place when his boyfriend visited. I heard that they were having sex. I watched them through the half-opened door. I hated myself for watching them, but got extremely excited.”

(A male confessor)

Despite its wider and sometimes pseudo-liberalized acknowledgement in Western cultures, homosexual practices have a clearly preserved taboo status in Muslim societies and as such are characterized by secrecy, are hidden from view both linguistically and socially, and are therefore rendered un-verbalized in traditional forms of social communication. While homosexuality is not legally penalized in the territory of the Republic of Turkey, homosexual individuals face extreme social devaluation, isolation and negative attitudes (Eskin, Kaynak-Demir, & Demir, 2005). Pinar Ilkcaracan provides the following formulation of the social status of homosexuality in Muslim countries:

“The taboos surrounding sexual orientation in the Middle East constitute a profound example of hypocrisy, as there is extensive evidence and general, widespread recognition that homosexuality has been widely practiced in the region for centuries. Despite the relative visibility of male transvestite popular singers and artists, the ‘public’ silence shrouding non-heterosexual behavior remains exceptionally strong.”(2008a, p. 8)

The roots of the social anathema regarding homosexuality, along with the initiator of what Ilkkaracan calls “public silence” (ibid) that can be traced to the text of the Holy Qur’an, the foundation of the Islamic religious compass, that reads:

“Of all the creatures of the world, will you approach males, and leave those whom Allah has created for you to be your wives? Nay, you are a trespassing people!” (26:165-166 as cited in Kotb, 2004)

The Islamic social restriction regarding heterosexuality and what Butler tradition calls the hegemonic norms in favour of heterosexuality (1993) has resulted in part to the expression of subversive desires addressing same-sex subjects in online environments. Despite the absolute taboo status regarding the verbalization or articulation of homosexual desires in the ‘real’ of the physical reality, sexual confession narratives addressing this type of sexual practice *redefine* it as a socially recognized and reorganized *desire*. Within Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, homosexual desires are revealed as either (1) fantasies and potential future practices, or (2) established recognition of this type of sexual activity. In both cases, homosexual desires find a clearly verbalized online expression:

“I have been walking around transvestite communities for a while and I want to try [it] even if once [...].”

(A male confessor)

“Despite being a heterosexual [man], I started a relationship with a transvestite six months ago and I have not been able to be with somebody from the opposite sex for the last six months. And even more importantly, I think I am in love. If it weren’t for the social taboos and repressions, I was going to marry him tomorrow.”

(A male confessor)

Both of these narratives express and indulge in two operative frames: (1) a frame in favour of heterosexuality, and (2) a frame recognizing subversive homosexual desires. The heterosexual frame is revealed through a reference to homosexual acts as inferior to heterosexual activities, as revealed in “even if once” (as in the first exemplary confession); or respectively, an explicit proclamation of the heterosexual self, as in “being a heterosexual man” (second exemplary confession). The homosexual frame is articulated through admitting, confessing, verbalizing, and representing a homosexual desire.

“I am not a gay, but I like chatting via cam on gay sites. I like it when we masturbate watching each other.”

(A male confessor)

In this two-fold order of intervening homo- and heterosexuality, homosexuality is normalized and refracted via the socio-cultural organization of heterosexuality. The construction of homosexuality within the frame of heterosexuality is dependent on the way the *actor* (the confessor) relates to *the other* (Tapinc, 1992). Tapinc presents four models of social construction of homosexuality in Turkey (1992, pp. 40-46):

“Model A: the masculine ‘heterosexual’” includes practices of mutual masturbation excluding oral and anal sex. Individuals engaged in these activities are considered ‘heterosexual’.

“Model B: the masculine ‘heterosexual’ and feminine homosexual” includes practices of mutual masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex. In this model, the active inserter considers his identity ‘heterosexual’, while the passive recipient is considered

homosexual. Despite the homosexual context of the sexual practices, the inserter is believed to satisfy heterosexual needs.

“Model C: the masculine homosexual and feminine homosexual” refers to active masculine homosexual individuals who define their sexual identity as homosexual.

“Model D: the masculine gay” reflects on the disappearance of the traditional distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’.

Within this topography of the expressive forms of homosexuality within Turkey, the prevalent online ‘homosexual’ confessions observed by the author conform to Model A and Model B, where the confessor claims a ‘heterosexual’ identity:

“I feel extreme sexual desires toward my best [male] childhood friend with who I grew up together in the same neighborhood. I am not a gay. During puberty, we used to spend a lot of time kissing, rubbing our bodies and experiencing orgasms together. Moreover, I can’t forget the handjobs that we were giving to each other. I am sure he can’t forget either. We are still close friends. I know that he has the fantasy of being with a transvestite. I am sure that if I open this conversation, we will end up having sex. He even made a joke that instead of giving money to prostitutes, it would be easier if we do it together. The only thing that scares me is if I would be able to psychologically recover afterward. The thought of being with any other man appears extremely repelling and makes me vomit. But I see my friend in a completely different light. On top, the thought of having his huge penis in my mouth drives me crazy.”

(A male confessor)

This confession clearly articulates the hybridization of homo- and heterosexuality and the relationship between desire, friendship, intimacy and amorous emotional connection. Despite the explicitly homosexual desires, the confessor insists on a heterosexual identity. The insistence on a heterosexual identity within an overtly homosexual scenario testifies that the formation of liberalized sexual understandings is a

long process of transition both personally and socially. The deep cultural embedding of heterosexual norms morally elevates itself above explicit homosexual desires even in safe online environments. What is most important in these scenarios is the recognition of the ubiquitous existence of homosexual desires and their explicit formulation despite moral condemnation of homosexuality in physical reality. The following confession clearly articulates the tensions appearing between socio-cultural norms and homosexual desires:

“I randomly entered a dating site and came upon a ‘passive’ individual²³. We chatted via MSN and I broke a big taboo – I showed him mine²⁴ on the cam. From then on, he tries to convince me to get involved in oral sexual activities with him. But, of course, I am a bit cold toward this idea. If he continues to be so insistent, I am curious if I will break another taboo.”

(A male confessor)

The term homosexuality is often used to signify male homosexuality. However, female homosexual practices cannot be ignored in the framing of homosexual desire in Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. Female homosexuality is also devalued in Turkish physical reality. However, the social condemnation of such sexual acts is significantly milder in comparison to the social response to male homosexual activities. The slightly higher rate of acceptance of lesbian sexual acts coincides directly with the taboo of virginity²⁵ (Dialmy, 2010). Lesbian sexual activities are not culturally associated with penetration²⁶ and thus are not considered a danger to virginity, and thus to male domination. The erotic power status of ‘girls playing with girls’ does not threaten the

²³ Meaning a passive homosexual male.

²⁴ Meaning ‘my penis’.

²⁵ “Virginity is the means by which a man controls the female body and sexuality.”(Dialmy, 2010, p. 162).

²⁶ Lesbian sexual acts are usually associated with oral sex, rather than sexual penetrations.

normative social order and can even be considered to be ‘not well understood’ by male viewers, other than as a part of their own erotic fantasy of voyeurism.

“I think, I am on the way to become a lesbian. I spilled my coke on my friend’s boobs in order to see them. Her boobs were really nice. I touched them pretending to help her clean herself.”

(A female confessor)

“During my undergrad studies, I was sharing a room with three more girls at the university female residency. All four of us used to have sex together for hours. We were totally eating each other up. To this moment, I haven’t experienced anything of the kind with a man.”

(A female confessor)

These confessions clearly exemplify the discernment of female homosexual desires. The recognition, verbalization, and re-presentation of female homosexuality in online environments serve as an evidence of *reorganization* of sexual understandings. It represents a knowing female homosexual body emerging from the confession cyberspaces, a body of female homosexuality that is not recognized in physical reality (Eskin et al., 2005).

4.5.2 Pre-Marital Sex and Virginity

As illustrated in the previous sub-section, the Qur’an remains an ancient historical source of the social-cultural taboos that retain a stringent stronghold on the social behaviours and publically stated mores of Turkish Islamic culture. Just as the taboo of homosexuality can find its source in the Qur’an, the traditional requirement of pre-marital virginity can be also found in the following excerpt from the Qur’an:

“Sons and daughters of the true believers must be taught that their happiness throughout their lives depends on following God's law and preserving their chastity. This means that they must keep themselves for their spouses only, and never allow anyone else to touch them in a sexual manner.” (23:5-6, 24:30, 33:35, 70:29-30, as cited in Kotb, 2004)

Virginity is a subject of high social importance in Turkish society, especially when marriage comes into consideration. Pinar Ilkcaracan provides the following insight:

“The significance attached to virginity and honor in both rural and metropolitan Turkey is deeply entrenched; both constructs involve social, legal and political means for controlling all forms of female extra-marital sexuality. Unmarried women are generally expected to remain virgins until their wedding night, and virginity is not only the symbol of a woman's purity and chastity, but also an icon of her family's honor.” (2008b, pp. 48-49)

The social demand of maintaining a ‘status’ of virginity before marriage assures the cultivation of female sexuality through belonging to a single male partner (the proprietary husband). Dialmy argues that the importance of virginity in Islam as a social state of the female body and not a simple biological detail comes from the fact that it “prevents the woman from remaining sentimentally bound to a former husband or from taking the initiative when it comes to sex” (2010, p. 162).

Consider the following confessions:

“I am not a virgin.”

(A female confessor)

“[...] Knowing my libidinal desires, my ex-girlfriend calls me saying “ I am not a virgin, we can be together just for the sake of sex.” [...] What should I do??”

(A male confessor)

“My new girlfriend claims she has never kissed and made sex before. However, based on her expertise in oral sex, it didn’t take me long to understand she was lying. When I asked, she tied her expertise to common sense and porn movies. That’s ok, but during 69, I inserted my whole finger inside, and she didn’t mind it. How should I interpret this? Don’t (women who pretend to be) virgins try to impede such actions? I am happy with that situation, but why do you feel the need to lie?”

(A male confessor)

“I have been with my boyfriend for 2.5 months; and I am so crazy about him that I see myself having sex with him in my dreams almost every night. However, he does not proceed to something more than kissing...If he knew I was not a virgin, would he be regretting all this time of sexual abstinence?”

(A female confessor)

These confessions exemplify the reorganization of sexual understandings appearing through liberalization of the sexual self. Of importance here is (1) the non-conformity to social norms, and (2) the act of admitting (both by male and female confessors) and substantiating a state of ‘non-virginity’ verbally and in front of an audience. Such a verbal substantification of non-conformity to a state of extreme social significance (virginity) signifies the denial of social, sexual institutions incompatible with a liberated female sexual self.

4.5.3 Non-Coitional Practices of Sex

From the previous sections we have seen that Islam tends to support a reductionalist approach to the sexual expression limiting it to a ‘reproductive’ activity.

Again, I site the Qur'an as an embedded historical source of the social-cultural taboos that limit and define normative sexual behaviours within Turkish Islamic culture. Just as the taboo of homosexuality and extra-marital sexual activity can find its source in the Qur'an, the strength of repression of erotic morality to the tradition of wife-husband coupling is one of the precursors to limiting sexual practices as illustrated by the following excerpt from the Qur'an:

“Your wives are a tilth for you, so go to your tilth when or how you will. . .”
(2:223 as cited in Kotb, 2004)

Although in the contemporary imagination, this excerpt could be expanded to various sexual expressions, this excerpt is intended to explicitly legitimate the practice of coition (meaning penile-vaginal intercourse (C. Hill, 2008).

Although the prohibition of oral sex by religious sources leaves space for various interpretations, the early contributors to the documentation of the deeds of the Prophet Mohammed have not left scope for interpretations with regards to the practice of anal sex. According to the hadiths, the documentation of the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed considered an ultimate source of Islam (Armagan, 2003), there are several entries concerned with this act:

“He is cursed, the one who has intercourse with his wife in her anus.”(Reported by Abu Dawud and Imam Ahmad, as cited in Kotb, 2004).

“Avoid the anus and the time of menstruation.” (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Dawud, as cited in Kotb, 2004).

These sources and their interpretation described in Kotb (2004) underlie and are representative of the general, distinctive, and negative social attitude toward the practice of anal sex in Muslim societies.

The religious prohibition of anal sex in general (also referred to as sodomy) illustrates that socio-sexual reality in physical environments in the territory of the Republic of Turkey forms a socially restricted and repressed sexual self. In contrast to this repressive social attitude, online confessions reveal more liberated views with regard to this sexual practice.

“It appears that all my prejudice has been in vein; I regret all the years that I have lived without anal sex...there is nothing to please a woman more than that, but you must have a trustable partner :) that’s from me...”

(A female confessor)

The value of this confession is not the verbalization of the act of anal sex, but the presence of feedback about this sexual activity. The feedback serves to communicate the confessor’s performance and to initiate interest in the female contribution within the online community. The successful attributes of the message depend upon the intensity and the rhetorical construction of the feedback: “there is nothing to please a woman more than that, but you have to have a trustable partner”. The generalization of the level of pleasure obtained from an otherwise ‘sinful’ activity, and the transition of the subject of the sentence from the neutral use of the phrase “there is” to the intended audience for this message, “you”, serve to provoke social involvement and reflection in the issue. It should be emphasized that the successful transmission of this message is encoded and decoded through the online digital medium, as this type of sexual expression would be nearly impossible in most physical social environments within Islamic Turkey.

“I used to have a regular sexual life with my wife. She started visiting [this cyberspace] and totally changed. She has always been ok with oral, but never agreed for anal. Now, all she wants is anal sex. We used to have sex two times a week, now it became five. I can’t keep up with her tempo [...]”

(A male confessor)

The recognition and acknowledgement of anal sex as a *sexual practice* is synonymous with a transgressive shift in social perception of the significance of sexual liberation. In the example above, the ease of verbalizing a sexual practice as socially condemned within Islamic culture as anal sex begins to normalize the countering normative ‘sinful deviation.’ Such an expression trespasses Islamic sexual regulations and reverses them to what might be considered an advertising image of an emerging sexual subculture.

4.5.4 Female Polyamory

The Islamic prohibition of female polyamory (colloquially referred to as female promiscuity) is distinguished from male polyamory (polygamy or promiscuity) and can be considered a modified version of the subject of virginity with all its accompanying reasons. As Islamic women are subjugated within sexual relationships, are legally bound to have only one spouse, and as a result of marriage contracts, sex outside the boundaries of a marriage is prohibited. As a result of these limits on female expression of sexuality, female polyamory in an Islamic cultural setting is culturally and religiously prohibited. The following excerpt from the Qur’an illustrates the status of female polyamory as a ‘sinful’ form of sexual practice:

“O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dowry you have given them – **except when they have become guilty of open lewdness [...]**”(4:19 as cited in Kotb, 2004)

This excerpt from the Qur'an clearly deprives women of rights when they 'become guilty of open lewdness', which implies that female lewdness is an activity that should be punished. This conclusion is enforced by Prophet Muhammad's following saying promoting female monogamy:

“Shall I not inform you about the best treasure a man can hoard? It is a virtuous wife who pleases him whenever he looks towards her, and who guards herself when he is absent from her.” (as cited in Kotb, 2004)

Although in the context of Turkey, female polyamory and promiscuity are not illegal, there is a socio-structural habit of treating polyamoric (or promiscuous) female individuals with disrespect, usually referring to them as 'easy / light women'²⁷.

Contrary to the social context within which the prohibition of female polyamory is situated, consider the following confession:

“My dearest sweetheart [boyfriend], last weekend I cheated on you. With somebody younger, better looking, more refined and most importantly – not suffering from premature ejaculation [...]”

(A female confessor)

The expression of a need to practice polyamory becomes overt in this semi-conversational confession (notice the reference to her boyfriend at the beginning) as it

²⁷ In Turkish 'hafif kadın'

reveals more than just a sexual moment, the most important implication being the disregard of the social importance of virginity, fidelity, and male sexual domination. At a deeper level, it involves a sarcastic reference to the explicitly emphasized impotence of ‘the boyfriend’, a desire for disobedience and refusal to comply with the sexual authority of one male partner. In this case, the online environment has provided an opportunity for the confessor to engage in the activity of ‘venting’ in a form of para-conversation, while the counteractants (both the boyfriend and the regulatory norms prevailing in physical reality) are simultaneously addressed and denied a channel of communication.

“Yes, I did it at the end. It wasn’t totally my fantasy, but I did it for the sake of being with him (threesome: 2 males, 1 female). We got acquainted through one of the confessions, began chatting, and I started to want him incredibly. But I also have a boyfriend and didn’t want to cheat on him. I decided to tell him [the boyfriend] that I desired the other one. He got mad at the beginning, but afterward he told me that he would agree if it is group sex. I don’t like group, but I wanted the other guy so badly that we broke all taboos and did a threesome. Result? It was great ;) To my two boys from last night – thank you, you were great!”

(A female confessor)

Sexual confessions that clearly exemplify, address, and embody female polyamory serve as a demythologization of Islamic conceptions of the female promiscuity and of the female body as a shameful entity that needs to be protected by a single male’s possession, an enforced possession of “her body by law, rather than by emotional bond” (Haddad, as cited in Stephan, 2006, p. 164). Textual articulation of female promiscuity becomes to a great extent a political expression of reorganization of social order of sexuality. Such an articulation demonstrates the ways in which female individuals re-appropriate the online medium to communicate liberated expression of an independent sexual self.

4.6 Socially Mediated Meta-Cognition

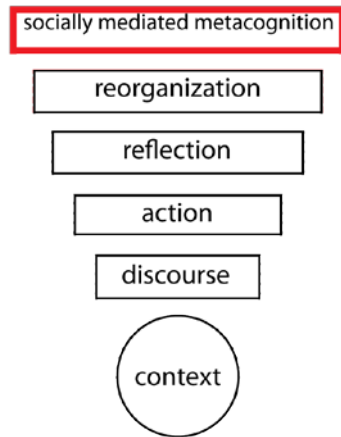


Figure 16 - Progression of content and argument within the theoretical model (based on Gunawardena et al, 2009).

This final phase of the model regarding the process of developing knowledge and understanding through communication in online environments engages with “the reciprocal process of exploring each other’s reasoning and viewpoints in order to construct a shared understanding” (Gunawardena et al., 2009, p. 14). In this final phase, I explore the influence of online sexual discourse on private practices of sex as a form of tacit reflection on socially shared communal reasoning. I consider the interaction between online sexual discourse, physical actualization of sexual fantasies, and the reporting of actualized sex scenarios back online to be structuring a liberated form of socially mediated sexual meta-cognition.

4.6.1 Liminal Sexuality: In-Between the ‘Real’ and the ‘Virtual’

The construction of a *liminal* layer of socially shared sexual reality is closely related to the conflict between (1) individual sexual drives and social norms, on one side,

and (2) the impossibility of a rapid change in social physical reality. If we consider the *liminal* socio-sexual reality to be ‘matter’ in the broadest sense of the word, then we can consider Derrida’s conception of matter as being applicable to the concept of liminality. Derrida describes the concept of new forms of ‘matter’ being extracted from the tension that exists in linguistic contradiction. Because my concept of *liminal* sexuality emerges from the tension between individual sexual drives that require expression and the normative socio-cultural taboos and dogmas that slow that expression, Derrida’s conception of matter can support our understanding of Liminal Sexuality in Turkish sexual confession sites. Derrida states:

“the reflection of contradiction, is indeed the fundamental motif [...] [that] exceeds metaphysical discourse[...] in the extent to which what has been called “spirit” or “consciousness” is conceived [...] as one of the forms of matter [...] which itself is fundamentally determined as [...] being an objective reality.” (Derrida, 2004, p. 62)

The resolution of the contradiction between the individual and the social regarding sexual interests has passed beyond the metaphysical discourse of religiously imposed stigmas, so as to reach the limits of an ‘objective reality’ in online environments. Since social organizations exist both in objective and subjective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), an engaged and pragmatic formulation of sexuality within a social institution should engage with both its objective and subjective construction. What I argue is that the interplay between subjective and objective sexual realities, respectively the exchange of sexual values between physical environment and the virtual realm, has formed a liminal layer of sexual reality. I call this layer “liminal” (V. Turner, 1977) because of its lack of a distinctive belonging to either physical reality or online environments. In other words, this liminal layer of liberated sexual understandings is

neither ‘real’ nor ‘virtual’; it is a marginal entity between the social organizations of physical and virtual reality, and as such it serves as a kind of channel, a metaphoric connective tissue that allows both to exist, and supports the functioning and emergence of knowledge and experience between both sides of the communication. This emergence of knowledge and experience is the upper layer of Gunawardena’s model. The emergence of socially mediated meta-cognition in the form of a liminal expression of sexuality illustrates this space for personal and social knowledge construction.

Berger and Luckmann argue that social structures in the context of objective and subjective reality are “understood in terms of an ongoing dialectical process composed of the three moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization.” (1967, p. 119) Based on this understanding, socially mediated meta-cognition as reflected in a liminal layer of sexual reality is formed by the dynamics emerging between (1) the detachment of sexuality as a socio-cultural product from the physical body (externalization) (2) to be textually and socially inscribed into a medium of ‘objective reality’ (objectivation), and then (3) get embodied back in physical reality in the form of divergent private practices of sex (internalization). In the following sub-section I illustrate how this liminal sexual expression emerges as interplay between the real and the virtual.

4.6.2 Evidence of Interplay between the ‘Real’ and the ‘Virtual’

The process of identification with sexual values embedded in a layer of liminal socially shared sexual reality is illustrated in many sexual narratives. These sexual narratives report the physical actualization of ‘taboo’ practices under the influence of sexual discourse in online environments. In other words, online sexual discourse along with the network formed by the flow and exchange of sex-related information become a

structural necessity for the practices of forbidden sexual acts in physical reality. Let me exemplify this situation with the following confessions:

“Under the influence of this site, my interest in trying anal sex is increasing[...]”

(A female confessor)

This sexual narrative illustrates the concept of *influence* of the virtual site, and indicates the effect on the virtual community on the *interest* of the community member. Influence is the movement of ideas and actions from one space (the virtual) through the liminal to the space of the physical world. Interest is the liminal attitude that enables new knowledge, activity and experience to emerge in both the real and virtual spaces.

“As a result of our [meaning between the members of the site] continuous seduction here on this site, I gathered courage to ask my partner for group sex.”

(A male confessor)

Again the concept of gathering courage is an expression of a liminal affective attitude that bridges experience and future activity for this member of community. This confession depicts the connection between ‘virtual’ *seduction* and ‘real life’ sexual implications. The existence of this connection is shaped and reshaped by the effects of online sexual discourse on community members. The boundary crossing between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ exemplifies the transgressive nature of what is possible in the ‘life’ of physical reality.

*“My wife used to be quite conservative and not keen on sex **until the moment she became a member of [this cyberspace]**. I think we are going to have lots of fun in the near future.”*

(A male confessor)

The pervasive influence of the Internet and public sexual discourse as a *desire* shaping dynamic is extensively formulated in this narrative. It implicitly addresses online environments as a means to disseminate models of liberated sexual cultures. These liberated models of sexual cultures induce something that can be called an emergent ‘sexual agency’. Agency is “a tool for gaining control over one’s behavior” (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, & Cain, 2001, p. 38) and is reserved for personal and informed actions (Feenberg, 1999). This leads to the specific construction of *sexual agency* in the context of *liminal* sexuality as a capacity to act in an informed manner in order to gain control over one’s sexual engagement. As the frame of ‘informed manner and control’ is highly influenced by the social sexual discourse in online environments, and as such is a product of social cognition, I treat the sexual agency as reported in sexual confessions to exemplify liminal sexuality as a form of socially mediated meta-cognition.

The sexual narratives presented and discussed in this sub-section reflect on sexual agency as (1) actualized sexual scenarios in private physical reality as a (2) result of online sexual discourse. Consider the following example:

*“Our ‘office’ affair with a female co-worker started with some oral. Now, as a natural progression, and **as a result of her discovering [this cyberspace]** (I introduced it to her), she wants to proceed with anal sex. Yesterday during the lunch break, after everybody left the office, I whispered some sweet stuff in her ear, got her to sit in my lap, and made her experience her first anal sex. I didn’t want to hurt her, and in order to reduce the pain I played around for 45 minutes. Now, I feel as if I have*

spent the whole day at the gym lifting weights, my right arm especially hurting and immobile [...]”

(A male confessor)

The content of these sexual narratives emphasizes the blurring, mingling, and interaction appearing between sexual vectors in physical reality and virtual environments. They illustrate how the performativity of sex in online social discourse enhances the transgression, liberation, and normalization of private sexual practices in physical reality. This type of sexual narratives assists the tracing of the symptomatic relationship between externalization, objectivation, and internalization of sexual desire. Tracing the ricochet of sexual scenarios between physical and para-social online ‘reality’ allows for the understanding of sexuality as (1) a liminal entity, situated in-between the real and the virtual, and (2) a result of socially mediated meta-cognition developed through discourse on sex.

4.7 Summary

“Most people interpret sexual intercourse as a bodily activity, yet we recognize that the sexual interplay between bodies has neither a fixed nor a necessarily normative state. Sexuality can assume a stunning range of expression between individuals. In fact, sexuality is such a complex and multifaceted dimension of human experience because sexual expression is rooted in the interplay between the selves that we are, selves in relation to our physical bodies, and ourselves situated in a sociocultural context. These three aspects of self together form the core of any sexual encounter and converge to form explicit body-to-self-to-society relationships when considering human sexual activity. Yet each of the components of this body-self-society relationship is fundamentally distinct; we interpret and respond differently to each.” (D. Waskul, 2004, p. 14)

Within the multi-fold relationship between body, self, and society, this case study chapter explored the developmental process of liminal sexual understandings based on the analysis of (1) the interplay between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ realities in the process of constructing new sexual frames, and (2) the social dimensions of online sexual discourse as ideology, and as a cultural opposition to predominant Islamic sexual understandings. It analysed the sexual metamorphoses as an indicative of transgression and liberation of the personal and social body of sexuality.

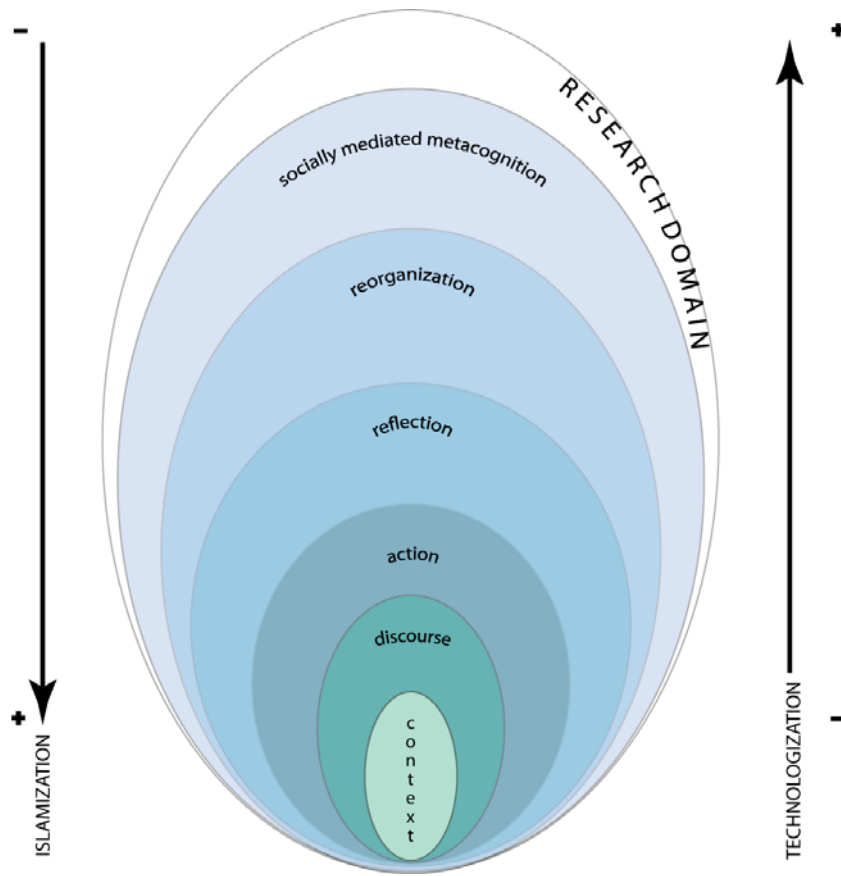


Figure 17 – An illustration of the structural interconnection between theoretical model and the scope of the research domain.

The case study was based on Gunawardena et al.'s theoretical framework for learning in online environments (2009), and incorporated the phases proposed within this model. The relationship between the phases of online learning and the research domain of this study is summarized and visualized once again in Figure 17²⁸. Figure 17 illustrates the interconnection between the theoretical model and the scope of this research as a holistic structure. Following this theoretical structure, I argued that the purely physical sexual body is an abstraction from and an extension of the socially constructed sexual body. In this relation, the meaning of sexual acts in sexual discourse is both an externalization of the physical body and transgressive contextualization of the social sexual body. I argued that online discourses on sexuality has trespassed the status of being purely conceptual. Talk about sex articulates the homogenizing and mingling of socially sexualized body and private sexual acts. In the case of Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces, this homogenizing process is resulting in a change of linguistic expression, which on its turn, causes a shift in sexual actions of individuals. These dynamics form a circular interplay where sex constructs discourse and discourse constructs sex. The tracing of the interplay between sex and discourse evidences the transgression taking place in the social organization of the sexualized body. In these complex sexuality forming dynamics and interactions, online sexual narratives are in the vanguard of transition. The production of sexual discourse is to be understood as an articulation of a real social phenomenon, and not as something that is simply 'done' in the usual sense of the verb 'to do.'

²⁸ This model was first presented in Chapter 1.

The status of online discourses on sex is complex. The sexual narratives-confessions cannot be treated as a merely subjective or cultural entity since they influence the pure physical, direct experiences of sex by re-encoding 'seks' beyond Islamic norms. From this perspective, the linguistic referent of sex as 'seks' has a different body, different boundaries, and the physical bodies play a different role. This phenomenon of transpiring differences signifies the emergence of a new sexual body that is situated between and betwixt physical reality and virtual environments. I call this emergent body of liberated sexuality 'liminal sexuality' as it emerges as a transformative channel between physical and virtual reality, but does not belong distinctly to either side. Its emergence is created by the tension evolving from the difference in need, desire and power differentials, and enables a transformation of knowledge and experience. This chapter engaged specifically with the deconstruction of liminal sexuality as the force re-coding the "body-to-self-to-society" (D. Waskul, 2004, p. 14) relationship in favour of sexual liberation.

5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

“What is, in the end, the difference that the internet makes for cultural diversity?” (Siapera, 2010, p. 196). At the end of my research journey, I found this question very relevant to what has occupied my interest for the last three years, and what I may vigorously define as ‘my research.’ How has the internet diversified sexual understandings in a society that has passionately enforced and promoted sexual stigmas? The answer to that question is simultaneously simple and complex. First, the dimensions of change and shift in sexual understandings are clearly reflected in the explicit sexual narratives shared in online cyberspaces. The sexual narratives reveal an influx and invasive turbulence of transformed, translated, literalized, presented, and represented sexual selves. Secondly, however, textual expression of sexual behaviours, along with the erotic power of socially shared desires in online environments reveal the depth of sexual discourse as an identity shaping dynamic. These dimensions of shifting sexual selves in an online environment are difficult to capture, because of the liquidity of the concept of identity and the even more slippery terrain of the notion of technological liberalization.

The tensions between private libidinal desires, social organization of sexuality, and the Internet culture are complex. In the foregoing chapters, I tried to reflect on these dynamics, and more importantly, to illuminate the results of these dynamics. Within the conceptual framework of sexuality, I wanted to illustrate that “no human thought [...] is

immune to the ideologizing influences of its social context” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 9).

5.2 Conclusions

The arrival at a conclusion is never an easy task, especially in qualitative and interpretive studies. The conclusions illustrated in this thesis are a product of a three-year-process of stating, re-stating, and reformulating the research questions, as well as a total re-formatting of my personal understandings and worldviews. For many years, I saw the world in terms of complete polarization and binominal oppositions. What I have learned from this study and its process is that social phenomena cannot be described in simple black and white. I learned that the appearance of one form of reality does not necessarily result in the disappearance of other ‘realities.’ I came to realize that sexuality is not a static entity, but a multiplicity of performances that vary between different contexts and media.

Following these lessons, this thesis explored and analyzed some systematic practices of the performance of sexuality in different social settings. Specifically, it compared the conceptual differences between (1) private, libidinal desires, (2) the socially sexualized body, and (3) representation of sexual behaviour in the online, digital realm. The main argument was based on the presumption that the constant interaction between physical reality and online settings results in a transformation and liberation of sexual values. This shift in sexual values, consequently, affects the performance of sexuality both online and in physical reality. The interaction between the ‘real’ of the physical world and the ‘virtual’ of online environments shapes a socially-sexualized body that does not conform to the Islamic regulatory norms. This emergent socially-sexualized

body is to a great extent manufactured by the detachment of sexuality from the social sexual body in physical reality to be inscribed both (1) in the safe, alternative terrain of online media as a form of textual production, and (2) in liberalized actual practices of sex. This phenomenon was systematically conceptualized as a 'layer of liminal sexuality' that is situated 'between and betwixt' (V. Turner, 1977) the 'real' and the 'virtual'.

First, I explored the social dynamics that shape sexual identities. I suggested that sexuality is a product of social influences and cultural institutions. This view was supported by a review of selected works engaging with the social construction of sexuality. Within this broader framework, I explored sexuality as a product of (1) Islamic socio-cultural and religious institutions; and (2) as a technological and communicative rationalization.

Second, using a methodological framework that incorporates a case study of sexual online confession cyberspaces in Turkey to which I applied Critical Discourse Analysis, I explored the specific development of the liminal layer of sexuality. This layer was considered to a result of the continuous interaction between (1) the dissonance of traditional Islamic social structures and private sexual drives in physical reality, and (2) public discourse on sex in online environments. My analysis and conclusions were based on sexual narratives shared online and freely available in the public domain, and were specifically intended for the context of the Republic of Turkey.

5.3 Contributions of the Study

This study provides a reassessment of sexuality in an Islamic cultural context and within the domain of online communication technologies. The analysis expands the scope

of the emerging field of digital humanities, along with the tradition of cultural and social studies. The transposing of ideas and concepts from the disciplinary fields of social studies, Islam, and communication media is unique and fruitful for further investigations. This study aims to continue a strategy of innovative interdisciplinary conversation by contributing to currently existing theories via an emphasis on the nexus between socio-religious patronage of protectionism and liberal rationalization of technology. A movement out of the center of established academic disciplines to the peripheries of overlapping vectors of cultural practices not only broadens the parameters of social and sociological discussions, but also enables a reassessment of the terrain of humanities and communication through the introduction of divergent perspectives.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This thesis is based on a case study and an interpretive approach aiming at the deconstruction of liminal sexual realities as reflected in sexual narratives posted on Turkish sexual confessions cyberspaces. As Yin suggests, case studies have been often characterized as “sloppy”, or “biased” (2002, p. 10). In broad terms, the prejudice against case studies and qualitative interpretive methods of analysis comes from the fact that these are often used as a generic umbrella to refer to under-defined, unsystematic, loose approaches to data analysis. In order to counter these prejudices, I established a close connection between selected texts, literature sources, and conclusions, with the clear idea to overcome the necessary subjectivity imposed by critical textual analysis and interpretive formulations of social phenomena.

Based on these concerns, it can be suggested that the reported findings in the domain of liminal sexualities and virtual environments within an Islamic socio-cultural

and religious context require further investigations based on research methods and approaches that directly involve human subjects.

5.5 Future work

Despite all the difficulties I have experienced while writing this thesis, this study has opened new horizons for me. The academic research deemed necessary for this thesis offered perspectives on sexuality from an Islamic, sociological, and technological point of views. These perspectives initiated one conversation related to the formation of liminal sexuality mediated by a single technological medium.

Future work on the project of ‘mediated sexualities’ contains two frames of interest – conceptual and methodological.

5.5.1 Conceptual dimensions of future work

First, I would like to expand the fields of comparison of sexuality from ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ to representation and projection of sexual norms in various media. These include mass print media, and more importantly Turkish cinema. Turkish cinema is a very fruitful terrain of investigation because of Turkey’s top place of film production in the Middle East, along with the fact that Turkish cinema is faithful to social traditions and dominant social perceptions (Arslan, 2011).

As a starting point and a basic example of the conceptual dimensions of my future research, I provide a table synthesizing and summarizing the primary perspectives and initial data entries of conceptualization of Turkish sexuality in different domains. I structure my research interest around the prevalent sexual taboos in the territory of the Republic of Turkey.

CATEGORY	HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEGAL REPORTS REFLECTING ON PHYSICAL REALITY	PHYSICAL REALITY	CINEMA	MAINSTREAM INFORMATION MEDIA (MAJOR TURKISH DAILY NEWSPAPERS)
HOMOSEXUALITY	Intolerance and impunity ²⁹ .	Data to be collected by interviews.	No data available to the moment.	“For the last 10 years, more than 200 cases of homicide against transvestites and transgendered were reported in the media.” ³⁰
VIRGINITY	Conception of women as property remains unchanged ³¹ . / Re-institution of virginity exams for girls studying in medical high	Data to be collected by interviews.	Negative examples of women involved in non-marital relations / Positive image of women avoiding non-marital relationships:	“My daughter is not going to sleep with anybody before getting married!” ³³

²⁹ Report by Human Rights Watch: “We Need a Law for Liberation: Gender, Sexuality, and Human rights in a Changing Turkey”, May, 2008. PDF file obtained from <hrw.org>.

³⁰ Citation obtained from the online edition of Turkish daily newspaper *Sabah Gazetesi* from July 10th, 2011. Translated from Turkish by the author. URL to the article: <<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Yasam/2011/06/10/nefrete-karsi-hayat-icin-miting-cagrisi>> (in Turkish)

³¹ Report by Human Rights Watch: “We Need a Law for Liberation: Gender, Sexuality, and Human rights in a Changing Turkey”, May, 2008. PDF file obtained from <hrw.org>.

	schools in Turkey ³² . Court decisions on honour crimes.		<i>Melekler Adasi</i> (The Island of Angels), <i>Binbir Gece</i> (1001 Nights), <i>AŞIK OLDUM</i> (I Fell in Love), <i>YANGIN</i> (Fire)	
NON-COITIONAL SEXUAL PRACTICES	No data available to the moment	Data to be collected by interviews.	Turkish porn productions	No data found
FEMALE POLYAMORY	See footnote (32)	Data to be collected by interviews.	Examples of negative image of polyamoric women in <i>Melekler Adasi</i> (The Island of Angels), <i>Binbir Gece</i> (1001 Nights)	Reports of honour killings because of “supposition of infidelity.” ³⁴ Publications of court decisions tolerating honour crimes. ³⁵

Table 4: Discursive embodiment of sexual values in different domains – a brief comparison outlining future work.

³³ An article title from the Turkish daily newspaper *Hurriyet Gazetesi*. For the online version of the article, refer to <<http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/ShowNew.aspx?id=12410517>> (in Turkish).

³² Obtained from Human Rights Watch. URL: <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2001/07/18/turkey-virginity-tests-reinstated>>.

³⁴ For an example, refer to the online edition of the Turkish daily *Sabah Gazetesi*; URL to an article reflecting on a specific instance of an honour killing: <<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Yasam/2011/06/07/aile-meclisi-karariyla-zincirleme-tore-infazi>> (in Turkish).

³⁵ Refer to the article <<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/06/16/yargitay-namus-cinayeti-bireyseldir-toreyle-ilmisi-yoktur>> (in Turkish).

The initial data set, as outlined in the Table 4, serves the purpose of illustrating current tendencies in discursive embodiment of Turkish sexuality. The specific samples provided are not single examples in isolation, but representatives of environmental dynamics that structure, form, and epitomize sexuality. The materials screened during this primary data collection process are in resonance with the conclusions drawn in this thesis.

5.5.2 Methodological dimensions of future work

The second frame of future work on the project includes a diversification of the research methods and data collection sources. I would like to develop a methodological model that allows for a more precise capturing, conceptualization, and measurement of what can be called ‘liquid’ variables³⁶. I would also like to include data input from individuals sharing a Turkish national identity. Such an expansion of the methodological framework will provide a more accurate reading of the current state of collective sexuality in the Republic of Turkey.

5.6 Summary

The study of formation of collective liminal sexual understandings deals with a shift in the social organization of sexuality caused by the practices of anonymous engagement in sexual discourse in online environments. These systematic discursive practices on sex are reality-forming dynamics that liberate the sexual subjects from

³⁶ By ‘liquid’ variables, I refer to factors, conditions, and phenomena of research importance that are elusive in their nature to be conceptualized, classified or measured, either because of their multiple states / forms of existence or their semantic ambiguousness.

existing stigmas, taboos, and social judgements and thus construct new layers of sexual awareness.

In this thesis, I examined and compared the sexual dynamics appearing between physical reality regulated by the culture of Islam, sexual discourse in online environments, and private practices of sex. Rather than treating sexuality as a product of cultural tensions taking place in a highly religiously charged physical reality, my analysis examined the construction of new layers of socially mediated sexual understandings. I considered these to be situated between and betwixt physical reality and the virtual realm. The emphasis of this thesis was on online discourse on sex that breaks apart from the burden of dominant social stigmas to structure a different social and sexual body of meta-cognition.

My conclusions were primarily based on discursive analysis of sexual narratives shared on Turkish sexual confession cyberspaces. I used these as a vehicle to explore the depths of sexual consciousness, which otherwise remains covered and unarticulated in an Islamic physical reality.

6: References

- Abercrombie, N., Hill, S., & Turner, B. (1984). *The Penguin dictionary of sociology*. London: A. Lane.
- Acar, K. (2004). Globalization and language: English in Turkey. *Sosyal Bilimler*, 2(1).
- Allan, K. (2011). *Contemporary social and sociological theory: Visualizing social worlds* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Armagan, S. (2003). *Islam hukuku (ders notlari)*. Istanbul: Filiz Kitabevi.
- Arslan, S. (2011). *Cinema in Turkey: A new critical history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Auer, P. (1998). *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Bakardjieva, M., & Feenberg, A. (2002). Community technology and democratic rationalization. *The Information Society*, 18(3), 181-192.
doi:10.1080/01972240290074940
- Barthes, R. (2002). The death of the author. In G. Stygall (Ed.), *Academic discourse: readings for argument and analysis* (3rd ed., pp. 101-106). Mason Ohio: Thomson Custom Pub.
- Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993). *Symbolic exchange and death*. London;Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society: Myths & structures*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bauman, Z. (2001). *Community: Seeking safety in an insecure world*. Cambridge;Malden MA: Polity; Blackwell.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (Anchor books ed.). Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Bilgili, N., & Vural, G. (2011). Kadına yönelik şiddetin en ağır biçimi: Namus cinayetleri. *Journal of Anatolia Nursing and Health Sciences*, 14(1), 66-72.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Brenner, C. (1985). Countertransference as compromise formation. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* LIV(2), 155-163.
- Brownlow, C., & O'Dell, L. (2002). Ethical issues for qualitative research in on-line communities. *Disability & Society*, 17(6), 685-694.
doi:10.1080/0968759022000010452
- Büyükkantarcioğlu, N. (2004). A sociolinguistic analysis of the present dimensions of English as a foreign language in Turkey. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2004(165), 33-58. doi:10.1515/ijsl.2004.006
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex."* New York: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, D., & Stanley, J. (1966). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Carter, S. (1998). *Civility: Manners, morals, and the etiquette of democracy*. New York NY: Basic Books.
- Chen, S.-L., Hall, J., & Johns, M. (2004). research paparazzi in cyberspace: the voices of the researched. In M. Johns, S.-L. Chen, & J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: Methods, issues & ethics* (pp. 157-175). New York: P. Lang.
- Chesney, T., & Su, D. K. S. (2010). The impact of anonymity on weblog credibility. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 68(10), 710-718.
doi:10.1016/j.ijhcs.2010.06.001
- Chodorow, N. (1994). *Femininities, masculinities, sexualities: Freud and beyond*. Lexington Ky.: University Press of Kentucky.
- Christians, C., & Chen, S.-L. (2004). Introduction: Technological environments and the evolution of social research. In M. Johns, S.-L. Chen, & J. Hall (Eds.), *Online social research: methods, issues & ethics* (pp. 15-23). New York: P. Lang.
- Combs-Schilling, M. (1989). *Sacred performances: Islam, sexuality, and sacrifice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cooper, A., Scherer, C. R., Boies, S. C., & Gordon, B. L. (1999). Sexuality on the Internet: from sexual exploration to pathological expression. *Professional*

- Psychology: Research and Practice*, 30(2), 154-164. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.30.2.154
- Derrida, J. (1998). *Of grammatology* (Corrected ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (2004). *Positions* ([Rev. ed.]). London; New York: Continuum.
- Dialmy, A. (2010). Sexuality and Islam. *The European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care*, 15(3), 160-168. doi:10.3109/13625181003793339
- Dijk, T. A. van. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352 - 371). Malden Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.
- Duff, B. (2010). Confession, sexuality and pornography as sacred language. *Sexualities*, 13(6), 685-698. doi:10.1177/1363460710384557
- Durkin, K., & Bryant, C. (1995). "Log on to sex": Some notes on the carnal computer and erotic cyberspace as an emerging research frontier. *Deviant Behavior*, 16(3). Retrieved from <http://www.informaworld.com/10.1080/01639625.1995.9967998>
- Epstein, S. (1991). Sexuality and identity: The contribution of object relations theory to a constructionist sociology. *Theory and Society*, 20(6), 825-873. doi:10.1007/BF00678098
- Eskin, M., Kaynak-Demir, H., & Demir, S. (2005). Same-sex sexual orientation, childhood sexual abuse, and suicidal behavior in university students in Turkey. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34(2), 185-195. doi:10.1007/s10508-005-1796-8

- Essizoglu, A., Yasan, A., & Yildirim, E. (2009). Erkek üniversite öğrencilerinde evlilik öncesi cinsel deneyimler ve deneyimlerin tutucu cinsel inançlarla olan ilişkisi. *New/Yeni Symposium Journal*, 47(2), 80-90.
- Etzioni, A. (1964). *Modern organizations*. Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Etzioni, A. (2004). On virtual, democratic communities. In A. Feenberg & D. Barey (Eds.), *Community in the digital age: Philosophy and practice* (pp. 225-238). Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge UK; Cambridge MA: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). Harlow Eng.;New York: Longman.
- Feenberg, A. (1999). *Questioning technology*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Feenberg, A. (2011, 15).
- Feenberg, A., & Bakardjieva, M. (2004). Consumers or citizens? The online community debate. In A. Feenberg & D. Barey (Eds.), *Community in the digital age: Philosophy and practice* (pp. 1-28). Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Filali-Ansary, A. (2003). The sources of enlightened muslim thought. *Journal of Democracy*, 14(2), 19-33. doi:10.1353/jod.2003.0031
- Foster, P. (1998). A classroom perspective on the negotiation of meaning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 1-23. doi:10.1093/applin/19.1.1
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality* (1st ed.). New York: Pantheon Books.

- Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777-795.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality, volume I: an introduction* (Vintage Books ed. --.). New York: Random House.
- Freitas, E. de. (2008). Interrogating reflexivity: Art, research, and the desire for presence. In J. Knowles & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 469-483). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Freud, S. (1965). *The interpretation of dreams* ([8th ed., rev.]). New York: Avon.
- Freud, S. (1989). *Civilization and its discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books,.
- Goñale, N. (1996). *The forbidden modern: Civilization and veiling*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gordo-López, A., & Cleminson, R. (2004). *Techno-sexual landscapes: Changing relations between technology and sexuality*. [London]: Free Association Books.
- Gunawardena, C., Hermans, M. B., Sanchez, D., Richmond, C., Bohley, M., & Tuttle, R. (2009). A theoretical framework for building online communities of practice with social networking tools. *Educational Media International*, 46(1), 3-16.
doi:10.1080/09523980802588626
- Hall, S., & Open University. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage in association with the Open University.

- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2010). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed.). London; New York: Routledge.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). *The question concerning technology, and other essays* (1st ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- Hill, C. (2008). *Human sexuality: Personality and social psychological perspectives*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Hodge, B., & Kress, G. (1993). *Language as ideology* (2nd ed.). London; New York: Routledge.
- Holland, D., Skinner, D., Lachicotte, W., & Cain, C. (2001). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hookway, N. (2008). 'Entering the blogosphere': Some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1), 91-113. doi:10.1177/1468794107085298
- Ilkcaracan, P. (2001). Islam and women's sexuality. In P. Jung, M. Hunt, & R. Balakrishnan (Eds.), *Good sex: Feminist perspectives from the world's religions* (pp. 61-76). New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Ilkcaracan, P. (2008a). *Deconstructing sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and discourses*. Aldershot England; Burlington VT: Ashgate.
- Ilkcaracan, P. (2008b). How adultery almost derailed turkey's aspirations to join the european union. *Deconstructing sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and discourses* (pp. 41-65). Aldershot England; Burlington VT: Ashgate.

- Imam, A. (2001). The Muslim religious right (“fundamentalists”) and sexuality. In P. Jung, M. Hunt, & R. Balakrishnan (Eds.), *Good sex: Feminist perspectives from the world’s religions* (pp. 15-30). New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Iqbal, M. (2002). *Islam and science*. Burlington VT: Ashgate.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2005). The socio-cultural context of adolescents’ notions of sex and sexuality in rural south-eastern Nigeria. *Sexualities*, 8(5), 600-617.
doi:10.1177/1363460705058396
- Jacobs, K. (2003). Queer voyeurism and the pussy-matrix in shu lea cheang’s japanese pornography. In C. Berry, F. Martin, & A. Yue (Eds.), *Mobile cultures: New media in queer Asia* (pp. 201-221). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jenks, C. (2003). *Transgression*. London: Routledge.
- Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Malden MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Khalaf, S. (2006). *Sexuality in the Arab world*. London: Saqi.
- King, S. (1996). Researching internet communities: Proposed ethical guidelines for the reporting of results. *The Information Society*, 12(2), 119-128.
doi:10.1080/713856145
- Klesse, C. (2005). Bisexual women, non-monogamy and differentialist anti-promiscuity discourses. *Sexualities*, 8(4), 445-464. doi:10.1177/1363460705056620
- Klesse, C. (2006). Polyamory and its “others”: Contesting the terms of non-monogamy. *Sexualities*, 9(5), 565-583. doi:10.1177/1363460706069986

- Kotb, H. (2004). *Sexuality in Islam* (Dissertation). Maimonides University, North Miami Beach, Florida.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford OX: Oxford University Press.
- Kucukcan, T. (2003). State, islam, and religious liberty in modern Turkey: Reconfiguration of Religion in the Public Sphere. *BYU L.Rev*, 475-506.
- Laumann, E., Gagnon, J., Michael, R., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1987). *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lewis, B. (1994). Why Turkey is the only Muslim democracy. *Middle East Quarterly*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.meforum.org/216/why-turkey-is-the-only-muslim-democracy>
- Lewis, G. (2002). *The Turkish language reform: A catastrophic success*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mann, C., & Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet communication and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online* (Repr.). London: Sage.
- Manovich, L. (2002). *The language of new media* (1st ed.). Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.
- Mattelart, A., & Mattelart, M. (1998). *Theories of communication: A short introduction*. London;Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.

- Maxwell, J. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Murray, J. (1997). *Hamlet on the holodeck: the future of narrative in cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nabi, R. (2009). *The SAGE handbook of media processes and effects*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Newman, B. (1997). The use of online services to encourage exploration of ego-dystonic sexual interests. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 22, 45-48.
- O'Brien, J. (1999). Writing in the body: Gender (re)production in online interaction. In M. Smith & P. Kollock (Eds), *Communities in Cyberspace* (pp. 75 - 106). Routledge.
- O'Dea, T. (1983). *The sociology of religion* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- O'Riordan, K., & Phillips, D. (2007). *Queer online: Media technology & sexuality*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Ogan, C. L., & Cagiltay, K. (2006). Confession, revelation and storytelling: Patterns of use on a popular Turkish website. *New Media & Society*, 8(5), 801-823.
doi:10.1177/1461444806067589

- Öney, B., & Durgunoğlu, A. Y. (2008). Beginning to read in Turkish: A phonologically transparent orthography. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 18(01), 1.
doi:10.1017/S014271640000984X
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). A call for qualitative power analyses. *Quality & Quantity*, 41(1), 105-121. doi:10.1007/s11135-005-1098-1
- Oxford English Dictionary. (2010). Retrieved from www.oed.com
- Paechter, C. (2006). Power, knowledge and embodiment in communities of sex/gender practice. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(1), 13-26.
doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2005.10.003
- Polanyi, M. (2009). *The tacit dimension*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Porter, D. (1996). *Internet culture*. New York: Routledge.
- R20-01.pdf. (n.d.). Retrieved from
http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/policies/files/research_policies/20_series/R20-01.pdf
- Rousseau, J.-J. (1993). *The social contract and the discourses* (Rev. ed.). London: D. Campbell.
- Sencer, A. (1996). Patronage, party, and state: the politicization of Islam in Turkey. *Middle East Journal*, 50(1), 40-56.
- Shilling, C. (2003). *The body and social theory* (2nd ed.). London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: SAGE Publications.

- Siapera, E. (2010). *Cultural diversity and global media: the mediation of difference*.
Chichester West Sussex U.K. ;Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Skeggs, B. (2005). Context and background: Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of class, gender and sexuality. *The Sociological Review*, 52, 19-33. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00522.x
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Stephan, R. (2006). Arab women writing their sexuality. *Hawwa*, 4(2), 159-180.
doi:10.1163/156920806779152219
- Tapinc, H. (1992). Masculinity, femininity, and Turkish male homosexuality. In K. Plummer (Ed.), *Modern homosexualities: Fragments of lesbian and gay experience* (pp. 39-49). New York; Florence: Routledge; Taylor & Francis Group [Distributor].
- Tibi, B. (1990). *Islam and the cultural accommodation of social change*. Boulder Colo.: Westview Press.
- Tibi, B. (2009). *Islam's predicament with modernity: religious reform and cultural change*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Travers, A. (2000). *Writing the public in cyberspace: Redefining inclusion on the net*. New York: Garland Pub.
- Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turkle, S. (1999). Cyberspace and identity. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(6), 643-648.

- Turner, V. (1977). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- VanGelder, L. (1985). The strange case of the electronic lover. *Ms. Magazine*.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language* (Translation newly rev. and edited /.). Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.
- Ward, K. (2001). Crossing cyber boundaries: Where is the body located in the online community? In N. Watson & S. Cunningham-Burley (Eds.), *Reframing the body*. Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire; New York: Palgrave.
- Waskul, D. D. (2002). Naked self: Being a body in televideo cybersex. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(2), 199-227.
- Waskul, D. (2004). Outercourse: Body and self in text cybersex. In D. Waskul (Ed.), *Net.seXXX: Readings on sex, pornography, and the Internet* (pp. 13-34). New York: P. Lang.
- Wayner, P. (1999). Technology for anonymity: Names by other nyms. *The Information Society*, 15(2), 91-97. doi:10.1080/019722499128556
- Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. (2003). *Critical discourse analysis: theory and interdisciplinarity*. Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity* (1st ed.). Cambridge U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Willis, S. (1987). *Marguerite Duras: Writing on the body*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2002). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Thousand Oaks:
SAGE Publications.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Los
Angeles; London: SAGE.

Yin, R. (2002). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks
Calif.: Sage Publications.