

**İSTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY**  
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**THE GENDER OF ACADEMIA:  
THE INVISIBLE GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE PRODUCTION  
OF KNOWLEDGE IN TURKEY**

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**The Gender of Academia: The Invisible Gender Discrimination in the  
Production of Knowledge in Turkey**

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## FOREWORD

I had an ideal academic life in my mind 10 years ago, yet my experience of the last 10 years has verified that academia is quite far from my understanding of a peaceful working environment where we can seek truth, share knowledge, and contribute to our society. I apply a feminist perspective to anything in both my personal and professional life; I try to get rid of the gendered judgments that have been engraved in my consciousness since I was born, and I put a lot of effort into integrating such a perspective in my classes and towards my students to be able to raise their awareness as well. Yet, it is a daily challenge to fight and try to transform the gendered bias and the masculinized culture around you.

I was single in the first couple of years of my academic career, have been married for some time now and am experiencing pregnancy at the very moment. Thus, I have experience from different perspectives, and I know from firsthand how each of these stages in my life have created and still lead to anxiety and stress as well as happiness and joy. I started this research as a course assignment for my graduate program, but as I was interviewing women academics, for the first time, I felt I was not alone or unreasonable in my feelings of nervousness, helplessness, and incompetence. My dialogue with all the women participants gave me the strength and hope for the future and made me feel supported and accompanied. Thus, I believe my biggest thanks in this research is to the women who were brave enough to participate in this study and kind enough to share their stories with me.

I thank my advisor Associate Professor Çiğdem Yazıcı for her patience, support, and hard work in this process; the fact that she kept believing in me is what made this thesis possible in one of the hardest periods of my life with Covid-19, work and family issues, and pregnancy. I have experienced solidarity and support in my relationship with her, whose calm and encouraging manners gave me confidence to stay determined. I also owe thanks to Professor Arus Yumul, who taught me how to conduct research, who was a perfect example with her own body of research, and who followed this research closely as it was my assignment for her course. I also would like to thank Associate Professor Zeynep Talay Turner, who

made us feel competent with her encouragement in dealing with the feeling of not enough during our break-time conversations, and Doctor Yağmur Nuhurat, who made this thesis even more comprehensive with her valuable perspectives and feedback. I feel lucky to have met these powerful women academics in my graduate program who inspired me with their work and attitudes. I also owe special thanks to all the women academics and researchers whose work I used in this thesis and who have paved the way for us to turn the society into a more peaceful place.

I would not be who I am if it was not for my family. Even though I come from a small farming town, I feel privileged to have parents who supported me in my dreams despite not understanding; thus, I owe my gratitude to my mother, Esmâ, who always worked hard to make me a strong woman; my father, Kemal, who always tried to understand my atrocities; and my sister, Elif, who always supported me in my enquiries in life. I also would like to thank my partner, Burak, for all his collaboration through this period of my life; he prioritized my needs during this period and delayed his own dreams to make mine come true; this thesis would not be possible without his endless help. I also thank my child, Katre, growing in my body, who somehow makes me feel content and scared at the same time, but who also gave me another reason to try to make this world a better place.

My final thanks go to the women (and men) surrounding me, primarily my head of department and my colleagues, who have made this process of thesis and pregnancy easy and tolerable for me with their cooperation and assistance. They made me understand how important it is to have a great support system to produce effectively. I would also like to thank my friends from my graduate studies, Yeşim, Sinem and Melahat, and my close friends Seda, Özlem, Lyra and Jaimie, who have always inspired me with their amazing personalities and kept reminding me of the beauties and hope in the world.

Without these people in my life, and many more that I might have forgotten, I would not be successful in completing this thesis or surviving in my academic career. This research is a product of such a period in my life; exciting, frightening, hopeful, and full of surprises.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>ÖZET .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1. THE GENDERIZATION OF THE SCIENCES .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.2. THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIA .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.3. FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: THE NARRATIVES OF WOMEN ACADEMICS IN TURKEY .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3.2. GENDERED ACADEMIA .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>    3.2.1. Gender Inequity According to Women Academics .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>    3.2.2. Discriminative Acts Among Colleagues.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>    3.2.3. Discriminative Acts from Students .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>    3.2.4. How Institutions Deal with Oppression.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>    3.2.5. How Women Deal with Oppression .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>    3.2.6. The Administrative Problems and Decision-Making Processes.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>    3.2.7. Being a Woman or Having a Feminist Perspective? .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>79</b>

<b>ANNEX I – INFORMED CONSENT FORM .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>ANNEX II – RESULT OF EVALUATION BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE .....</b>	<b>87</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 2.1:</b> Summary Table of the Number of Teaching Staff and Rate of Female Academics .....	24
<b>Table 2.2:</b> Summary of the Number of Academic Staff, 2021-2022.....	25

## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to examine the gender-related discrimination and oppression women face in the academic institutions in Turkey. The number of women academics has increased recently, yet this research aims at understanding if this high number equals to a gender-neutral environment in higher education institutions and if women can work peacefully and become a part of the production of knowledge without any kind of oppression. To move beyond the statistical data and to hear women's side of the truth, this research consists of in-depth interviews with 22 women academics actively working in academic institutions in Turkey in different titles, departments, and universities. The higher education institutions will be analyzed using Joan Acker's Theory of Gendered Organizations and Patricia H. Collins's concept of Matrix of Domination; and the narratives of the women academics will be interpreted in the light of Nancy C. M. Hartsock's Feminist Standpoint Theory. Women's accounts are the focal point of this research, and they reveal that academic institutions are not gender-neutral and there are many steps to take in order to liberate women from the patriarchal oppression.

**Keywords:** Gender, women, discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, academic institutions



## ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye'deki akademik kurumlarda kadınların yaşadıkları toplumsal cinsiyet ayrımcılığı ve baskıları araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Kadın akademisyen sayısı son dönemde artış göstermiştir, ancak bu çalışma, bu artan sayıyla birlikte akademinin cinsiyetten arınmış, kadınların huzurla çalışabileceği ve baskı olmaksızın bilgi üretimine katkıda bulunabilecekleri bir ortam haline gelip gelmediğini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. İstatistiklerin ötesine geçmek ve kadınların gerçekliklerine değinmek adına bu araştırmada, hâlihazırda Türkiye'deki akademik kurumlarda çalışmakta olan, farklı üniversite, unvan ve alanlardan 22 kadın akademisyen ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Yükseköğretim kurumları Joan Acker'ın Toplumsal Cinsiyetlendirilmiş Kurum kuramı ve Patricia H. Collins'in Tahakküm Matrisi kavramı kullanılarak analiz edilecektir; ayrıca kadın akademisyenlerin anlatıları Nancy C. M. Hartsock'un Feminist Bakış Açısı Teorisi ışığında yorumlanacaktır. Kadınların hikâyeleri bu araştırmanın odak noktasını oluşturmaktadır ve akademik kurumların cinsiyetten arınmış olmadıklarını ve kadınları ataerkil baskıdan özgürleştirmek için atılması gereken birçok adımın olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Kadın, Ayrımcılık, Baskı, Ataerkil, Akademik Kurumlar

## INTRODUCTION

*“Women’s trust in her own existence is lost, and this loss of the ontological confidence is a critical damage. We must work on the identity-related and ontological unreliability so that we can communicate effectively. All I want is not to alienate from ourselves.”*

Participant 17

Women have strived and worked determinately to be included in the public arena for a long time in Turkey, as well as in many countries around the world. Even though the situation seems to be better than before, there is still a big amount of work to be done for gender equity in the society. The Global Gender Gap Index prepared by the World Economic Forum in 2021 clearly shows how much still needs to be done in Turkey since Turkey ranks 133<sup>rd</sup> among 156 countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> As academia reflects the outside world, it is not surprising that similar gender-related problems exist in the academic institutions as well. It would be quite illogical to expect academia to be a completely gender-free environment, yet I would also assume that with the qualifications and educational background of the academics, such institutions where knowledge is produced and truth is sought would be a place of equal participation, opportunities, and payment, regardless of personal differences. Nonetheless, the amount of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, age, and class can be felt vividly in the higher education establishments. There has been more attention to and research about the gender-based oppression in the academic institutions recently; many women (and men) are working collaboratively to make the academic workplaces a more peaceful setting where they can become a part of the knowledge production and validation; and even more needs to be done to shed light to the unknown corners and hidden discriminatory elements in these foundations.

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<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, March 2021: 10, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/>.

The long history of women's fights for their rights in academia in Turkey inaugurated in the late Ottoman period. Until 1913, primary level education for girls was not obligatory; therefore, most parents chose not to send their daughters to schools with male teachers. During the period of the governmental reforms in the Ottoman Empire (Tanzimat), schools for girls, nursing schools for women and schools to train women as teachers were opened with the purpose of educating women for their duties of transforming the society and taking care of the family and children. Women's entrance into the higher education was made possible in 1913 with the intensive campaign of the feminist magazine *Kadınlar Dünyası* [*Women's World*] for women's right to gain access to higher education, and İnas Darülfünunu [the Women's University] opened its doors in 1914.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the defeat in World War I, the government could no longer support the Women's University financially and decided to close it down and start mixed education. Even though the rector of the university opposed mixed education, with the support of some women activists, writers, and publishers, it started in 1923. It was in the late 1920s that a small number of women started teaching at higher education. Administrative positions took even longer to achieve, as the first woman dean in Turkey started her job in 1954 and the first woman rector in 1974.<sup>3</sup> A lot has changed in more than 100 years since women's entrance into academia. According to the statistics from the Higher Education Council<sup>4</sup>, in 2017-2018 academic year, women constituted almost half of the academic staff all over the country. This data seems promising and might mean that women have obtained a certain place in the processes of knowledge production, yet I wonder if this quantity proves that all problems have been solved and the fight is over in terms of gaining equal access to an academic career and visibility in the academic world.

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<sup>2</sup> İstanbul Kadın Müzesi [Women's Museum İstanbul], *Kadınların Üniversitede 100 Yılı, İnas Darülfünunu / Kadın Üniversitesi 1914-1919* [100 Years Women at the University / Women's University 1914-1919], 2014: 6, <https://sarkac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/KATALOG-catalogue-100-YIL-year.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>4</sup> "The Number of Teaching Staff by Academic Title, 2018-2019," March 25, 2019, <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>.

Many studies concerning the gender issues in the higher education institutions have revealed that there are still major problems that women encounter every day. One of these problems is the fact that women are still made to feel powerless and unconfident despite their qualifications and academic background. Although university encourages exploration of truth and objective knowledge regardless of gender- or race-related differences, we, women, still feel “presumed incompetent as scholars, teachers, and participants in the academic governance.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the reasons behind the feeling of incompetent must be examined if we want to emancipate ourselves from the oppression. These reasons, some of which I also experience myself, are diverse including but not limited to being excluded from the academic activities in the male-domination, being torn apart between family responsibilities and work duties, experiencing a stagnation in the career because of children, being called names for not being married or having children, being told what to wear or how to behave, being mocked for being too feminine or too masculine, not being respected even in your own field of study, etc. When thought individually, these might not sound like crucial matters, yet it is important to remember that facing such challenges every day makes one’s life devastating and exhausting. As Aurora L. Morales expresses, “The culture that inequality creates around itself is saturated with pain, confusion, alienation, a sense of unreality of our own experience and that of others, an inability to name the abuses we experience, perpetrate and witness on a daily basis.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in an environment of inequality, we cannot expect women to produce scientific knowledge, not because they are women but because they are not provided with the same conditions as their male counterparts.

As mentioned earlier, it is appealing and easy to imagine academia to be a society of equality and scientific research where knowledge is produced, accumulated, and shared. Nevertheless, the concepts of domination, power

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<sup>5</sup> Gabriella G. y Muhs, Yolanda F. Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez, and Angela P. Harris, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (Colorado: The University Press of Colorado, 2012), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998), 13.

struggles and inequality exist in their own ways in this yet another patriarchal system which is penetrated by the bias and prejudgments against women. I have come to understand this harsh reality through my own experiences both as a student and as an academic working at the university environment for about 10 years now. I have witnessed a lot of my women colleagues try to come up with different strategies to be able to survive and produce, to be able to keep a balance between their work life and private life and to be able to feel happy in the middle of this craziness. For these purposes, women utilize various tactics; some might have to attain the patriarchal language and become a part of the oppression to have a career; some are lucky enough to be surrounded with powerful women who pave the way for them to keep on the fight; some give up and leave their life purpose after realizing the huge gap between the dreams and the reality.

Another aspect of the male-domination in academia is the changed face of the oppression; discrimination is not as open and public as it used to be in the past. Although there are still cases of direct physical violence, these are rare compared to the past thanks to the solidarity and determination of women organizations. Yet, gender-discrimination manifests itself in the daily acts and discourses in the academic environment and deprives women of the necessary power to name and cope with them. A crucial point here is to raise awareness of all the academics, students, and administrative staff in institutions so that they can identify the implicit male domination and call for action. In some higher education institutions, there are some efforts to create a gender-equal environment by generating gender-equality plans and reports, by opening centers to fight verbal or sexual harassment, mobbing and to increase women's and men's consciousness and sensitivity. Yet, many universities are still not even close to discussing these issues and in these institutions, it is a general tendency to sweep the problems under the rug and ignore completely because of not having a clear policy about what discrimination is and how it can be tackled.

Not being represented or allowed in the decision-making processes is another dimension of the patriarchal culture in the higher education institutions in

Turkey. According to the study carried out by Zeynep G. Göker and Aslı Polatdemir, the glass-ceiling effect, the higher number of men in the critical managerial positions that do not let women in and women's hesitation in attaining an administrative position are the most common reasons mentioned by the participants.<sup>7</sup> Due to many reasons such as having a lot of family or child-related responsibilities, women's career come to a period of stagnation at a certain point, which makes women lose their connection to their academic work and leads to the feeling of incompetence. Apart from family issues, women are also not visible in the managerial positions since these higher ranks are regarded as a masculine environment; thus, women either cannot penetrate this area or refrain from such duties because of the feelings of insecurity and exhaustion as they know dealing with such a male-dominated culture might be unbearably challenging and wearing.

Women are generally obliged to come up with their own defense strategies since many institutions lack effective mechanisms to solve gender-related issues. In today's implicit discrimination, it is even harder to identify oppression; hence, it is a must for organizations to have a gender-equality policy, an action plan and a center to follow and take action against any kind of discriminatory behavior. Otherwise, in cases of sexual, verbal, or physical harassment or mobbing, women students, academics or other staff are commonly not aware of their rights or what they should do; in some cases, they cannot even find someone to tell their story and the oppression is ignored by the community at the institution. "Such naturalization and normalization of sexism creates a kind of *chilly climate* for women."<sup>8</sup> The patriarchal structure is reproduced in this climate since "[...] oppression of any kind tugs at the culture around it, distorting our view of the naked exercise of power, normalizing it so that it appears natural and tolerable."<sup>9</sup> This normalization keeps

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<sup>7</sup> Zeynep Gülrü Göker and Aslı Polatdemir, "Türkiye'de Yüksek Öğretim Kurumlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Mekanizmaları: Bir Temel Değerlendirme Çalışması," *SU Gender and Research Worldwide* İstanbul, 2019: 40, [http://rwistanbul.org/files/Univ\\_Toplumsal\\_Cinsiyet\\_Raporu\\_30Nisan.pdf](http://rwistanbul.org/files/Univ_Toplumsal_Cinsiyet_Raporu_30Nisan.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Selda Tuncer, "Cinsiyetlendirilmiş Bir Kurum Olarak Akademi: Türkiye'de Akademik Cinsiyet Kültürüne Bakmak," *Kültür ve İletişim* 44 (2019): 181.

<sup>9</sup> Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 11.

women away from their rights as well as demotivating and discouraging women's production.

In this oppressive *chilly climate*, we, women, are expected to produce knowledge, seek scientific truth and cultivate results that are assessed and validated by men or are subjected to the same evaluation as men's production. Yet, one question keeps rising in my mind; how can a being who experiences the psychological and physical burden of such problems direct her full concentration and energy into production? The answer to this question, according to my personal experience and what I have witnessed around me, is that it is virtually impossible due to the weight of the constantly nagging feeling of not enough, the despair sensed towards the prejudiced judgments and the barriers set throughout the career. Therefore, in order to liberate ourselves from the chains of patriarchy, we must find out the different ways of oppression and how to deal with them both at personal and at institutional level.

This research, thus, emerged from my personal inquiries as an academic to apprehend the way the patriarchal system maintains its existence in the scientific world; from my personal experience of injustice and discrimination as a woman; and my personal witness account of sexism, racism, class elitism and dominance as a feminist. I started this research as a final paper for one of my graduate courses, which then turned into a whole area of research since my findings and interviews with women in academia led to an insight into the diverse ways of oppression that manifests itself at the intersection of gender, race, religion, and class. The more I lent an ear to different stories, the more I realized how much we, women, somehow are oppressed in one way or another. So as to provide a general interpretation of the statistics in academia, I will also share some quantitative data related to women in the academic institutions in Turkey. Yet, the reason why I place women's stories in the center of this research is because quantitative data can only show one side of the truth whereas "qualitative empirical research creates a frame in which to interpret the quantitative data."<sup>10</sup> Thus, I believe the personal experiences and

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<sup>10</sup> Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, and Harris, *Presumed Incompetent*, 3.

accounts of women will shed light to the depths of the academic life that no numbers or statistics can exhibit. Towards the end of the research, I was even more convinced about the significance of this qualitative interview-based study as I gained insight into the myriad ways of oppression that women undergo; quite a different reality from what numbers tell us. In order to avoid the patriarchal bias against women in sciences, as Sylvia Walby asserts, “to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods, to interview women and to report faithfully on their views”<sup>11</sup> is what matters most in producing less distorted and partial truth.

Before diving into the depth of this research, I would like to clarify one important point. I am a part of this research; I am one of the many women oppressed in some way and therefore, I refuse to take myself out of the research. I was always formally trained to have a distance between myself and the text; to never use “I” language in order to be more “objective” as a researcher and writer. It was only in my graduate studies surrounded with feminist friends and lecturers where I found my own voice as a woman and realized that I could be myself in the text, reject the positivist language, and still claim reliability. Thus, I do not see any problem in calling all the women and myself “we” throughout this research paper, since I feel a belonging to that community, share their experiences and refuse the positivist hierarchal distinction between the “subject” and the “object” of the research; between the “interviewer” and “interviewee”. My research has found its way through women’s voices and my personal experience; through our interaction, sharing and support; therefore, everybody is in the Subject position. My relationship with this study became a mutual gain of power and voice; my own relationship with the academic world, my personal challenges and responses, and my experiences of ignorance and contradiction provided me with the need to listen to others’ stories; and reciprocally, women’s stories gave me the strength to live through my own struggles.

The questions in my mind that led to the construction of this research are whether the increased number of women working in academia guarantee equity; if

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1990), 14.



women have a peaceful working environment regardless of their gender; in what level of academia women have career and visibility; if they can contribute to the production of knowledge without any oppression and whether gender has an effect on the accountability and credibility of knowledge. The main purpose of this study is to understand how academia internalizes and reproduces the patriarchal structure of the society, what are the new and implicit ways of discrimination, what strategies women use to fight such hidden oppression and how their scientific productivity is affected in Turkey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

*Academia is a constant process of research; ego is generally high in academia, and it is even higher in men. No matter how much one reads about feminist theories, people still possess the socially constructed and internalized emotions and judgments. Just like it becomes a problem when a woman's financial status is better, a woman with a better position in academia threatens men's ego.*

Participant 4

### 1.1. THE GENDERIZATION OF THE SCIENCES

Today's sciences are not gender-neutral because of their roots in the dichotomies of the Western thinking. As Audre Lorde states, "Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior."<sup>12</sup> This binary interpretation of the world leads to the construction of two opposing groups; one dominant and the other subservient, in such, good and bad; subject and object, the one and the other, masculine and feminine, strong and vulnerable, rational and emotional; of which man is always associated with the former and woman with the latter. Judith Hicks Stiehm explains the effects of this mindset on the current social constructions as *the Aristotelian hangover*, by which she clearly shows that this hangover has certain implications on the public and political thought.<sup>13</sup> Due to this *hangover* left from the Western androcentric tradition, the methods and language used in the production and validation of knowledge have been constructed and used by men, and a masculinized culture has been generated around sciences.

The devastating result of having the mindset of opposing groups is that men are always associated with power, strength, rational thinking, masculinity and therefore the one, the subject, while women with emotions, vulnerability,

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<sup>12</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 114.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Hicks Stiehm, "The Unit of Political Analysis: Our Aristotelian Hangover," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 40.

femininity, and therefore the other, the object. These binary oppositions “presuppose a subject as signifier and an object as signified, [which is] the traditional epistemological dichotomy within philosophy [...]”<sup>14</sup> It is certainly hard to challenge this mindset that has been engraved in people’s minds over centuries; and as a result of these binary oppositions, “the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral,”<sup>15</sup> which put women in the secondary position.

Due to this androcentric tradition in the sciences, “the very way that mainstream science and social science construct knowledge is biased against women.”<sup>16</sup> Aren’t we, women, mostly accused of saying something *because* we are women; while men almost never face such accusations of unaccountability based on their sex. That is because these binary oppositions create an imbalance between what counts as knowledge and what is not. As Simone de Beauvoir suggests, “[...] humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, we understand history through a male gaze, and we primarily listen to the stories of men; in that sense, women cannot contribute to what constitutes as knowledge since woman herself has not had the chance to exist in the public space by herself. Public space is the male space, where only masculinity can exist and where the knowledge matters; not the private spaces where women have been confined to and continue to be so to some extent.

This androcentric duality is so entrenched in the consciousness that it is quite hard to challenge it. As Evelyn Fox Keller argues, “[...] the association of masculinity with scientific thought has the status of a myth [...]”, and “unexamined myths, wherever they survive, have a subterranean potency; they affect out thinking in ways we are not aware of, and to the extent that we lack awareness, our capacity

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<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 57.

<sup>15</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Howard M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 15.

to resist their influence is undermined.”<sup>18</sup> However, this myth is not a part of the nature; it is a product of human thought as individuals always create the Other in order to define themselves just as black people are the Others for the white, the Jews for the anti-Semite, the natives for colonists, the proletarians for the upper class, and the woman for the man. This otherness manifests itself in what counts as important and essential and what does not. In terms of the production of knowledge, “because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, women have always had to struggle against the male interpretations of the world to make their truth visible.

The reasons behind the subordination of women to men exceeds the purpose of my paper; nonetheless, one thing is certain; the necessity of an interdependent solidarity among women as “for women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered,” since “interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows *I* to *be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative.”<sup>20</sup> One crucial way to create such an alliance could be sharing and listening to our narratives so that we can discover our power to become the subject of our own worlds and generate our truth. And even though we have claimed our positions in the public arena to some extent, it is still a man’s world; its language is male; its structure is male-dominated, and it is ruled by men. Hence, we all still encounter certain biased expressions, implications or actions overtly or in a subtle way; we are told to smile more, to act more feminine, to dress appropriately, or to assume a humble attitude, etc.

In order to find a way to deal with the irritation towards this bias and man’s transcendence, woman has to create strategies; yet, “to decline to be the Other, to

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, “Gender and Science,” in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 187.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 251.

<sup>20</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 111.

refuse to be a party to the deal – this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste.”<sup>21</sup> It is an excruciating experience to search for ways to exist in this Other’s transcendence, which make many women give up and become the Other voluntarily either because they are tired of fighting or because they lack the resources to survive in that environment. As Beauvoir clearly explains, women become inferior to men due to being restrained to that inferiority long enough and not having equal opportunities to break that vicious circle.<sup>22</sup> They are told so many times over and over again that “they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, through this mysterious fulfillment of femininity, women were only allowed to become nothing but good wives and mothers and have been deprived of the necessary means to gain their emancipation.

To realize that emancipation, Beauvoir’s equality theory encourages women’s transition from the immanence of housework to the transcendence of the work in public space. She suggests that “women [be] reared and trained exactly like men were to work under the same conditions and for the same wages.”<sup>24</sup> For her, women and men must be recognized as subjects for each other leading to her independent existence in the realm of transcendence as well. Although she recognizes the impossibility of emancipation for women only through economic independence alone, she sees it as the basic factor in making both sexes equal. Betty Friedan mentions a similar concern by stating, “women who do not look for jobs equal to their actual capacity, who do not let themselves develop the lifetime interests and goals which require serious education and training [...] are walking [...] to a nonexistent future.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, this heteronormative approach to the historical categorization of women cannot be a solution in itself, as can be seen in the results of my research. Therefore, it is clear that entering the workforce does not lead to

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<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 44, [https://elearning.unipd.it/spgi/pluginfile.php/99853/mod\\_resource/content/1/The\\_Feminine\\_Mystique.pdf](https://elearning.unipd.it/spgi/pluginfile.php/99853/mod_resource/content/1/The_Feminine_Mystique.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 680.

<sup>25</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 366.

women's freedom of oppression since the organizational structures in the workplaces are patriarchal themselves and need to be challenged to provide women with the means to transcend the self.

As mentioned, entering the workforce is only the first step which must be followed with questioning the patriarchy and transforming the structure of the institutions. With the current high percentage of women in the academic institutions, some people assume that there is nothing to discuss apart from women's personal problems from insecurity to family-related matters. However, "personal problems are political problems"<sup>26</sup> and this seems to have gained its validity over the years. Many of the challenges women encounter today are not because of their personal or professional inadequacy; they are because of the feelings of self-blame and incompetence imposed upon them by the social norms and political structures. That is also exactly why each and every story in this study must be embraced as a part of a bigger structural problem since although stories might differ, the barriers set for women are pretty similar.

Morales expressed remarkably how personal stories matter when she excavated both her personal experiences of oppression and other women's histories; the detailed analysis of the personal sexual abuse brought about a sense of empowerment and release, which made it possible to understand and express the subordination and resistance of others better. As she states, "whether it takes place in the supposedly private context of sexual abuse or the public and allegedly impersonal arenas of colonialism, patriarchy or a profoundly racist class society, the traumatic experience of being dehumanized and exploited strips people of their stories, of the explanations that make sense of their lives."<sup>27</sup> This leads to women's refrainment from the power of telling their truth and expressing their feelings, and therefore, from contributing to the production of the truth.

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<sup>26</sup> Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (January 1970): 76, <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01039>.

<sup>27</sup> Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 3-4.

It is through language that we create our reality of the world, convey our history and traditions, and express our emotions. Yet, as Ruth Hubbard explains, “the question is *who* has social sanction to define larger reality into which one’s everyday experiences must fit in order that one be reckoned sane and responsible.”<sup>28</sup> This power of generating reality has always been in the hands of men throughout history, and when women decided to take control of their reality, men felt threatened by their resolve. Without the language and power to share their stories, women are deprived of the power to produce their reality. Yet, the fight must continue since “when individual people are abused, the events themselves become a story of our worthlessness, of our deserving no better. We must struggle to re-create the shattered knowledge of our humanity.”<sup>29</sup> The perpetrators’ stories full of justifications must be replaced with the Others’ stories that have the potential to undermine the grand narratives with their subversive fabric. The importance of questioning the distorted historical knowledge and the reason why a new version of history must be created with the women’s voices and realities can be seen in bell hooks’s assertions.

That American women, irrespective of their education, economic status, or social identification, have undergone years of sexist and racist socialization that has taught us to blindly trust our knowledge of history and its effect on present reality, even though that knowledge has been formed and shaped by an oppressive system, is nowhere more evident than in the recent feminist movement.<sup>30</sup>

To gain authority over past, present and future, we must engage ourselves in a struggle to transform the history, memory, and society. Therefore, narratives need to be re-constructed and re-told by women for these stories will redesign the social and political structures and violate the power of the privileged since “our

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<sup>28</sup> Ruth Hubbard, “Have Only Men Evolved?,” in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 46.

<sup>29</sup> Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 121.

personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action.”<sup>31</sup> For this to become possible, we must create a dialogue and bond among women with their personal stories to establish mutual understanding and support, and to form our own language to express our reality, “for the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”<sup>32</sup> As Morales argues, “the only way to bear the overwhelming pain of oppression is by telling, in all its detail, in the presence of witnesses and in a context of resistance, how unbearable it is.”<sup>33</sup> This is exactly why I wanted to carry out this project; to collect the witness accounts of women who are fighting their right to participate in the production and validation of knowledge in a world where the oppression is more overt than explicit.

If we want to improve our knowledge of the world and arrive at a less distorted truth, women must take their place which has long been in the wrong hands. As Sandra Harding justifiably affirms,

It needs to be stressed that it is *women* who should be expected to be able to reveal *for the first time* what women’s experiences are. Women should have an equal say in the design and administration of the institutions where knowledge is produced and distributed for reasons of social justice: it is not fair to exclude women from gaining the benefits of participating in these enterprises that men get. But they should also share in these projects because only partial and distorted understandings of ourselves and the world around us can be produced in a culture which systematically silences and devalues the voices of women.<sup>34</sup>

Allowing women to explore and use their own voice and language is the only way to explore the truth and apprehend the world around us.

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<sup>31</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Sandra Harding, “Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?,” in *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 7.



## 1.2. THE PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIA

In terms of the structure of the organizations, any woman (and/or man) in the workforce can feel the patriarchal structure of the policies and laws that were utilized in the creation of organizational structures. The presumption that organizations such as academic institutions are gender neutral is a problematic presumption since as Joan Acker states, “organizational structure is not gender neutral; on the contrary, assumptions about gender underlie the documents and contracts used to construct organizations and to provide the commonsense ground for theorizing about them.”<sup>35</sup> Depending on this gendered structure of the workplace, one can clearly see that the ideal and universal worker is a man; men’s bodies and masculinity exist in the very base of the structures, which lead to the marginalization of women.

One reason why entering workforce, in our case academia, is not enough for women’s emancipation is that the organizations still embrace a masculine hierarchical structure where the most powerful decision-making positions are heavily held by men. As we will discuss further in the upcoming section, stronger gender discrimination, also called as the glass ceiling effect<sup>36</sup>, exists on the higher ranks of hierarchy in the academic institutions as much as in other organizational structures. Due to many implicit or explicit reasons, women are refrained from climbing up the career steps in academia; therefore, they are not represented and/or their ideas are not valued in the decision-making processes because of their gender and the invisible gendered structure of the academic world.

It requires a more in-depth analysis and alterations on many levels of the organizational structures to provide women with a non-threatening working environment since “structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal domains of power reappear across different forms of oppression,” which refers to how the

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<sup>35</sup> Joan Acker, “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations,” *Gender and Society* 4, no.2 (June 1990): 139.

<sup>36</sup> David A. Cotter, Joan M. Hermsen, Seth Ovadia, and Reeve Vanneman, “The Glass Ceiling Effect,” *Social Forces* 80 no. 2 (December 2001): 655.

matrix of domination is organized.<sup>37</sup> While Patricia Hill Collins uses the term *matrix of domination* to interpret and explain the oppression of African-American women, I feel that the same template of the four domains of power she describes can be used in analyzing the situation in academy in Turkey. According to Collins's analyses, *the structural domain of power* deals with how the organizational structure of the institutions reproduce gender discrimination over time; *the disciplinary domain of power* refers to the implicit power relations that are run by regulations and bureaucracy; *the hegemonic domain of power* encompasses the production and maintenance of dominant groups' ideas as "commonsense", and finally *the interpersonal domain of power* shows the importance of the realization of a piece of oppressor entrenched somehow in each of us and creating a revolution in our daily conversations and practices with this awareness.<sup>38</sup> Women's stories and witness accounts that I am sharing in this research proves that this *matrix of domination* exists in the academic institutions in Turkey.

Lending an ear to women's narratives proves that for their integration in the production of knowledge, women come up with certain strategies to deal with the domination in their own ways. This struggle sometimes ends up in women embracing and becoming a part of the oppression themselves, sometimes in finding ways to open space for their productivity and sometimes giving up. Deniz Kandiyoti defines these strategies of dealing with patriarchy which women use as *patriarchal bargains*, and "different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct 'rules of the game' and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active and passive resistance in the face of oppression."<sup>39</sup> The stories from different levels of academia in my research have supplied me with the various types of patriarchal bargains that women are engaged in with one trait in common; one way or another, the bargain is an obligation.

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<sup>37</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 277-288.

<sup>39</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (September 1988): 274.

A general overview of the number of women in academia shows that more women are now employed in academia; yet, a closer inspection, as shall be discussed in the next section, shows a horizontal and vertical gendered structure; more women occupy positions in so-called *feminine* disciplines and less women in the decision-making ranks. This shows the embedded gender discrimination in the organizational structures leading to the exclusion or partial inclusion of women. The gender discrimination deeply engraved in the politics and theories behind the creation of such institutions means the increase in the number of women in the workforce does not necessarily equal to an oppression-free working environment, which means a fundamental transformation in the structures of workplaces is needed. Though “such a transformation would be radical in practice because it would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today, along with a redefinition of work and work relations,”<sup>40</sup> it is not impossible with women’s alliances against the reproduction of discrimination in their environments.

### **1.3. FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES**

What is knowledge, how is knowledge acquired, how do people arrive at truth and who validates knowledge are some of the questions that epistemology, the theory of knowledge, strives to find answers for. It is the study of the tools used to decide which is the truth and why we believe that one; so, who can validate truth and who cannot. Yet, “far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is safe to say that epistemology is more about who is powerful enough to produce and validate knowledge and whose truth will be ignored or silenced.

Before the feminist movements, the traditional methodologies and epistemologies were androcentric, focused on rationality, objectivity, and men’s perspectives. As Sandra Harding states, feminist researchers first tried to add

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<sup>40</sup> Acker, “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies,” 155.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 252.

women into these traditional analyses, yet these women either had to conform to the men's rules of their times or they were victimized in the studies of men.<sup>42</sup> These efforts, quite reasonably, were not enough to eradicate sexism and androcentrism from the knowledge validation processes. While these approaches were an essential step in the progress of women's involvement in the production of knowledge, it was obvious that they were not enough to empower women to become the narrators of their own truth.

Only if we free ourselves from the presumptions that knowledge can be produced through the objective positivist research can we realize the various levels of truth and how reality can differ based on class, gender, or other conditions. That way, we can adopt a clear picture of how women's realities are different from men's, and therefore, to arrive at truth, we must stop ignoring women's accounts and understanding of the world. One epistemological approach for such a purpose is based on the standpoint theory, which means "in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them."<sup>43</sup> By utilizing Marx's historical materialism and applying the proletariat's point of view to women's life conditions, Nancy C. M. Hartsock develops such a methodology for knowledge production; a feminist standpoint theory to arrive at a feminist historical materialist epistemological tool, which "could allow for a much more profound critique of phallographic ideologies and institutions than has yet been achieved."<sup>44</sup> This standpoint not only provides us with an approach for the inclusion of women in the production of knowledge, but also

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<sup>42</sup> Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?," 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is 'Strong Objectivity?'," *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 442.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983), 288.

demonstrates what kind of epistemological consequences women's experiences of the world would lead to.

Women's narratives reveal the spheres that were hitherto unknown and not included in the world knowledge. Yet, it is crucial to realize that "the worlds opened up by speaking from the standpoint of women have not been and are not on a basis of equality with the objectified bodies of knowledge that have constituted and expressed the standpoint of men."<sup>45</sup> The obvious reason is that men have possessed dominance over the production of knowledge. Thus, it is crucial to analyze women's experiences and struggles in the work community to be able to comprehend the various ways that patriarchy reveals itself in the structures of the society. "Women's lives, like men's, are structured by social relations which manifest the experience of the dominant gender and class"<sup>46</sup>, and the exposure of this concealed oppression can initiate the reconstruction of the social, political, and legal institutions. One way to disclose such structures of subordination is to allow the production of knowledge with a feminist standpoint. The effective practice of a feminist standpoint can offer a profound insight into the multiple levels of domination that interfere with women's access and contribution to knowledge.

Women's stories will change the body of knowledge accumulated over years based only on men's experiences and stories. By uncovering women's encounters and narratives, we can fill in the void in the truth caused by the silenced voices and unheard realities. While seeking knowledge, "women's lives can provide the starting point for asking new, critical questions about not only those women's lives but also about men's lives and, most importantly, the casual relations between them."<sup>47</sup> Therefore, by examining the undervalued contribution of women and their experiences, we can arrive at certain implications and knowledge on the family, society, economy, and other institutions. The only way to attain such truth is to integrate women into the production of knowledge processes with their own

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<sup>45</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint," 304.

<sup>47</sup> Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," 443.

voices, perspectives, and standpoint so that knowledge can be produced not for the dominant groups to manage the lives of the oppressed groups, but for the marginalized people to expose their narratives.

To understand the world from the standpoint of the dominant is what has been done for years and years in sciences; yet there have been attempts of creating the opportunity to allow women to produce and validate their own knowledge. Collins, for instance, made an impressive use of the standpoint theory and proved how “African-American women not only have developed a distinctive Black women’s standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge,”<sup>48</sup> despite the intersecting oppressions at the matrix of domination. With a similar approach, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa<sup>49</sup> compiled the experiences of women of color in their feminist anthology which was an inspiring expression of women’s struggles through their intersecting identities. Another crucial feminist anthology was co-edited by Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith<sup>50</sup>, whose focus was again on the intersecting oppressions that women of color encounter in spite of the sisterhood claims of white women. Furthermore, the Latina Feminist Group<sup>51</sup> produced quite an impactful resource that reveals the testimonies of Latina women and the intricacies of the Latina identity. With the same purposes, Gabriella G. y Muhs, Yolanda F. Niemann, Carmen G. Gonzalez and Angela P. Harris<sup>52</sup> explored women’s stories at the intersection of race and gender, and the atrocities they faced in academia. These are only a few of the significant work that has chosen to validate and produce truth and challenge the existing body of knowledge through women’s accounts and narratives. I am quite aware of the fact that my interviews do not deal with the multiple intersecting oppressions in the same way as these texts, but with the

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<sup>48</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 252.

<sup>49</sup> Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Mass: Persephone Press, 1981).

<sup>50</sup> Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: Feminist Press, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (North Caroline: Duke University Press, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, and Harris, *Presumed Incompetent*.

dialogues in this study, I hope to accomplish a similar approach where women's experiences talk for themselves, become the authoritative voice that manages their truth and produce their own knowledge. I also wish to show the subtle matrix of domination in the academic institutions in Turkey, what patriarchal bargains women utilize when dealing with the oppression and what methods they use to be able to produce and validate their truth in their fields.

The inferiority and discrimination that women go through might seem a trivial matter to most men (or women), yet “they produce in woman moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to spring from her original nature.”<sup>53</sup> That is exactly why it is crucial that women gain their voice to tell their side of the story; to gain enough power to fight the patriarchal system and to overthrow the mindset of superiority and inferiority in dualities. We can also infer from these profound effects what a challenge it must be for many woman academics to present their knowledge under the judgment of men who have owned the arena for centuries.

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<sup>53</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 25.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*As women, we suffer from the prejudgments, biases and definitions. After a while, your gender is what matters more than the quality of your work. Even your privacy is invaded at times, and you become guilty if you complain. It is ridiculous to struggle with these after all your experience and qualifications.*

Participant 12

Women face countless challenges in public life to gain power and freedom; nonetheless, when it comes to the number of woman academics in Turkey, at first glance the result might seem assuring. The number of women in various disciplines in the academic institutions in Turkey is increasing and is already better than some of the EU countries.<sup>54</sup> As Burcu Şentürk states in her article, the rate of female academics was 15.9% in 1950-1951 and 36.6% in 2001-2002<sup>55</sup>, which seems to be increasing rapidly when compared to the current numbers and percentages of woman academics shown in Table 2.1. Nonetheless, this number does not indicate gender equity in academia. As can be seen in Table 2.2, according to the latest statistics, only 8% of all rectors in Turkey are women, 33% of women academics are professors and 40% are associate professors while this percentage goes higher in the positions of assistant professor, instructor, and research assistant. As for the number of woman deans in Turkey, there is no statistical data on the Higher Education Council website; however, according to some news, in 2021, 377 woman academics were working as deans<sup>56</sup>; in total, 394 women were rectors and deans which made up 3.94% of all the woman professors.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the report of the “Women’s Participation in High-Level Decision Making” Project indicates that

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<sup>54</sup> Meltem İnce Yenilmez, “Women in Academia in Turkey: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Journal of Administrative Sciences* 14, no. 28 (2016): 291.

<sup>55</sup> Burcu Şentürk, “Çocuk ama Yokuz: Türkiye’deki Akademisyen Kadınlar Üzerine bir Analiz,” *Vira Verita E-Journal*, no. 2 (2015): 6.

<sup>56</sup> “Türk Üniversitelerindeki Kadın Profesör Oranı, Avrupa Ortalamasını Geride Bıraktı,” *Higher Education Council*, June 5, 2021, <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2021/turk-universitelerindeki-kadin-profesör-orani-avrupa-ortalamasini-gecti.aspx>.

<sup>57</sup> Erdem Sevgi, “YÖK’ün İstatistiklerine Göre Üniversitelerde Kadın Yönetici Oranı Yüzde 3.94,” *Cumhuriyet*, 15 June, 2021, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/yok-istatistiklerine-gore-universitelerde-kadin-yoneticisi-orani-yuzde-394-1844460>.



the rate of women in the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey (KOSGEB), and Technology Development Foundation of Turkey (TTGV) is 5% combined, and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) has never been run by a woman in its history since it was founded in 1981.<sup>58</sup> It can be understood from the statistics that even though women occupy more space in academia now, they usually take up ‘lower level’ positions whereas the ‘higher level and/or managerial’ positions are still mostly occupied by men.

**Table 2.1:** Summary Table of the Number of Teaching Staff and Rate of Female Academics.<sup>59</sup>

Academic Year	Total Women	Total Men	Rate of Female Academics (%)
2017-2018	70235	87863	44.4
2018-2019	74391	91838	44.7
2019-2020	78687	95807	45
2020-2021	81467	98218	45.3
2021-2022	84555	100147	45.7

<sup>58</sup> İtir Akdoğan, *Women’s Participation in High-Level Decision Making* (İstanbul: TESEV Publications, 2019), 21.

<sup>59</sup> Various tables on the website were used to create Table 2.1. Please see <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> (Accessed May 20, 2022).

**Table 2.2:** Summary of the Number of Academic Staff, 2021-2022<sup>60</sup>

	Rector	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Instructor	Research Assistant
Women	18	10729	8136	18998	19581	27542
Men	190	21527	12105	22557	18945	25240
Rate of Women (%)	8.6	33.2	40.1	45.7	50.8	52.1

For an accurate interpretation of the seemingly equal numbers of women and men academics in Turkey, we must go beyond the overall number of women and dive into the details of statistics. “The Gender (In)Equality Report at the Academy in Turkey” by Yaşar Aldırmaz takes on the duty of examining the statistical data in 2020<sup>61</sup>. The report clearly shows the inequality hidden behind the statistics. It is clear that in academia, the traditional patriarchal structure of the society and the gender-based discrimination have created a barrier for women to exist and to rise in their academic careers.<sup>62</sup> One clear indication of the study is the exclusion of women from the power positions, as the numbers of rectors and deans demonstrate. Another conclusion is the decreasing number of women in the higher hierarchy in terms of the academic titles. The last interpretation is the unbalanced distribution of number of women and men academics across different disciplines and faculties.

Some insight into the statistics clearly show that academia has its own patriarchal male-dominated structure, and it is important to go beyond the general

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<sup>60</sup> For the number of the teaching staff from assistants to professors, please see <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> (Accessed May 20, 2022). For the number of the rectors, please see <https://www.yok.gov.tr/universiteler/universitelerimiz#> (Accessed May 20, 2022).

<sup>61</sup> Yaşar Aldırmaz, “Türkiye’de Akademide Cinsiyet Eşit(siz)liği Raporu: 2020 Gender (In)equality Report at the Academy in Turkey: 2020,” *Researchgate*, (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10258.07364>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

data of how many women there are in academia to see their everyday challenges. There are various types of gender discrimination towards women in academia which have been examined in some studies in higher educational institutions in Turkey. The results of these studies show that while the number of women in academia is rising, the issues related to excessive family duties, conflicting gender roles and the glass ceiling effect faced in climbing up the career ladder still exist in the gendered academic world<sup>63</sup>.

One eye-opening study was carried out by Songül Demir, who conducted interviews with 100 women academics.<sup>64</sup> Her research results show that women experience direct and constant gender discrimination in the academic community no matter what title they have. First of all, they face difficulties during and after pregnancy; moreover, they are not preferred for a project or long-term research, which creates gender inequity. Women mostly experience gender-related discrimination once they start a family and have children and take up more responsibilities in their lives because of the socially determined gender roles, which leads to a slower progress and/or a period of stagnation in their academic career whereas male academics do not face the same struggles. In other cases, women feel the need to postpone their plans of having children in order to carry on their academic career effectively.

This conflict of gender roles between being a mother and being an academic emerges in many studies. Duygu Altınoluk also shows in her in-depth interviews with 6 female academics at Ege University that those with (a) child(ren) often experience a dilemma between their gender roles as mothers and their workload as

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<sup>63</sup> Yenilmez, "Women in Academia," 289; Şentürk, "Çokuz ama Yokuz," 1; Songül Demir, "Akademide Kadın: Farklı Disiplinlerden Kadınların Akademideki Yeri ve Aile Yaşamıyla Etkileşimi," *Marmara University Journal of Political Science* 6, no.1 (March 2018): 192; Duygu Altınoluk, "Kadın Olmak mı Akademisyen Olmak mı?: İşte Bütün Mesele Bu," *Fe Dergi* 10, no.1 (2018): 58-59; Ece Öztan and Setenay Nil Doğan, "Akademinin Cinsiyeti: Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi Örneği Üzerinden Üniversite ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet," *Çalışma ve Toplum*, no.3 (2015): 195; Deniz Ünal, "Akademik Yaşamda Cinsiyetçilik," in *Yönetim ve Organizasyon Makaleleri: Kadın Akademisyenlere Armağan*, ed. Esra Gökçen Kaygısız and Reyhan Aysen Wolff (Konya: Eğitim Yayınevi, 2017): 418.

<sup>64</sup> Demir, "Akademide Kadın," 191-205.

academics in the gendered structure of academia.<sup>65</sup> The dialogues with these women demonstrate that being a woman means there is the potential of marriage or pregnancy, which affects the recruitment procedures. Even after recruitment, women are always reminded not to consider pregnancy until the end of their thesis or dissertation studies, and some women who are pregnant feel the need to hide this for some time which cause even more anxiety.

The issue of the balance between family life and academia has also been addressed by Ece Öztan and Setenay Nil Doğan in their research, in which they collected data through online surveys with 134 participants as well as conducting in-depth interviews with 8 female and 8 male academics.<sup>66</sup> Almost 47% of the women participants in the study stated that they had to take a break from their careers for various reasons while the rate for men is 17%. The reasons behind this stagnation are pregnancy, giving birth, family issues and having no job security. The fact that most of the administrative structure is male dominant and there is very little support from the institutions or their partners certainly turns women's lives into a source of constant anxiety. Apart from the workload on women, the clash of home and work responsibilities and the dilemma of being a good mother or being a good academic probably creates a big psychological burden for women. Not only do these responsibilities create moral dilemmas, but they also leave no personal time for women to spare for their hobbies or for relaxing. Due to these reasons, it also becomes quite hard for female academics with children to attend a conference abroad or to catch long-term post-doctorate projects or research opportunities.<sup>67</sup> Another reason why women do not have as much access to information flow about such prospects as men is because of the fact that the administrative and decision-making structures are male-dominated and out of women's reach in most cases.

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<sup>65</sup> Altınoluk, "Kadın Olmak mı Akademisyen Olmak mı?," 63.

<sup>66</sup> Öztan and Doğan, "Akademinin Cinsiyeti," 206.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 214.

Another indicator of the existence of gender discrimination in academia is the fact that the number of women in various disciplines is not equally distributed as asserted by Meltem İnce Yenilmez in her article:

A look at the distribution of female academics across the different disciplines revealed that there are more women in disciplines that are traditionally considered feminine. Furthermore, the number of female academics at the entry level is high, but not many of them make it to the top, an indication that the academic profession is not immune to gender discrimination.<sup>68</sup>

According to Yenilmez, the disciplines socially seen as suitable for women seem to attract women academics more. Society, expecting women to be mothers, caretakers, and academics at the same time, also dictates what kind of jobs they can and should do. This might also be an explanation for the higher number of women at lower ranks since many women prefer to stay at entry levels because of the clashes between the gender roles and not receiving enough support from their partners and/or institutions. Öztan and Doğan prove the existence of similar problems stating that there are two types of inequities in academia; the vertical and horizontal discrimination.<sup>69</sup> Vertical discrimination refers to the decrease in the number of female academics on higher levels of academic career such as professor and executive positions whereas horizontal discrimination refers to the asymmetrical distribution of female and male academics across different disciplines, both of which exist in the academia in Turkey.

Apart from not occupying enough space in higher ranks in academia, women are also not visible in the managerial positions. As Şentürk states, men are mostly the decision makers in the academic society while women are almost never represented.<sup>70</sup> This proves that even though academia provides more women with job opportunities compared to the other fields of work, it still does not give a voice

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<sup>68</sup> Yenilmez, "Women in Academia," 289.

<sup>69</sup> Öztan and Doğan, "Akademinin Cinsiyeti," 198.

<sup>70</sup> Şentürk, "Çokuz ama Yokuz," 9.

to women in the senior academic positions such as rectors and deans. As accepted in the societal norms, men are entitled to have the jobs that are higher in hierarchy and considered to be masculine. Executive positions, just like some disciplines such as engineering which are regarded as masculine areas, seem to naturally belong to men and lower positions as well as some other so-called feminine disciplines are considered to be more appropriate for women's talents.

One of the most serious issues in gender discrimination is the fact that it can be carried out covertly and might not even be recognized by many including both men and women since the gender roles are deeply embedded in the society and in the way people grow up and socialize. One needs to keep in mind that gender is not a biological entity; on the contrary, it is socially constructed. However, patriarchal structures define being a woman in biological terms and position them in a lower level in the social hierarchy.<sup>71</sup> Thus, in order for women to gain the right for expression and freedom, they mostly need to find a way to exist in the patriarchal world and *play by men's rules*. As Altinoluk asserts, women in public usually act *masculine* or deter their *womanhood* to be able to make themselves accepted and respected.<sup>72</sup> In this situation, the high number of women in a public place, in our case in academia, does not necessarily mean that women have achieved emancipation in their workplace as they can only be free as much as certain restrictions allow them. Especially in disciplines which are considered to be the men's arena, female academics, as participants in her study shared, are not allowed to enter into the field work since they do not belong there and/or cannot do the *men's work* because "Manhood requires one to be *assertive, active, energetic and initiative* while womanhood to be *cooperative, passive, kind and emotional*."<sup>73</sup> Altinoluk's research clearly shows how women work persistently in order to gain equal status compared to their male counterparts even though they have the same quality and quantity of educational background.

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<sup>71</sup> Altinoluk, "Kadın Olmak mı Akademisyen Olmak mı?," 59.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 62.

Another way of hidden discrimination, which is quite hard to notice and act on, is carried out under the cover of “being a gentleman”. As Demir states, beside the requirement of proving themselves in order to gain trust among their colleagues or students while such things are never expected of men, women working in *masculine* fields such as engineering are also sometimes treated *kindly* as a way of -sometimes unconscious- oppression. Male academics help women in the field work and with *male* jobs under the cover of *politeness* which is another way of creating dominance over women.<sup>74</sup> Although it may seem to be courtesy at first sight, this kind of over support overtly means women are not capable of completing certain types of work without men’s interference. Ünal provides another way of how biased discourses and discriminative jokes in the working environment can lead to psychological breakdowns for women.<sup>75</sup> To use a gender-biased language is a kind of mobbing in the workplace, and disturbing discourses about women disguised as *harmless jokes* can be quite destructive despite appearing innocent and naïve. Similar actions in the society and in the workplace are the reasons why women are deprived of the chance to improve themselves and why they experience a constant feeling of incompetence.

There are many factors that affect the severity of the discrimination in academic institutions, one of which is the geography. It might be comprehensible why woman academics in the rural areas of Turkey experience fiercer oppression due to the highly patriarchal structure of not only the institution but also the community. This has been proven by Emek Yıldırım Şahin, who conducted surveys with 53 women working at various universities mostly outside of big cities in order to understand whether the domination becomes stronger and more concrete in their lives. According to the results of the study, women’s qualifications are disregarded during the recruitment for higher positions; intersections of gender, ethnicity, political and sexual identity manifest themselves more severely and lead to even more oppression in such universities; and most importantly, in cases of mobbing

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<sup>74</sup> Demir, “Akademide Kadın,” 199.

<sup>75</sup> Ünal, “Akademik Yaşamda Cinsiyetçilik”, 423.

and harassment, it is even harder to find a solution in these male-dominated institutions. Beside the issues with the management and other instructors, women academics also experience problems with the male students in their classes, which is probably more explicit in such rural communities.<sup>76</sup> Such studies provide a picture of the situation in rural educational institutions where it is clear that the patriarchal structure is even more evident in the work environment.

In the male-dominated world, sometimes women have no choice but adopt the masculine language and structure as part of their patriarchal bargain. This might be their only way to have a peaceful working environment, or they might be tired of fighting, or they might believe this to be the only means to gain equal rights with men. This is quite obvious in Şahin's research that sometimes women give in to the oppression and ignore the problems with a passivized attitude since they feel that they do not have the means to fight such issues or encountering these problems might lead to more serious difficulties in their academic lives.<sup>77</sup> Many of these women also lack the knowledge or power to identify and name the oppression. The acceptance and passivity of these women prove that masculinity does not refer to one gender; it means a type of power and domination.<sup>78</sup> It is therefore possible and quite comprehensible that some women surrender to this authority as a way of being accepted and given the same privileges of those who have gained their rights to be there.

One aspect of the gendered structure of academic that has not been focused much is the perception of hierarchy and difficulties in academic institutions. It is crucial to understand how women perceive the challenges and the masculinized discourse in academia and how that perception impacts their work life and production. To analyze this perception, Hande Eslen-Ziya and Tefik M. Yıldırım carried out an original study in 2018-2019 with over 200 women academics from

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<sup>76</sup> Emek Yıldırım Şahin, "Bir Taşra Hikâyesi Daha: Taşra Üniversitesinde Kadın Akademisyen Olmak," *Çalışma ve Toplum* 1 (2020): 239-262.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>78</sup> Duygu Altınoluk, "Eril Sahada Kadın Araştırmacı Olmak: İkilemler, Çelişkiler, Karşılaşmalar ve Çarpışmalar," *Akdeniz Kadın Çalışmaları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (2021): 208.



various disciplines, titles and countries. They found out that “those reporting the presence of strong hierarchies in the workplace are significantly more likely to acknowledge bias in performance evaluations,” and furthermore, “not only do perceptions of hierarchy in the workplace shape perceptions of gendered-challenges facing academics today, they also diminish women academics’ hopes about overcoming such challenges in the future.”<sup>79</sup> According to the results of this research, women’s concerns and views of the gendered bias and discrimination in their institution make them feel more pessimistic about their workplaces both in the present and for the future, thus affecting their career and production negatively.

The patriarchal structure of the higher education institution is generally concealed and gender discrimination is quite invisible, thus hard to identify and take action for, at times. One reason is that “the gender ideology, which is inherent to the construction of all the institutional structure and occupational culture, is being naturalized as a part of institutional process [...]”<sup>80</sup> Because of this naturalization process, it has become difficult to identify the acts of discrimination and to respond to them. Apart from the invisible patriarchal structure, individuals also bring certain gender-related assumptions with them to the professional community. I believe it is highly crucial to realize the patriarchal authority engrained in all of us as the products of this society and fight it through sharing, dialogues and solidarity.

The difference between the statistics from the past and today reveals that women are occupying more space in academia day by day. Although the high number of women does not guarantee a gender-neutral environment, it is still promising for the future. The first step to emancipation is to identify and name the gender-related issues inside the patriarchal structure of academia and find resolutions for them. It is rather grueling to challenge the gender-related issues since they have been deeply-rooted in the society over so many years that, as Deniz Ünal illustrates it with a good example, “[...] while a male academic is applauded for

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<sup>79</sup> Hande Eslen-Ziya and Tevfik Murat Yıldırım, “Perceptions of Gendered-Challenges in Academia: How Women Academics See Gender Hierarchies as Barriers to Achievement,” *Gender, Work and Organization* 29, no. 1 (January, 2022): 304.

<sup>80</sup> Tuncer, “Cinsiyetlendirilmiş Bir Kurum Olarak Akademi,” 174.

working late in the office at night, the same situation might be considered to be *strange* for a female academic.”<sup>81</sup> Some behaviors that are regarded as *normal* and even *praiseworthy* for men can be regarded as *not suitable for a good woman*. The next step is to transform the gendered atmosphere and the institutional policies in academic institutions. This is the only way for women to participate in the production and validation of knowledge and to reveal their silenced truth.

These and similar studies shed light to the dark sides of the academic institutions as well as offering hope for the liberation of women and obliteration of gender inequity. As hooks undoubtedly asserts, the real monster is the patriarchy, dominance, and sexism; not a specific gender.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the gendered structure of the institutions and the policies are what we must try to alter for a peaceful working environment where individuals can produce together in solidarity. For this purpose, I believe, sharing stories and bringing hidden oppressions to daylight are two vital strategies; that way, women can realize that they are not alone and they can work together to cope with the discrimination they experience daily and to actualize their knowledge claims.

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<sup>81</sup> Ünal, “Akademik Yaşamda Cinsiyetçilik,” 412.

<sup>82</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 67.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE NARRATIVES OF WOMEN ACADEMICS IN TURKEY**

*There is a strong women's movement in Turkey. Women must support each other and become organized. We need to come up with strategies. Feminism is a perspective towards life. Let's not forget, it is not only about doing academic research; it is about applying it in every aspect of life. Only then is it possible to transform the patriarchal structure entrenched in the daily life.*

Participant 9

### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research consists of in-depth interviews with 22 women academics in 10 different departments mostly in the fields of Social Sciences from 9 different universities, eight in İstanbul and one from another town. The reason behind my choice of in-depth interviews is because I would like to go beyond the quantitative data and expose the hidden details that numbers cannot provide. Since I have also worked in an academic institution for about 10 years now and as a currently pregnant member of the academic staff, I have come to gain firsthand experience of the various ways of oppression or hear about the instances of oppression around me. Thus, I wanted to follow a feminist epistemological approach from a feminist standpoint and focus on the dialogues with and stories of women/participants rather than treat them as the objects of a study. I reject to use a distancing language and approach of a researcher towards the participants of this study due to being a part of the community myself; I believe what makes this research even more reliable and sincere is the fact that I have an understanding of the experiences and feelings in the face of discrimination.

As the topic is a sensitive one, I believe it is rather crucial to see the participants as storytellers and to witness their emotional responses. In order to see through the eyes of the others and achieve an in-depth understanding of their situation, I have applied semi-structured in-depth interviews. With the freedom of expressing their ideas in their own words, participants opened up and provided me

with a rich quantity of experiences that no positivist methodology would do. The interview included six open-ended questions, however, the dialogues sometimes led themselves into a different direction based on the answers of the participants. I have preferred an interpretivist approach in the analysis of the stories. This makes the research results difficult to generalize to the whole community, which, however, is not a concern in this study. There has been much research conducted in order to comprehend the gender-related problems women experience in academia; this research specifically focuses on gendered discourses used in academia as a way of oppressing women, the visibility of women in decision-making processes and the effects of patriarchal domination on women's access to the production and validation of knowledge.

To carry out the study, I chose nine different universities on purpose to spot the differences as well as similarities between various institutions. Out of these nine universities, four of them are state universities and five are foundation universities. I had conversations with 22 academics with different titles; three of them are PhD students in their final years, one is a research assistant, eight are assistant professors, eight are associate professors and two are professors; and of all, five of them have managerial duties. Thirteen of the participants work in departments with a greater number of male academics while the other nine work in departments where the number of female and male academics is equal, or the number of female academics is higher. Thirteen of the participants are married, seven are single, two are divorced, and thirteen have children. The sampling for the study was done with the snowball method; however, including such a variety of titles, disciplines and family and workplace dynamics in the research had a purpose, which was to see if the results would alter in different contexts and situations. The names of the participants are kept anonymous for security purposes and also to provide the women with freedom and flexibility in expressing their opinions; thus, I have used *P* for participant names coding them as P1, P2, P3 ..., and P22 randomly.

## **3.2. GENDERED ACADEMIA**

### **3.2.1. Gender Inequity According to Women Academics**

For various reasons, such as academia having flexible hours to work and being an average-paid job, women have taken more space in academia lately. Nonetheless, it is important to listen to women and comprehend what prevents them from climbing the career ladder and being more assertive in their knowledge claims. For this reason, the first thing I wanted to grasp was what women thought when asked about gender discrimination and how they defined it. Most of the participants defined gender discrimination as being exposed to discriminated behavior from men (or other women) in a visible or invisible way; earning less while doing the same job or doing more for the same amount of salary; having less power in the decision-making processes; unfair distribution of duties among members of faculty; not being informed about the projects and activities and not being taken seriously because of being a woman. Women's different perspectives on gender discrimination might exhibit the kinds of problems and experiences they have in their own workplaces.

[Discrimination is about] not letting women in the administrative positions, differences in the salaries, not letting women talk in the meetings, not taking women's requests into account. (P4)

[Discrimination is about] men thinking they have the right to speak on behalf of women or to defend women, while devaluing women at the same time. (P6)

[Discrimination is that] men have a strong network of communication, and they share everything among themselves excluding women. Women are generally not informed about the activities in the faculty. (P7)

[Discrimination is that] everybody you work with including students, colleagues, cleaning people or security people have certain

presumptions about and expectations from you because you are a woman; these expectations shape their relationships with you. (P15)

[Discrimination is about] showing the power and authority wherever possible; the emergence of harassment in every possible context. (P16)

One important pattern emerges frequently in many participants' answers; discrimination used to be more open and direct in the past; however, nowadays, it is more covert and not directly visible anymore, thus making it even harder to identify and respond to.

It [discrimination] is not directly visible, it is re-produced through daily practices, and this maintains and recreates the social structure and patriarchy. (P9)

[I feel discriminated against] when I am forgotten to be invited to a meeting or when I am expected to get the tea ready for a meeting. (P10)

Discrimination is so embedded in social relationships and practices that it is not tangible anymore. For example, I have a little child. To arrange a meeting after 6-7 pm might not seem like a problem to many people, but in my opinion, it is a very inconsiderate behavior. (P15)

Nothing much is done to my face, probably because they are a bit scared of me, but I have heard things said behind my back or things said to me about another woman research assistant [...] In such cases, since I am not the one addressed, there were many times that I got frustrated because of not being able to interfere. (P21)

We have internalized certain things so much that I find it hard to differentiate whether something happens because I am a woman or because it is me, yet things like mansplaining or that something you say

receives a different reaction when somebody else utters it happen all the time. (P22)

Especially these last two comments made me remember all the times I had the same feelings. In my academic career, it took me some time to be able to identify and name discrimination; looking back, I have many memories of instances of mansplaining or implicit joking, yet I could never stand against them due to the internalization of such gender roles. Now, I use my feminist identity as a shield towards such behaviors to stop them before happening; but it still does not guarantee an oppression-free environment.

It is asserted by most of the participants that direct discrimination such as verbal or physical harassment is not as common as it used to be before, but women are still not represented enough in the managerial positions, and they are judged with what they say and how they react to issues in the departments.

Men have more power in the decision-making process, and they sometimes silence women. [...] If a woman says something, she is either nagging or complaining too much and is not taken seriously. (P12)

Women are not preferred for critical administrative positions. They [men in power] act as if they are caring about women by not allowing them to take part in higher positions or they believe that women are not capable of managing. They also assume that, at some point, women will get married, will have children and familial responsibilities which will affect their productivity. Sometimes women also do not prefer [these positions] themselves. (P13)

They [men] used to talk more open and direct in the past; they were supposedly being friendly and joking. Now, they do not have the courage to do such things, but they only avoid doing these directly around other people. I am not so sure if such things occupy their minds less. (P20)

As can be seen in the participants' comments, discrimination today might not be seen on the surface; however, we still feel and are exposed to the gendered structure of the organizations as Joan Acker asserts. Differently from the past, the patriarchal structure manifests itself in hidden discourses and daily practices. These practices include behaviors and prejudgments about women, not only by the other academics but also by students, parents, security people, and janitors. All people, because of social upbringing and patriarchal structures, have certain postulations about women, which affect and determine their relationships with women academics. These can be seen more clearly in the answers to the second and third questions about what kind of discriminative acts and behaviors women face in their workplaces in any academic environment such as meetings, conferences, projects or in the decision-making processes about who will teach which courses and who will participate in the academic activities.

### **3.2.2. Discriminative Acts Among Colleagues**

When asked about what kind of discriminative behaviors women face, the most recurring answer was that, with the higher number of women in academia, things have gotten better than before; however, discrimination has taken a new shape; one that cannot simply be recognized on the surface; but rather shows itself in discursive elements in departmental meetings or academic gatherings.

I take on multiple identities and subject positions as a woman; I am a young woman, a mother, a wife, and I wear a headscarf. And because of these, I feel that there are certain judgments about me. For example, once when I went to a conference as a speaker with a male academic, the security let him in with no questions, but they stopped me and asked why I was there. [...] I even change my voice on the phone sometimes to sound more assertive and serious. I am always careful about what to wear and how to seem professional. (P1)



It [discrimination] is not directly visible, but for example we (female research assistants) get more criticism compared to male assistants, especially about our clothes and the way we behave. (P11)

You feel them [discriminative acts]. For example, they find a way to keep you out of a PhD dissertation jury duty or they do not take you seriously when you comment on somebody's thesis. Some people listen to you with certain prejudgments and presumptions. Once, about a problem, they did not take me seriously and even mocked me; then they had to act on the problem when it turned out that I was right, but you have to fight for that. [...] However, they do not do the same to a male academic. For instance, a male academic can leave a meeting in an angry manner, and everybody takes it calmly. If I do the same thing, I would be judged in a different way through my womanhood. Unfortunately, I am on the verge of leaving the institution because of these issues. (P12)

Never directly to me, but I have heard things said about me or about other people. There have been many times when I felt like I received a certain reaction because I am a woman. These seem to be small things, but they occupy a big space in your mind, and they make you question yourself or feel worthless and quilt. (P13)

Ours is a traditional department and a lot of people believe that women's real duty is to take care of children. When I first started here, one instructor told me to my face that a woman's real place is home and real duty is children. (P14)

I found out that I was pregnant while completing my doctorate dissertation. This became a source of anxiety for me since there is a generally accepted idea that women should not get pregnant before finishing the dissertation. Finally, I told one of my instructors and then started the preaches, which were not done to a male academic who also was expecting a child. [...] I finished my PhD in 4 years despite the pregnancy and birth. I

think I could have written a far better dissertation, but I hurried up just to escape from the domination imposed upon me and to be able to breathe. Even now I still experience gender discrimination. I am the only woman academic in my field in my institution, yet I get interrupted by men when discussing my area of expertise, who claim to have more knowledge about my own PhD dissertation. Mansplaining... I don't even feel the need to respond anymore. (P19)

For example, her advisor told my friend not to have any children during her dissertation period. This is an indirect psychological pressure. He was like a second husband, affecting her life decisions that she needs to discuss with her real husband. This is like a hierarchical power; if your advisor is a man and you are a woman and he finds you manageable, he feels like he can penetrate any aspect of your life. (P21)

What I generally feel is the constant awareness of my womanhood, and that makes me self-conscious about everything. Thus, although I am normally a comfortable person, I feel the need to think everything through many times before saying it. I have this problem because of over-consciousness. Mansplaining happens a lot, in such a way that I always experience instances where a man who is not knowledgeable in my field of study still can try to explain the content to me. (P22)

As can be seen, most women are reminded of their gender and womanhood in one way or another in their production processes. From my personal experience, I certainly share the feelings of anxiety, stress, lower self-confidence, and a sense of incompetence that these women are made to feel, even when they are equally equipped with the knowledge and talent compared to their male counterparts. Today, discourse seems to be the biggest issue in gender-related problems; nevertheless, it does not mean all the other problems have been solved. In some institutions where men outnumber women, the patriarchal system finds new ways to exist stealthily.

It seems like there is no discrimination in duty distribution and other activities. However, there are secret meetings among men where the real decisions are made, like a coffee break, an evening night out or a breakfast event, in the “men councils” inside or outside the school. Though everything seems perfect to an outsider, the mechanism maintains itself behind the closed doors. (P4)

It seems to be better now. But for example, the other day after a workshop, there was a dinner event and I was the only woman there. I stayed for the dinner but felt very awkward. Nobody said anything bad to my face; however, the things they discussed like ‘Have you seen that blonde woman’s article?’ made me feel like I should not have stayed. (P10)

They [men] come together and create their support systems; like a “men’s league”. And whenever there is a problem, they always protect each other, and you become the trouble maker. (P12)

It took me a long time to understand what was happening, like many women. You always experience a certain distance that you cannot comprehend. Then you realize that the whole system is constructed upon men’s relationships with each other. All are in contact with the other male academics. Even if you have the same academic title, you do not get the same level of respect, for example, they can call you by your first name more easily. They find ways to never let you forget that you are a woman. [...] Overall, you are a woman in a male-dominated network. (P20)

As someone working in a male-dominated academic institution especially in the managerial positions, in the first opening ceremony that I attended at our university about 10 years ago, there were no women in the first couple of rows of chairs where the members of the administration were sitting. The scene is unfortunately more or less the same today. When you see such a view, you understand that you are not completely a part of that “men’s council”; I do not even

know how to approach such a group of people with gender-related issues, just like most of the interlocutors in my research stated.

Besides these issues, some participants who identify themselves as feminists and who also integrate feminism into their lives and academic works assert that they are seldom directly assaulted in any way by their coworkers or managers. Nonetheless, this subject position of 'feminist' brings about new difficulties for them in their workplaces. I personally make it very obvious that I work for women's rights, which sometimes creates a certain level of tension in the working environment or leads to jokes about how "manly" or "assertive" I am.

It is important how we position ourselves. I usually openly identify myself as a feminist. This gives you power and affects your relationships. Others position themselves accordingly. [...] On the other hand, they might prioritize your feminist identity and it might turn into an object of mocking or pressure. You get reactions like 'You are exaggerating' or 'Be careful, ... is here, she might get angry'." You always find yourself in defense position, which creates a pressure. You become tagged as a *feminist* and are shown as *disturbed* by everything. Sometimes the academic environment makes it hard to for you since everybody believes they are knowledgeable, so it is even more annoying to explain such things. It is, for instance, quite hard to explain mansplaining. When you warn someone, they say you are being ridiculous. (P9)

I am in a quite male-dominated field, which is really challenging me. It is very hard to exist here, but I believe I have opened a way for more women. I hope the next generation won't have to remember all the time that they are woman. I wanted to study woman studies for my PhD but nobody supported me, they said that enough was said about that field and that I should not get into such speculative topics, so I gave up. They wanted me to be more *professional*. I opened a gender course, but not many students

attended. I still attract a lot of reaction when I try to discuss the women's issues in an intellectual level; I am being mocked for being a feminist. (P13)

I have a very vivid example related to being a woman and studying gender. When I was at a conference in the USA, an elderly professor sat next to me at lunch. He asked me about my field of study and when I said women/gender studies, he said "Is that all?" That was shocking to me. [...] When you are younger, they do not take you seriously or hit on you; you are mostly visible with your womanhood, not with your studies especially if you are working in the gender studies. As you get older and higher in your title, there is certain hesitation and fear towards you, as if you are unpredictable or might show aggressive behavior. [...] In the jury for my associate professorship, they asked me why I *ended up in* these topics (referring to gender studies) when I had written such a good PhD dissertation. (P16)

Apart from academic meetings and conferences where female and male academics spend time together, the decision-making process about certain academic activities is another occasion that they (need to) work together. The same pattern of hidden patriarchal relations seems to occur in these instances. In terms of which classes to teach, almost all women asserted that they have no problems about what they want to teach. They mostly decide on course schedules and choose a course they want to teach depending on their expertise or interest. Therefore, it seems like a certain level of equality have been achieved in that sense.

There are no problems in this topic, we discuss who wants to teach which class and decide together. It is easy since ours is a small department and consists of mostly woman academic. (P1)

The decision of which subject area will be taught by whom is made collaboratively depending on everybody's specialty and expertise. We haven't had any problems. (P3)

Not now, but I had certain problems when I was an assistant. I used to be assigned more duties compared to the male assistants. But it does not occur now. (P6)

I teach according to my expertise. We share the courses in a meeting. We don't have gender-related issues in that sense. (P13)

Yet, the picture is not as promising when it comes to the planning and organizing academic activities such as attending a conference as a speaker, going out of city or abroad for a project or training, or managing a project. There are different types of problems women face, depending on their academic titles, years of experience, family-related responsibilities, and the people they work with. Some face challenges in taking part in the academic activities because of their children; some are assigned to more "social" duties as it is believed that women are better at communicating; some face negative reactions from their male coworkers if they are assigned to a task or position that men see themselves more worthy; and others confront the glass ceiling effect when they want to take part in the higher administrative positions.

Sometimes male managers say, for orientation days for instance, "You are a woman, you can do it better," since women are considered to be better at social relationships. They act like they are complimenting you, except that the actual message is that they have more important things to take care of. So, they *flatter* you, which is even worse because they act like they are actually saying something nice. If you say something, they say "But I didn't say anything bad." (P2)

I work with a very powerful woman as the dean, so I do not face any challenges in decision mechanisms. What I confront is the "masculinity crisis"; they [men] change their attitudes towards you once you step up in your career or do something better than them. When the people with whom you get along well before start resenting you and acting aggressively, I cannot help but think if it is a kind of masculinity crisis. (P3)

Mansplaining is still a big issue. [...] They still see women as assistants or they *overflatter* when a woman is successful, as if it is shocking that she does her job so well. At a conference the other day, for example, there was such exaggeration to a woman's presentation; some were almost surprised at how good she was! (P4)

Obstacles have been created to prevent women from getting into higher positions and we don't have faculty meetings anymore. The head of department has meetings with whomever he wants, others don't hear anything about what is happening. You don't even hear about a project sometimes; it starts and finishes without your knowledge. They find a way to keep you out of these meetings in which decisions are made. And you cannot do anything because these are intangible, not something you can complain or do something about. (P12)

When I first chose my topic for my dissertation, I was challenged by my male professors who thought I would not be able to do it as a woman and they tried to direct me into something that was more *appropriate for women*. I was lucky because my advisor supported me a lot. But there were even discussions about why I was given this position instead of a male assistant. These comments have lowered my self-esteem and self-confidence. (P14)

Considering these answers, women are still challenged in one way or another in taking part in academic activities. Only three women among all the participants expressed that they do not face these kinds of academic-activity-related problems anymore; not for things have gotten better, but because they have either given up on certain things, or they themselves occupy the managerial position and take active part in decision making, or they work with powerful women who participate in decision-making.

One of the most crucial components in some women's lives is the children. According to the participants, having as well as not having children is a serious

issue they must deal with every day. All participants who have children asserted that children have changed their lives including their academic careers. All these women expressed that having children brought a great color into their lives; however, they mostly had to accept the fact that their academic career would slow down or even stop for some time, and they would have to give up on some academic or personal activities to take care of their children. It takes even more toll on women if they do not have enough support system around them from their families or their institutions. Apart from having a stagnant period in their knowledge production and the reactions they receive from the people around, women also face motherhood dilemmas and feel torn apart between having a career and being a good mother.

It [having children] affects you deeply. You cannot live with the feeling of frustration, so I accepted the fact that my male coworkers will improve faster in their careers, even though my mother helps me at home and my husband also takes part in taking care of children, but only when I tell him to do so. All these responsibilities delay my academic production. If I had no kids, I could arrange my time as I wished, yet with children it is impossible. Academia has very flexible hours, but it is a 24-hour occupation that requires constant production. It is really challenging to carry on such work with children. (P1)

Marriage and especially kids mean double amount of work that you do. You need to accept this. My mom made my life easier when my child was little, and it was still very hard for me. Most of the duties about childcare is on you as a woman. (P5)

It [having children] is terribly difficult! Whatever position or title you might have in your job; your childcare duties are permanent as a woman. No matter how much they love their jobs, women prioritize their children, and it becomes exhausting and consuming to keep the balance. You also feel the need to prove that you are married and have kids, yet you can still do everything perfectly well. [...] This image of a “strong woman” increases expectations from you. I used to take it as a compliment whenever



my husband said, “You are strong, you can do it,” but now I realize that he actually just put all the burden on me. And I took it without questioning as my duty to live up to that expectation. I guess we sometimes like that so-called praise of “you can do it all.” My husband’s mental burden is never the same as mine. (P7)

Having kids is an incredible experience, it teaches you a lot (which does not necessarily mean that without it, women lack something), but it also changes your whole life. I can spend less time for my academic work. I prefer to spend my evenings and weekends with my child now; however, I can still catch on with the academic activities thanks to my mom, another woman in my life who supports me. Yet, the fact that your colleagues are progressing sometimes discourages you. (P9)

I receive a lot of support from my faculty, mostly because in this traditional environment, being a mother gains approval easily. But my productivity certainly lessened after having a child. I am still supported by my mother-in-law with my child when I have classes, but generally I do things after my child goes to sleep. Especially the first two years can be considered lost, and you need to accept this. (P13)

I had my child after my master’s thesis and completed my PhD with a child. Thus, it took 2 years longer to finish it. I had no family to support me, so it was really hard. I was really exhausted and worn out trying to do it all. I wanted to have another child, but I would either have a child or have a PhD; I chose the latter. (P16)

Due to financial conditions, I had to go back to work when my child was 5 months old. My biggest support was my mother and sometimes my mother-in-law. Of course in these periods, you waive your sleep, your time with your child or with your work. It is generally the woman who needs to waive her rights because of motherhood. Even though my husband supports me, I do most of the work and all the planning, which is the most tiring. [...]

Recently, I asked my husband to increase his support because I have to finish a book and I can only write 1 sentence a week. He said; “Tell me and I will do it.” But planning is the most tiring part. [...] It is so rare that I have some coffee with some music. (P17)

When I was interviewing some of the participants, I was pregnant and honestly, our dialogues made me feel fearful of the future of my personal life, my academic career and my child’s life. Pregnancy and having a child is a beautiful journey; yet, even if everything goes smoothly and ideally, it is obvious that a stagnation in my academic career is awaiting me, let alone all the physical and psychological changes in my life. The fact that our institution has no lactation rooms, no kindergarten, or no other way to support families with infants, a long break from my career is inevitable, which creates a huge burden on me and my partner psychologically, academically and financially. Despite these concerns, all the interactions with these women made me feel powerful, competent and hopeful for my future.

As mentioned, the children not only slow down the academic progress, but they also lower the concentration and sometimes have a negative impact on the production of knowledge in the workplace. The responsibilities as well as the biological changes might have a destructive effect on women’s academic career and their sense of competence, confidence, and professionalism.

The other day, I looked at the text that I sent to the editor; a sentence was half. I wondered where I went while writing this sentence. Therefore, justice is very important. While I am trying to proceed with a child, a husband and all the responsibilities, another male or female academic can close themselves to the outside world for a month and work. But our results are evaluated with the same criteria. I know a pair of academics married with one child. My friend (the woman) told me her husband closes the door and works on his project, doesn’t even bother to create a bond with his family. My friend, on the other hand, feeds the child, organizes her

responsibilities at home and at work and then can focus on her academic work at around 12 at night for an hour or so before falling asleep. (P17)

I can say that I have had more time for myself after the divorce. I can manage my time more easily now. But during the first years of the child, there was a big hold in my academic life. There is a completely sleepless 2-year period in my life. I remember falling asleep in my doctorate class. It was really challenging. I could only restart my academic studies 2.5-3 years after my child was born. Participating in a conference took such a long time as well. The first time was actually by the force of my head of department. Otherwise, I would not feel confident enough to attend. (P18)

In the 5<sup>th</sup> month of my twin children, I felt that my career was over and that I would not be able to complete my PhD. [...] I was psychologically struggling a lot. Then I started seeing a professional and the therapy helped me a lot. During the first period, my mother, father and sibling moved in with us to support us. It was a traumatic period of time. I thought I could never go back to work. (P19)

Academically, having a child means being away from the whole academic context for 2 years. All women should be aware of this, because this is not only about staying at home or having a support; we are talking about a huge biological and hormonal change. We are talking about the loss of concentration and sleep. Thus, those 2 years hold you back. After pregnancy, your memory functions transform; you have trouble remembering and concentrating. These are all against academic production. If all women are forced to be productive in the same way during this period, this would end as a disaster for women. Of course the whole process is even harder for mothers without any support. I didn't have a support and you have to even plan your bathing time. (P20)

On the other hand, not having children or not being married is equally important reasons of pressure that many women experience in their work

environments. After a certain age, women are usually dragged into conversations about how marriage is important and asked why they are still not married. If they are married, the theme changes to having children. It is encoded in our culture and traditions that being married after a certain age for women is the most desirable behavior and if they do not, people might feel like they have the right to question single women on such a matter which is quite personal, private, and politically incorrect. Beside the verbal pressure for marriage or children, these women also face discrimination in the distribution of duties or projects since in some institutions, being a mother is the highest position for women and their needs are met on the basis of creating inequity for the others. Based on the answers from participants, one can clearly see that this burden on single women or women without children does not only come from men; it is also carried out by some other women colleagues as well, which will be discussed in more detail later.

[...] For example, once we were doing a project together and a colleague with children told me that I would not be able to understand what she was going through because I did not have children. And at some point, it turned into mobbing. This happens a lot, it is like there is another hierarchy between women; married women with kids, married women with no kids and single women with no kids. And when you confront them, they say they were only joking. (P6)

Our faculty is more traditional, so it is more acceptable to be married and have kids. There is a lot of pressure, at least from older teachers, towards single women. Some single women academics got really tired of all the marriage pressure. It is not only by men, but also by women. Single women are seen as a threat whereas men, married or not, are never judged with what they do. It is even worse to be divorced. I know some instructors who kept their divorce matters a secret for some time, not only to avoid judgments but also to avoid some male academics' changed attitudes. (P11)

I am sometimes burdened with a lot of work because I am single. Single women also have the right to be tired. Being single is considered

equal to being free. [...] People always think and say that I postpone marriage because I work a lot; academia does not let me get married. However, I simply do not have someone in my life that I want to marry. This perception is very disturbing. (P10)

For example, a male academic can ask a female colleague when she is planning to have children. Maybe that woman wants a child but cannot have one due to some health issues. And she cannot react to this because it is so inappropriate. This question would definitely not be asked to a man, married or not. [...] Some pressurize you not to have children, and others treat you better when you have children. Because the culture teaches men to see it his right to ask any question regardless of whether it will embarrass or depress someone. Also, in our institution, women with children are prioritized while preparing the class schedules. It is obvious that you are in a different category if you are married with kids. (P21)

As can be seen in the remarks of the participants, social roles attached to genders are encoded in the culture and traditions. This new feature of invisibility also proves that even though life seems to have changed on the surface, Patricia H. Collins's *disciplinary domain of power* in the matrix of domination is still in progress in academic institutions. This disciplinary domain of power exercises implicit power relations which are, as mentioned by the participants, covered in daily conversations, bureaucratic regulations, decision-making processes, and discourses. Even if we know about feminist theories and apply them in our lives, the embedded prejudgments, expectations and patriarchal structures make it hard to live our lives fully as we wish. To do so, what we need the most is good support systems in our workplaces as well as in our families, whether we are single, married, divorced with or without children. In an ideal world, these should not be support systems; on the contrary, they should be integrated into life as an indispensable part; however, in today's world women need to fight for these webs of support to gain equity.

### 3.2.3. Discriminative Acts from Students

When asked about whether they encounter any discrimination from their students, most women stated that, just like the coworkers, there was no visible gender-related judgments or direct attacks on the students' side. Yet, gender-related presumptions manifest themselves in students' attitudes or implications in an implicit way, which creates new areas of challenges for women academics in their workplace. The most common problem that women face in their classes, especially when they are younger or lower in title, is the issue of respect and acceptance by the students.

There is a difference in students' attitudes towards me and male instructors. They find men more reliable. (P4)

Not much, but there are some students who don't communicate with you because you are a woman but that is very rare. I guess there are some students who still are not used to seeing women in certain positions. (P7)

I have some problems, but I used to have more in the past. Especially students from conservative traditional backgrounds created issues; some even raised their voices against me. I was asked once why I had gotten that position while there were many other men who deserved it more. But these decrease as you get older and more experienced. (P13)

First of all, it is always harder for women to be accepted. For example, woman academics usually receive lower grades than men at the student questionnaires. Since they relate authority to men, it is harder for you to establish authority. [...] I have felt like being tested many times. You can experience a lot of nonsense; they can write you stuff, they can confess their love to you, they can insult you in the class to show off; overall, male students sometimes provoke you. (P20)

Some students try to find my mistakes in the classroom and I understand that this is happening because I am a woman. After a while, it

turns into respect when I establish my authority. First they question you as a woman, then they start admiring your power. (P21)

I realize that students do not see me competent because I am young and a woman, and this changes in time after seeing my performance. But at the beginning, there are certain behaviors like they look down on me, sit too comfortably, do not listen to me or roll their eyes. Once a student even asked me directly if I was competent enough to teach that class. I don't know if any male instructors experience something similar. (P22)

It is obvious that most of the participants still experience or have experienced at some point in their lives a certain level of discrimination from their students, not only from male, but also female students. The most recurring problem is the attitude of the students towards woman lecturers; they feel like they have the right to question the woman academics' knowledge, competence, or abilities, to reject their authority, or to interact with them in a more casual or friendly manner. Although many academics clarified that these behaviors usually change after a certain age or after the students get to know them, it is still damaging and exhausting for women to know that they will face such attitudes at the beginning of their classes.

#### **3.2.4. How Institutions Deal with Oppression**

The two crucial mechanisms for creating equality for women in the academic institutions including academics, students, administrative staff, cleaning or security staff, and to provide assistance with the challenges they face seem to be the presence of a unit or a person they can talk to about these issues and any childcare services at universities to ease their load. When asked about whether there was a unit or a person they could contact in cases of gender discrimination of any kind, very few women stated that they have a formal unit or are in the process of creating one in their institution whom they can contact in cases of sexual assault or any other kind of discrimination. Unfortunately, most institutions have no formal center for these issues to be discussed. Even more importantly, most women are not

even aware if there is such a unit in their institutions or not; or how they can defend their rights in cases of harassment or oppression. It is also ironic enough to mention that until carrying out this study, I also had no idea if our institution had such a formal unit that I could use in cases of oppression. In many institutions like mine, most problems women face are either shared with someone from the management or discussed with friends yet are mostly ignored. The problem with not having a formal unit is that women do not know what actions, if any, will be taken if they express their problems and most of these problems are covered up and silenced for various reasons.

Unfortunately, there is no such unit in charge. Nothing formal, so we don't even know what kind of steps would be taken in such situations. (P1)

There is no such formal unit in our institution. We tried to form one before with some colleagues to discuss issues such as gender, women rights, and animal rights etc.; however, some friends had to leave for various reasons and this discussion of forming a center was suspended and treated as if it had never existed. There is no consciousness about what verbal or physical harassment is; I try to find do something on my own. [...] After some time, it becomes really exhausting, hitting the wall all the time. (P4)

It depends on the dean. Our current dean is not an approachable person. I am not sure if there is a formal center. (P8)

For some women, these are small issues that need not be taken to the higher management. For some others, they have found their own ways of solution, patriarchal bargains, and strategies, such as avoiding men and not contacting colleagues. And others believe that the issues will probably not be taken seriously anyways, so there is no need to take things to the management. One common pattern in all participants' answers is that most of them have never taken an issue to the dean or the higher management to find a solution. Depending on my personal encounter of the men's council in our management, I also find it virtually



impossible to discuss any discriminatory issues before such a group of people and expect them to completely understand my experience of oppression.

I can talk to my head of department, but he will probably approach this situation as “Poor young girl, look at her difficulties.” And there is no formal unit. (P10)

There are people I can talk to, yet I am not sure if the problem will be solved, if it will be covered or if you will be forced to negotiate with the person. But generally, these problems are concealed and not talked about, at least that is what has happened so far. For example, there was a case with a professor once and it was covered for a long time although everybody knew what he was doing. When things came to light, not much happened to him; he is actually the head of department in another institution right now. (P11)

I can write a complaint report to the dean, still it wouldn't work because I tried it before, and it didn't. Then, I rewrote my report and finally they told me he was given a warning. I believe the whole process would be different if it was a woman who did what he did. At the end, there was no solution to this problem. [...] Sometimes, you might even become the criminal for expressing your ideas so assertively. (P12)

There is no formal unit. But I believe that I can talk to the management, and I think they would have a considerate approach to the issue; however, in order to find a solution, the problem needs to be *serious enough* for them. There have been cases when women were not taken seriously, as all the management staff are men. So, I can only take things up to the management if I know that the problem is big enough for them. (P14)

In our faculty, there was academic personnel who was sexually harassed; an academic took or found a photo of a research assistant and made it his desktop picture, also made inappropriate comments. The assistant filed a formal complaint, but it was not accepted by the faculty

secretary and the whole case was swept under the rug. This showed me that if anything happens, there will be no consequences for the perpetrator. And the other men in the faculty also probably heard about this. This could be encouraging for them. I heard that such cases are also happening among students, but there is no mechanism to fight these at the institution. (P19)

In cases of discrimination or harassment, the mental maturity and attitude of the person in the managerial position is very determinant, which makes it all very personal. I personally don't believe that my problem would be solved by the higher management. There is no formal process that I can trust. (P20)

As for the support in terms of childcare, the first thing that comes to mind is having a daycare center in the institution<sup>83</sup>. Another important facility is a lactation room with a refrigerator, sink, cleaning supplies and a comfortable chair where mothers can pump their milk and keep it fresh. Only one institution among all has a daycare center which is not enough for its academic staff and sometimes the children grow older while waiting in line. The importance of such assistance for childcare is not clear for many foundations, yet, just like many women in my research, I have witnessed a lot of women take a long break from their careers due to the lack of such support from our school, and I believe a similar experience is waiting for me as well. I feel the frustration over this issue in my bones knowing that my male counterparts will continue their scientific production without any disturbances.

I wish we had a daycare center. I am lucky that my apartment is close to my school and my mom helps me. [...] If your kid is sick, life stops for you. Your mind is always at home which is a huge mental load. I came to a point once where I had a kind of nervous breakdown trying to arrange my time and balance my life with two kids. Children's schools also require

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<sup>83</sup> Since the focus of this study is the academics, the discussions will evolve around them. However, it should be noted that childcare services should not be limited to only women academics; it should include any women or men working or studying in the institution.

a lot of things from parents; they expect you to be a full-time parent. I cannot even imagine how single mothers or mothers with no support can handle the situation. (P1)

We don't have a kindergarten now. It was requested once or twice before but no step has been taken to build one. (P6)

We don't have any childcare facilities, but it is a must both for mothers and fathers! (P9)

We don't have day care center, we demanded one, but they said it would be too hard and rejected our claim. If the government wants to support women and integrate them more into the workforce, kindergartens and other services are obligatory. It is highly important especially during the first couple of years of the child. I know people who stopped breastfeeding very early because of not being able to go to their homes to do it; especially if you live far away, 2-3 hours a day for breastfeeding is not enough to go and come back. (P13)

Overall, despite such a variety of reasons, one thing is common in all participants' remarks; women experience challenges and difficulties in academia because of their gender, and the expectations and prejudgments about their womanhood. Discrimination does not occur as directly as it did in the past; however, that does not necessarily mean that all issues have reached resolution. On the contrary, there are still gender-related matters existing in the discourse and behind the doors; yet this intangibility makes it even harder to fight with and requires new strategies for women to undertake.

The way that higher education institutions "deal" with the gender-related issues brings us to another domain of power in Collins's matrix of domination. It can be easily seen that in solving issues, the problem must be serious or important enough in the eyes of the dominant groups to take action, which proves that the *hegemonic domain of power* exists in most academic organizations. It is still the

male-dominated culture that makes crucial decisions, and their beliefs are perceived as commonsense. This creates certain new challenges in many women's lives in cases when we are looking for support.

### **3.2.5. How Women Deal with Oppression**

As can be seen in the previous part, many academic institutions still lack certain mechanisms and formal policies to deal with discrimination against women. Thus, many women generate their own strategies to form a peaceful working environment for themselves where they can produce and teach comfortably and happily. Even though this was not a part of the questions I asked, many participants mentioned their own ways of solving issues and creating a space for themselves to complete their academic activities and to participate in the production and validation of knowledge as much as possible. For some, this is a more fruitful process thanks to a more sensitive management and higher number of women in leadership positions; whereas for others, it is too hard to even carry on the battle for their freedom due to the lack of enough support or understanding. In many cases, the solution sometimes comes down to the personality and personal strategies of the academic.

Since I am a bit harsh and sensitive about boundaries, the students are generally not able to do any discriminative behaviors. I learned how to behave through experience and age. I think your attitude is very important, but I am also lucky that I don't have many people around me who are discriminatory. (P6)

Age is an important factor. The attitude that I received when I was younger decreases with the age, title, and an administrative position, which is another aspect of the problem; the closer you get to the male patriarchy and the further you get from your womanhood, the less you face discrimination. (P16)

I think the reason why I do not face that much direct discrimination is because I am not an introverted quiet person. I have different friends in

my personal life and am stricter in my workplace, towards the students as well. This is my strategy. [...] I also start my lessons with a strict manner. That is how my students meet me. (P18)

You are a woman in a male network. And your personality traits either save you or not. I have witnessed someone who ran away from academia because of not having such personality to fight. I somehow found my way to deal with issues with my personality, maybe because I learned how to have a clear position at an early age. You need to either develop some natural strategies or stand strong on the face of the problems. (P20)

I have an assertive personality and am not afraid of arguing. I also had issues with some female colleagues and had many fights with my advisor. Of course, in that case, you will not be liked by many. Once a man of religion said pregnant women should not be outside on the streets and my advisor supported that view. When I was arguing with my advisor, a woman colleague also supported my advisor's view by saying that pregnant women should not show their belly in public that much. I had to fight over such issues many times. (P21)

These are just a few illustrations of how we, women, try to defend our rights and survive in the academia when we are not supported much by the management or by other colleagues. Most of these struggles are daily, and it is clear how much these affect our quality of production and peace of mind. As Deniz Kandiyoti mentions, we employ patriarchal bargains to create a safe environment for ourselves, which can also be witnessed in the participants' narratives. These bargains include various strategies such as knowing their limits and not asking for more, changing their personality and acting strict in certain cases, standing strong against all the problems, and sometimes even leaving the institution or academia. These patriarchal bargains are necessary for us to be able to survive in the gendered higher institutions; yet it can also be seen that sometimes the bargains do not work and some women leave their position in the production of knowledge. In order for

these issues to be solved as effectively as possible, one important step would be, as the participants also mentioned, to include more women and more equity in the decision-making processes.

### **3.2.6. The Administrative Problems and Decision-Making Processes**

As statistical figures also demonstrate, women are still underrepresented in the higher positions in the managerial hierarchy and the number of women decreases dramatically in the academic titles such as associate professor or professor. There are many reasons behind the halt in women's academic career such as family responsibilities, having children, glass ceiling effect, or being excluded from the male-dominated positions; and sometimes many of these coexist. The stories of the participants reveal that having more women in the power positions allow women to solve their issues more easily and to create a more peaceful working environment.

I consider myself very lucky in terms of my working environment. I work with a sensitive dean and colleagues. They did everything they could to support me when I had my child. For instance, I had to go to a conference in another city and we all worked together to find a way to take care of my child. But the important thing here is to have conscious people around. (P15)

I am currently experiencing mobbing from my head of department. Women academics must contact the management for issues like mobbing or others. The level of this mobbing is increasing day by day even though it has been proven that he was wrong. I wanted to discuss this with someone from the rectorship. Nobody agreed to see me. Now I have started a disciplinary action against him. What really bothered me was that every single person I had to talk to in the higher management was a man. I faced a lot of implications that I should just play along and assume a humble attitude. I was told not to exaggerate the situation. I know that they could never do this to another male academic. Right now, things are somehow on

track, but that is only because I have legal support from my lawyer; there had to be another patriarchal authority for them to take me seriously. (P19)

Women who have made it to the higher positions keep experiencing problems in the decision-making processes as well. As someone in a lower managerial position, I sometimes find it quite challenging and exhausting to communicate work-related issues to the men in the other administrative positions, but I can clearly see a difference in the attitude when my partner, with whom I work together, try the same thing. Thus, for many women including myself, it is a constant fight to pave a way into the male-dominated system to be considered accountable and to be listened to. Only in cases where there are many women in the higher positions do women feel more comfortable in making progress in their emancipation.

Especially the administrative staff who are not academics, who are not familiar with the work we do show us strange attitudes. For example, once when we were discussing the budget at the center, we couldn't convince this man from the Financial Affairs Office, who obviously found himself young and handsome. It was probably a summer day, and I had a t-shirt and a shirt. After the meeting, my professor said, "If they see your boobs, men won't take you seriously." It was so shocking.

I have witnessed such terrible male managers, those who tried to possess authority over women through sexuality, who turn anything you say into a kind of tension, and I have always had to fight such behaviors at the cost of losing everything. But my fight is very rare; you must have lost your sanity to do such things. Otherwise, you can't do it. (P20)

We are constantly expected to provide reports about women's employment or the data related to better conditions for women to the university, but in practice, the whole thing evolves around those that the political power defines as "acceptable woman"; only these women are allowed in certain positions. (P21)

Seeing the administrative problems as well as implicit discriminative acts, we arrive at another domain of power in Collins's matrix of domination; *the structural domain of power*. All the remarks of the participants so far reveal that the structure of higher educational institutions is created in such a way that they participate in the reproduction of gender discrimination and male domination. The way that women are not accepted into the higher positions, are not taken seriously even in their own fields of expertise, are excluded from certain activities due to other responsibilities and are exposed to hidden discriminatory discourses provides us with the clear picture of how this matrix of domination is in progress.

These accounts of the participants led to the discussion of another issue in the academic circles, one that I did not have in mind while starting this research but came up in the conversations with women. Some participants had negative and discouraging experiences with other women as well as men in their institutions instead of mutual support and understanding. Thus, women's awareness in gender-related matters and their attitude towards such issues were the other important focal point of my dialogues with the women.

### **3.2.7. Being a Woman or Having a Feminist Perspective?**

Women, oppressed in the patriarchal and hierarchical relationships in the academia and burdened with gender-related, familial, or child-related duties, must find a way to open space for themselves in academia. As shown in statistics, they are occupying more space now; nonetheless, what needs to be improved is the integration of women into administrative and critical positions for decision-making. Although this issue was not directly addressed in the interviews for this research, many participants mentioned two important topics of potential discussion; how women survive in this system and what they do to each other in this fight for endurance. Many participants drew attention to the fact that sometimes women can be very harsh towards each other, and this creates even more anxiety in the workplace since it is harder to confront oppression from someone with whom you share similar difficulties and from whom you seek solidarity. That is why, it is vital to increase the number of women in administrative positions as the first step;



however, it is equally crucial to equip those women with an awareness of gender-related issues and with power to create a support mechanism for all other women.

Some participants were quite clear on the fact that sometimes it is women who create the appropriate environment for oppression and discrimination. For many reasons, those women internalize the patriarchal structure and carry on applying it towards other women.

Those who discriminate towards women and make women serve coffee while treating men nicely are not only male managers; but also, female ones. And when it is another woman who does that, it becomes more personal and hurtful. (P6)

There are two groups of women; those who adapt to the male dominance and adopt patriarchal attitude and those who try to exist with their femininity. The former group have taken over the male rationalism and hierarchy; they are no different from men; they also apply mobbing and belong to the male circle. They can see no problem in making themselves accepted to the patriarchal world at the expense of oppressing women who embrace their femininity, which is more dreadful. (P4)

Sometimes woman academics harm you more than help. Working conditions are a lot better if the women around you are aware of rights and equality, but some women might damage you more than men. You can ignore men, but it is a lot more devastating not to have solidarity among women. Sometimes there is a competition among women about who can do it all better and this damages us. We forget that we are humans. (P7)

The situation is even worse in the universities in small towns. [...] Even though statistically we have as many women as men in our department, I experience mobbing by many of my female colleagues as well. Those who believe that they can only survive if they join the masculine language and domination have transformed in such ways to become a part of the patriarchy. They have normalized so many things that I would never

do such as preparing tea or coffee. Now, the head of the department expects the same things from me too and because I am outside the norm, I face many issues. (P19)

Women also cause problems in the academic environment. They also tend to create an authority in their circles. They go through so much trouble that they develop a sense of dominance towards their work environment consciously or unconsciously. This sometimes turns into a destructive experience for the next generation of women. This kind of harmful environment is created by men and supported by some women. (P20)

Yet, I agree with the participants on the importance of increasing the number of women in the managerial positions that possess certain level of consciousness and sensitivity as the first essential step on our way to liberation. Raising the number of women might not lead to immediate transformation of the work environment, however, it is an inevitable step in generating equity and turning the institution into an oppression-free workplace. This makes sense considering that most of the institutions in my research which support the improvement of the environment for women's freedom include women in the critical positions in the management. However, it is still crucial to make sure that these women in power are knowledgeable about gender discrimination and can act upon these issues. Another important part of this transformation is men; thus, it is equally important to raise awareness and consciousness towards gender issues among men.

In our institution, there is a woman dean who takes part in the decision-making process and she is conscious about gender equality and discriminative acts; therefore, a potential problem can be avoided before it occurs. It is highly effective to have such a person in critical positions. [...] In most places, the administrative body is still occupied mostly by men. It is vitally important that women take part in administration, but women who are aware of gender-related issues and who can identify discriminative behaviors, who own power to articulate problems without fear. For the

current problems, all we can do is ignore them because we don't know what might happen if we complain to the higher management. What constitutes as a discriminative behavior should be identified clearly in an institution; if it is unclear, it decreases productivity. This unclarity also creates a blurry space and you never know what will happen when you make a complaint. (P3)

Undeniably, it is very important to increase the number of women in managerial positions, but quantity by itself is not enough. Quantity is the first step in order to give women their human rights of equality in a workplace. It is also understandable why some women adopt male language and behaviors; they need to prove themselves and be taken seriously in a *man's world* and any mistake will be related to their identity as a woman. [...] On the other hand, the real difference in that power position can be made by women who have the consciousness of gender equality. (P9)

The women in a higher position must have the power and consciousness to stop these disturbances which make you feel worthless and make you question your qualifications. We need to have a woman manager who knows what women are facing and how to deal with these fairly. Of course, it is extremely difficult for such women to gain power in administration. For example, they did everything they could not to let me become the head of the department because they knew I would not ignore these problems. (P12)

In taking part in administrative duties or higher positions, women are affected by the imposter syndrome which is the constant feeling of "not enough". I used to feel that a lot when I first started teaching, like I didn't deserve my position. This is something that we learn and internalize as we grow up. [...] Unquestionably, to fight these kinds of psychological burden, the number of women in administration needs to rise; but also, those women should be self-confident and must adopt an egalitarian approach. (P15)

Numbers do not always guarantee a feminist perspective. If someone has a patriarchal mind, that continues the same way. But still, studies show that there are some critical thresholds. One woman cannot do much in the management; 2 women can mix things up, but 3 and more women come with their experience and standpoint. That experience, even if they do not possess a feminist standpoint, allows them to understand you better when you are seeking some solutions to some problems. (P16)

Ours is quite a male-dominated university. Women are minority and their number must be increased, which we will include in our gender equality plan. We are still quite far from having equal number of men and women primarily in privileged and decision-making positions such as head of departments, deans, rectors etc. But it is an essential step to recognize this. Having women in the management has a crucial impact on improving the system. Women embrace these issues and fight more. The reason why we can work on a gender equality plan and a center is because of the few women in the management, which showed us the importance of having more women in administrative positions. (P22)

Based on these annotations about the nature of the relationship among women in academia, one can easily recognize the growing need for more unity and harmony among women and more support towards one another. This brings us to the last domain of power in the matrix of domination by Collins; *the interpersonal domain of power*, which is perhaps the most difficult one to cope with since it means that each of us, despite being knowledgeable about gender-related issues, still might embody an oppressor within ourselves that we are not even aware of. We all soak up the dominant ideas and patriarchal judgments in this society; thus, it is a lot harder than it seems to get rid of that piece of patriarchal structure within us. These embedded social constructs might have quite a negative impact on our daily interpersonal relationships with others.

Statistics show that the number of women in administrative positions is quite low and thus, one of the most important steps to equality is the incorporation of women into those positions; but that is just the beginning. The core issue here is to equip those women with the necessary power and tools to become egalitarian leaders who are aware of gender-related problems and who can take necessary actions in order to stop them.

## CONCLUSION

*I started understanding sexism in my 40s. This is a topic that we are not quite aware of. I am not sure if there is one woman who would claim that she has never experienced any verbal or sexual abuse in the academia in Turkey. And all women have their own strategies. When it is so hard to be a woman in Turkey, you cannot expect it to be easy to be a woman in academia. Now, women are more conscious, and they are helping the new generation of women. Thus, solidarity really matters.*

Participant 20

In April 2022, Times Higher Education announced its annual ranking based on how universities are contributing to gender equality<sup>84</sup>. Some of their criteria are the existence of research about gender, school policies about gender equality, recruitment and promoting women etc. Only one institution from Turkey is in top 100 universities in the ranking for gender equality. Furthermore, the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 also provides insight into the situation in Turkey from a wider perspective as it focusses on gender equality in four different areas<sup>85</sup>. According to the report, in the global index, Turkey has dropped 3 rankings down in the last 3 years, from 130<sup>th</sup> to 133<sup>rd</sup>. These reports clearly prove that the gender gap is widening in Turkey, and a lot more needs to be done to create a more discrimination-free world for individuals in our workplaces.

One of the most important steps to take is to define what constitutes as gender inequality and clarify it as much as possible in order to form effective policies. As can be seen in the participants' accounts in my research, there are certain remarks that recur when asked about gender discrimination; however, the grey areas such as jokes in conversations or prejudice in duty distribution differ from person to person. While some women consider it unthoughtful and

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<sup>84</sup> Times Higher Education, *Top Universities for Tackling Gender Equality*, April 2022, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/top-universities-tackling-gender-equality?fbclid=IwAR1wiRYqScJLbf17cXIRQP4NKYZfb7F0177gHOCKetrUtacpizNpFsl2UJw>.

<sup>85</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, 10.

discriminative to have a meeting in the evening or to be mocked about being bossy; others might consider these *normal* and ignore them because they have been taught to do so and are unable to recognize the patterns of oppression. Hence, it is greatly vital to increase the awareness of gender equality so that women can identify these problems, can act on them, and can arrive at a consensus to support each other. What is more, it is also crucial to define gender related discriminative behaviors so that institutions can produce necessary policies accordingly. Otherwise, how can we insist on producing a policy for something that does not exist in the eyes of the management?

As the participants indicate, discriminative acts nowadays have a new form unlike the ones in the past. They are not carried out explicitly; they rather take place implicitly and under the radar. There are still institutions where women might experience overt discrimination; but these are, as participants claim, traditional institutions and the pattern is changing as older academics retire and the younger generation take over. All participants, on the other hand, stated that they have experienced gender discrimination covertly at some point in their academic careers; in decision making about who will attend or manage a project or conference, in discourses in meetings, in complaints and offering ideas etc. This shows that discrimination shows itself mostly in discourse under the mask of joking or complimenting. Even though there seems to be no problem at first glance, deeper analysis shows that women are not informed about the meetings, they are not taken seriously when they suggest an idea, they are mocked if they identify themselves as a feminist, they are joked about being too bossy, judged about being too nice, warned about being too friendly or ignored totally.

Women occupy various subject positions in a workplace just like in the society; they are wives, mothers, single, divorced, wearing a headscarf etc. All these different identity roles affect the prejudgments about women and the expectations from them, which in turn influence others' relationships with them together with their academic productivity. According to the participants, women cannot escape from certain assumptions and reactions whether they are mothers or not. For

mothers, childcare doubles the burden on their shoulders and they are usually obliged to slow down their academic progress or participate less in academic activities. As for single or divorced women, on the one hand, they are generally lectured about the importance of marriage; on the other hand, they are expected to devote all their time to academic duties as if they have no personal life.

In terms of creating equity for women, daycare centers at universities and lactation rooms are the most mentioned support systems that will ease women's burden. These issues are being discussed in some institutions; however, there are still financial and administrative barriers in front of them. Women, when they decide to have children, accept the fact that their lives will totally change, and they will have to decelerate their academic careers. This affects not only the others working in the institution with more workload, but also women's chances to be accepted to a position, as managers often prefer men who do not have to worry about pregnancy or childcare responsibilities. Most women are supported by their mothers in the childcare process, which reveals the fact that it is another woman who supports them in the most difficult periods of their lives. Therefore, if institutions want to adopt a gender-equal approach and policy, they must start with opening childcare services and lactation rooms in the workplace; not only for mothers; but also, for fathers.

For many participants, the main reason behind not having a gender-equal environment was because of the unbalanced number of women and men in the higher managerial positions. There are several factors that influence women's inability to obtain higher positions. In the institutions where male culture is highly dominant, it is almost impossible for women to attain any administrative duties; as some of the participants also explained, the regulations and policies in such institutions are arranged in a way to exclude women; besides, generally men councils manage such institutions where women are not even notified about the flow of information. In some other cases, women cannot even think about applying to such positions due to family or childcare responsibilities; the imposter syndrome leads to the feelings of incompetence, irritation, and discouragement. That period



in individuals' lives are usually the times when they get married and have children; however, the issue here is that women's lives change and halt for a long time while men never experience such problems due to marriage-related changes. Thus, the patriarchal culture that still attributes home-related responsibilities only to women must transform and the necessary policies at the institutions must be created to give women the required environment and support to be able to make academic production.

Another implication from the research was that women need more unity among themselves. Some participants asserted that they were sometimes more assisted by male academics who have internalized a feminist perspective and lifestyle than female academics who have adopted a masculine standpoint. There might be a number of reasons why some women become a part of the dominant patriarchal system. The number of women in higher decision-making positions is extremely low, which shows that it is really tough to obtain a position and survive there. Some women might see adopting masculine behaviors and discourses as the only option to become a part of the man's world. Another reason might be that women also grow up in this society with these cultural norms. Just as bell hooks explains,

Because women's liberation has been equated with gaining privileges within the white male power structure, white men have dictated the terms by which women are allowed entrance into the system. One of the terms male patriarchs have set is that one group of women is granted privileges that they obtain by actively supporting the oppression and exploitation of other groups of women.<sup>86</sup>

It would be unfair to expect women to start applying a feminist perspective in their lives in one day; transformation takes time, and we tend to forget how difficult it must be to accept your femininity, to exist with that identity, to go against the expectations from you and to be who you want to be in this society. As stated in the

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<sup>86</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 156.

report “Women’s Participation in High-Level Decision Making” by *TESEV* (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation), most women with a consciousness of equality assert that they have witnessed equality at some point in their families:

The large majority [women in high-level positions] tell us that they have been very lucky with their family because it was here that they saw gender equality in action, transformed their freedom into confidence and were offered opportunities in their education. Here, they tell us about their uneducated mother who supported her daughter’s education, their father who did not pick favorites [...]<sup>87</sup>

Even the most educated woman can bear feelings of *not enough*; the emotional states of guilt and shame are taught to girls at a young age by cultural norms. Unless women are lucky to witness equality in their families and upbringing, it would be too much to expect them to forget all the things they have internalized throughout their lives and change overnight. What we need is to support these women and provide them with confidence and trust. So as to do that, more women with gender consciousness and feminist perspective must occupy critical senior positions in academia so that they can increase visibility, and use this power to take actions for equality, to be an example for all women academics and students and to create solidarity among women. It is highly crucial to raise the number of women in higher levels in academia; that is a part of human rights for women, and it has been accomplished by some women in some institutions in Turkey. These improvements in the policy making process can be taken as successful examples; one thing in common in those institutions is that fact that the developments are made possible by women (and men) who can identify discrimination and gendered bias; and similarly, individuals who can employ a feminist approach need to take the higher positions to utilize their power to achieve such changes since sometimes a woman

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<sup>87</sup> Itr Akdoğan, *Women’s Participation in High-Level Decision Making*, 35.

manager with a masculine patriarchal approach might become a part of the problem-making process.

Overall, the stories of my participants along with my own experiences reveal that as in the society and in many professions, women still experience gender-based discrimination in academia. Women's narratives show what kind of patriarchal bargains they employ when fighting the male-domination in the academic society. Looking from their standpoint and based on their remarks, it is clear that the matrix of domination that Collins uses for African American women exists in the academic institutions in Turkey with a different face; the structural, hegemonic, disciplinary and interpersonal domains of power are still existent in the higher educational institutions. The crucial point to consider is that these domains of power do not function as explicitly as before; domination is more implicit and harder to name and fight against. That is why women need even more solidarity and awareness now than before to acquire their emancipation in their process of knowledge production.

Women occupy various subject positions in the institutions based on their marital status, class, ethnicity and religious choices. As Audre Lorde states,

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's acceptable women [...] know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths.<sup>88</sup>

Likewise, the intersection of these identities creates challenges for women daily; in the policies, in the language used, as sexual harassment or as a psychological burden, which require solidarity and peace with our differences in order to overcome these obstacles. It is critical to understand how women position themselves in these challenges of the patriarchal system and how they contribute to

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<sup>88</sup> Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

scientific knowledge under these pressures. This is the reason why I decided to utilize a feminist standpoint in my research and analysis; the standpoint of women and a feminist research method provided me with a more in-depth understanding of the current situation in the academic institutions.

The results of this research coincide with the results of two mind-opening reports published this year in 2019. *TESEV*'s report on women's integration into decision-making positions states that all women in higher positions have worked incredibly hard, mostly a lot more than their male coworkers, and have faced a lot of difficulties known as glass ceiling effect and still kept pushing passionately.<sup>89</sup> The same report asserts that women have been supported by some male coworkers who embrace gender equality whereas not much aid was provided by some women who adopt masculine values of dominance. According to the recent report prepared by Sabancı University Gender and Women's Studies Center of Excellence and Research Worldwide İstanbul<sup>90</sup>, women academics with a feminist perspective who occupy a higher position mostly use this power to produce gender equality policies in their institutions and they use the gender equality report by the Higher Education Council<sup>91</sup> as a legal basis in order to explain why gender studies are important in an institution and to encourage people to support such activities.

As this research and the other reports suggest, women need more visibility in higher decision-making positions in order to solve gender related problems. Attaining such positions is hard and full of obstacles for women; however, the more women with a feminist perspective enter, the smoother it will become. One of the most important steps to take seems to be increasing awareness of gender equality among both women and men and providing both academics and students with an opportunity to understand and apply the feminist approach in their lives. Prejudgments and expectations about being a woman, which Virginia Valian calls

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<sup>89</sup> İtir Akdoğan, *Women's Participation in High-Level Decision Making*, 37.

<sup>90</sup> Göker and Polatdemir, "Türkiye'de Yüksek Öğretim Kurumlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Mekanizmaları," 22.

<sup>91</sup> The report has been removed from the Higher Education Council's website. To see the report, please see Göker and Polatdemir, "Türkiye'de Yüksek Öğretim Kurumlarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Mekanizmaları," Ek 3.

*gender schemas*<sup>92</sup>, need to be challenged and changed. These gender schemas, which affect people's perceptions of genders, accumulate disadvantages for women and advantages for men. The important point here is that women as well as men possess these gender schemas, especially if they have been raised in a traditional environment. That is to say, we, women, also sometimes apply the same prejudgments about our coworkers unconsciously.

In order to break such gender schemas and minimize the traces of gender-based expectations or obstacles, more action plans need to be applied at higher education institutions such as opening gender equality courses, giving seminars to students, academics, and other administrative staff, creating support webs for women, opening units to fight gender-related discrimination and harassment, opening day care centers and lactation rooms and many more depending on the needs of the women in academia. Most importantly, what forms discriminative acts should be clarified, action plans should be sustainable and permanent, women (and men) should be provided with the consciousness of gender equality and the ways of solving those problems. EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) states three objectives to promote gender equality in research and innovation; “fostering equality in scientific careers, ensuring gender balance in decision-making processes and bodies, and integrating the gender dimension in research and innovation content.”<sup>93</sup> As they suggest, one of the most essential tools in creating a non-violent and non-discriminatory environment and in achieving these objectives is to make a Gender Equality Plan that defines gender discrimination and identifies strategies demolish the destructive masculinized atmosphere. That way, women can/should be informed about their rights as individuals and about the fact that they are not the only ones to take care of the children and to clean the house; men are there not to *help* them but to *share* the responsibilities. All in all, academia embraces the *matrix of domination* with all four domains of power; women still confront many

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<sup>92</sup> Virginia Valian, “Beyond Gender Schemas: Improving the Advancement of Women in Academia,” *NWSA Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 208-211.

<sup>93</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, *Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) Tool* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016): 6.

challenges on a daily basis and more needs to be done so that, as in a participant's words, "women are not obliged to remember that they are women all the time." (P13)

Who produces and validates knowledge has been determined for a long time by a small elite group of men, and "feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics that underlie what counts as knowledge."<sup>94</sup> In this research, I tried to produce knowledge based on women's stories, dialogues and witness accounts and tried to challenge the power dynamics that define certain ways of knowledge production as the only approach to arrive at truth. As Dorothy E. Smith clearly demonstrates,

The standpoint of women situates the inquirer in the site of her bodily existence and in the local actualities of her working world. It is a standpoint that positions inquiry but also has no specific content. Those who undertake inquiry from this standpoint begin always from women's experience as it is for women. We are the authoritative speakers of our experience. [...] In making the everyday world problematic, we also problematize the everyday localized practices of objectified forms of knowledge organizing our everyday worlds.<sup>95</sup>

The significant of this research can be seen more clearly considering the current political climate in Turkey and in the world. It is not a coincidence that the form of discrimination has transformed into such implicit oppression in such a climate of increased unnamed discrimination, not only against women but also queer lives. I believe these women's experiences in the academic world go beyond the scientific world and gain a larger significance in the current gendered sociopolitical climate in Turkey. I believe that we, women, go through such increased level of discrimination not on the surface but overtly in Turkey in 2022 due to the changes in the society, such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention [*İstanbul Sözleşmesi*], the increased number and brutality of violence

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<sup>94</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 273.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power*, 28.

against women, the misogynistic attitudes of the radical religious groups and the political tension of the pre-election period. With a closer look at the tendency towards more totalitarian regimes and leaders in the world on the one hand and the active and effective fights of the women organizations on the other, we can easily see the correlation between the rise of women's voices and the masculinity crisis that tries to silence it.

With this study, I hoped to delve into the everyday practices and challenges of women through their stories with their words so that we can witness the unspoken truth in their daily struggles in academia in Turkey in this sociopolitical climate. By problematizing the normalized oppression and discriminative behavior, I hope to get closer to a more peaceful future for the women trying to share their truth and validate their knowledge without any constraints and to liberate themselves from the patriarchal domination.

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**ANNEX I – INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**İSTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY**

**CULTURAL STUDIES MASTER’S PROGRAM**

**THESIS RESEARCH**

**Informed Consent Form**

**The Research Paper:** The Gender of Academia: The Invisible Gender  
Discrimination in the Production of Knowledge in Turkey

**Researcher:** Ebru Asal

**Section 1: Information About the Research**

Dear volunteer,

You are invited to the interview organized by Ebru Asal for the master’s thesis “The Gendered Academia” for the Cultural Studies Master’s Program at İstanbul Bilgi University. Before agreeing to participate in this study, you need to understand why the research is conducted and make your decision in the light of this freely. Please read the following information carefully, feel free to contact the researcher for further questions and to ask for detailed answers.

**The Content and Purpose of the Research**

Gender discrimination has always been present and felt in Turkey just like in many other parts of the world. Since academia cannot be free from the outside world, many types of gender discrimination manifest themselves in the academic world as well. The aim of this research is to understand whether women are discriminated against in the process of production of knowledge in the academia; and if they are, what kind of problems they face. According to the latest statistics, the number of women in academia is increasing day by day; however, whether this number guarantees a peaceful working environment that is free from gender or not is one of the primary questions of this study.

## **The Method**

The research involves in-depth interviews with woman academics. It will be carried out in the departments of Social Sciences in multiple universities in Turkey.

Each participant will be asked 6 questions. Before the interviews, the participants are welcome and encouraged to ask any questions regarding the research. The questions are about women's perspectives on gender discrimination in academia, whether they encounter any problems in their workplace and in the process of the production of knowledge and if they do, what kind of problems these are. The interviews will take place in the environment of the participant's choice and there will be no third parties during the interviews (except in situations when the participants themselves want the presence of others.) The interviews will take place once and will be recorded. The names of the universities and the participants will be kept anonymous during the recording and in the research paper. The recordings will be destroyed 3 months after the research is finalized.

## **Conditions and Volunteering**

The only condition for women to participate in this research is to be actively working in an academic institution. The participation is 100% voluntary. The decision to take part in the research belongs to the participant free of any external effects. Despite agreeing to participate, the subjects can withdraw from the study at any moment.

## **Risks**

As a result of the nature of the study, some questions might require personal or confidential information to be shared or might make the participants feel uncomfortable. The participants have the right to skip any questions if they do not feel comfortable enough to answer.

## **Benefits**

The study might not be of any direct use for you; however, your participation is of great importance to identify the problems that women face in the workplace, to prevent these problems in the future and to create a healthy and peaceful academic environment free of gender discrimination.

## **Sharing the Results**

If you would like to be informed about the results of the study, you can write your email address below. I can share a sample of the paper once it has been completed.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Contact**

If you have any questions or have additional comments after completing the interview, you can always contact me via my email address or phone number.

## **Section 2: Approval**

I have read (or have listened to) the information regarding the research. I have asked my questions and have received satisfying answers. I confirm that I have understood all the explanations conveyed to me written or orally. I have been provided with enough time to decide if I want to participate or not.

Under these circumstances, I hereby declare that I give my consent, without any external pressure, that my answers in the interview can be used for scientific purposes, can be presented and published following the regulations of confidentiality.

Name/Surname of the Participant:

Date:

Signature:

## **ANNEX II – RESULT OF EVALUATION BY THE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.