



Legato and the Practices of “Sexual Literacy” in Turkey

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This article discusses the practices of sexual literacy by two members of Legato (the collegiate Lesbian and Gay Association) in Istanbul, Turkey, through the perspectives of gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies. The discussion reveals that sexual literacy is community-based. Therefore, the complex and conflicting notions of community, as inflected by the politics of place and use, are essential for theorizing present and future configurations of sexual literacy in different ways. The conclusion provides suggestions for further research and some thoughts about ways of incorporating pedagogical understandings of how literacies are (self) initiated and acquired, in community-based literacy education.

In *Literacy, Sexuality, and Pedagogy*, Jonathan Alexander defines “sexual literacy” as being “much more than just *knowledge* about sex and sexuality; it should also be an *intimate understanding of the ways in which sexuality is constructed in language and the ways in which our language and meaning-making systems are always already sexualized*” (18; emphasis in original). Starting from this definition, I pose this main question: which practices constitute sexual literacy; in other words, how does it manifest itself in practice? I attempt to answer this question in the context of Legato in Turkey. LEGATO, the acronym for LEzbiyen GAY TOplulugu (Lesbian and Gay Association), a collegiate student group that organized through the Internet, mainly using Yahoo! mailing lists,¹ was established to connect lesbian and

1 To provide a brief background, the first two LGBT advocacy organizations



gay college students and promote the establishment of lesbian and gay student clubs in Turkish colleges and universities. In this essay, I focus on individual practices of sexual literacy in the context of Legato through qualitative, interview-based case studies of two Legato members' literacy practices in Istanbul, Turkey. I present their narratives of sexual literacy and discuss the findings through three established perspectives from literacy studies: gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies. This discussion reveals that sexual literacy is community-based. Therefore, the complex and conflicting notions of community (e.g., on/offline, familial, local/regional, international, religious, and gender and sexuality-based), as inflected by the politics of place and use, are essential for theorizing present and future configurations of sexual literacy in different ways. I conclude with suggestions for further research and some thoughts about ways of incorporating resultant pedagogical understandings of how literacies are (self) initiated and acquired, in service and other community-based literacy learning endeavors.

Two Legato Members' Narratives of Sexual Literacy

In my study of Legato members' literacy practices, I interviewed individual Legato members about their practices. Eleven people, seven males and four females, aged 20 to 27 participated in this study. At the time of the interviews in 2003, they were living in Istanbul and were current or former students who were involved with Legato during their

were established in the largest cities in Turkey: Lambda Istanbul in Istanbul in 1993 and Kaos GL in 1994 in Ankara. By the middle of the 1990s, Kaos GL had helped college students organize on two university campuses in Ankara. Despite these efforts, the Turkish LGBT movement struggled to broaden its scope to include larger populations, since these organizations could not connect to lesbian and gay students across the nation due to the lack of channels to convey the knowledge and political position they had accumulated. In the late 1990s, with the advent of computer technologies in Turkey, a few local lesbian and gay student groups began using Yahoo! Groups to spread the word about forming similar groups in other Turkish universities and organized under the name Legato. Widening the scope of the Turkish LGBT cause, this development ultimately led to the formation of a lesbian and gay student culture at universities across the nation, all linked through Yahoo! mailing lists, connecting them with pre-existing LGBT subcultures and with Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL (for more information on Legato, please refer to Gorkemli).



undergraduate studies. I found the participants of this study through e-mail correspondence and face-to-face contacts. These methods of finding participants for the study, which took place in Istanbul due to temporal and financial constraints, led to a geographically homogeneous participant pool. In addition, since all of the participants are Legato members and membership requires former or current affiliation with a university and access to computers and the Internet, all of them have had access to computers one way or another, whether at home or school, or both, as in the case of the two participants I discuss in this article. Thus, the participants, who are representative of the Legato population in the urban environment of Istanbul, should not be viewed as representative of the entire Turkish lesbian and gay population.

During the interviews, which ranged in length from ninety minutes to three hours, I asked the participants a number of questions about their literacy practices. Participant responses are presented here in third person and include portions of text translated directly from the transcribed interviews, which I conducted entirely in Turkish. The participants' first-person statements and various unique descriptions are placed in double quotation marks. All names used are pseudonyms. Due to the lack of space here, the case studies of two participants, Bilal and Nalan, are featured. Bilal and Nalan were chosen because, out of all the interviews conducted, theirs demonstrate the largest variety of literacy practices.

Bilal

Bilal was twenty-three years old at the time of the interview. He talked about one of his first encounters with gay characters on TV as he watched the American film *Philadelphia* (1993). Realizing the possibility of being a homosexual without being effeminate, he recalled viewing the characters in the film as "rôle models":



[The film] provided an example for me. The two characters there were quite masculine, and they had exactly the kind of ideal relationship I dreamt of having. I was like, 'OK, I want something like this. There are examples of it in the world; I am not alone.' This was helpful in this respect. The following stage is the search: 'OK, there are such people, but how can I find them?' That was the problem: I didn't know how to find them. And chat helped me out with that (Bilal).

After Bilal's parents bought him a computer with a modem, he started chatting online; he found out about gay.com during a chat session. After he had chatted online for about six months, he started meeting people offline. This is his description of how he felt after meeting a person, with whom he chatted online, for the first time:

I actually realized that what we call a homosexual is not someone out of this world, an alien. After this, I felt encouraged; gradually, I started meeting more people. As I met people, the number of gay people I knew increased. This is very different compared with high school; some find out and join Legato as they search online, whereas it wasn't like that for me. One of my friends was in Legato, and he asked me to become a member. So, I joined Legato after forming a circle of friends (Bilal).

As of 2003, Bilal was a member of three Legato Yahoo! Groups: Legato Ortak Liste (the shared Legato group that connected all Legato members at different colleges through one mailing list), Legato Istanbul (an online group for lesbian and gay students at Istanbul University), and Legato Platform, a Yahoo! group for those interested in Legato regardless of their sexual orientation, age, occupation, or other descriptors (Legato members in Istanbul gave him the task of establishing and moderating this online group). He was subscribed to Ortak Liste after the first Legato meeting he attended at Café Dezanj in downtown Istanbul, where a sign-up sheet was passed around for those



who wanted to become a Legato member through joining Legato Ortak Liste at Yahoo! Groups. Since he was a student at Istanbul University, they also added him to Legato Istanbul. At the time of our interview, he was the moderator of this online group.

Initially, Bilal found Legato Ortak Liste very educating since it not only provided an archive of previous messages, but also served as a forum where longtime members educated newcomers about various issues. Over time, as he developed offline community connections, his use of the list changed, and he found it less educating and mostly informative, providing for communication between members in different cities. In addition to its online presence, Bilal also liked Legato's face-to-face reading groups where attendees, all Legato members, read and discussed articles on LGBT² issues. As a senior in the Department of Natural Resources Engineering at Istanbul University, Bilal said,

I didn't have anything to do with or any knowledge about social issues, for instance, the articles published on minorities. I think I couldn't even find them even if I did research. For instance, there was a friend majoring in sociology and another majoring in philosophy, and they would bring articles. I read those articles, and this was my break; perhaps Legato pushed my perspective on homosexuality ten years forward. I mean perhaps it would have taken me ten years to get my present thoughts if hadn't joined Legato at all (Bilal).

In the forums, whether online or offline, he accessed through Legato, Bilal says he also discovered that he had an internalized homophobia toward what he calls "effeminate" gay people and transsexuals. By spending time with the variety of people he met while setting up booths and participating in other such community activities, he says, he realized why he should not hate them and how they all work for the same cause.



Nalan

Nalan, a self-identified bisexual female participant, was twenty-two years old when she was interviewed. She was a student at the Department of Electronics Engineering at Istanbul Technical University (ITU). She recalled that when she realized that she was different, she started searching to discover “if there were people like me” (Nalan). As part of this research, Nalan looked at mass media and books, and read whatever resources she could access, such as sexual psychology books. Concerning the results of her research, Nalan said, “Ultimately, we live in a predominantly Muslim country. While so much attention was paid to men, women’s sexual orientation was not discussed much out in the open. But I realized same-sex male orientation was viewed very negatively. I thought things shouldn’t be this way, but what people thought didn’t bother me much” (Nalan). Nalan came out to her friends in high school, and they were “OK with it.” However, like Bilal, she was not out to her family.

In college, Nalan gained access to a larger collection of books in her college’s library and read about topics such as lesbianism from a philosophical perspective. This was also when she found out about LGBT history abroad, specifically Stonewall in the United States. When she started college, Nalan got her first computer and “met the Internet” for the first time. She looked for lesbian chat rooms and started chatting with people online. She also did research on websites and found escinsellik.net, a Turkish website on homosexuality, through search engines.

Nalan found out about Legato for the first time in 1998-99. At the time, there was a lesbian and gay student group only at Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara. When she did a web search again later, she learned that Legato had spread to other universities, as well. Nalan joined Legato in her sophomore year in 2000-01; she located and joined online Legato groups on Yahoo! Groups. At the time of our interview, she was subscribed to two online groups: Legato



ITU (Istanbul Technical University) and Legato Ortak Liste (the general mailing list). At the beginning, she would send many messages, participating in discussions about what to do, where to go, and other such queries regarding initial Legato meetings. This changed later; she continued checking the e-mail from the mailing list every day, but without sending as many messages as at the beginning. She read what she considered important, including messages about controversial topics, such as whether bisexuality exists.

At a meeting that involved all Legato groups at universities in Istanbul, Nalan met some of her friends from elementary school and high school. One of her elementary school friends was attending Bogazici University, and Legato Bogazici was one of the most active Legato groups in Istanbul; as a result, Nalan began attending Legato Bogazici meetings. Following Legato Bogazici as a model, Nalan and her friends at Istanbul Technical University (ITU) decided to organize Legato ITU meetings on the ITU campus. Nalan had a friend prepare the fliers, and she posted them on campus. At their first meeting, only Nalan and one other person came. Later, more people (as many as seven) attended the meetings.

When the founder of the general Legato mailing list became too busy at work, he transferred moderator duties for the list to Nalan and two other people. As general moderators, they sent e-mail messages to all members of the group about such topics as coming out; finding friends at college; preparing, photocopying, and posting Legato fliers on campus; and placing Legato fliers in books on sexuality in college libraries. In addition to participating in Legato online groups, Nalan also co-founded Regl, an Internet-based lesbian group with a website and an online forum; joined Bilitis, another Internet-based activist lesbian group in Ankara; and followed the activities of Kaos GL, the LGBT advocacy organization in Ankara, reading its print and online journal, *Kaos GL*.



Nalan found mailing list discussions very useful: “one sees other people’s perspectives. This is very useful, since people are used to seeing things the way they usually do; it is very difficult for a person to see things differently” (Nalan). Nalan said that through her online group connections, she learned more about the lives of students with different interests and backgrounds, such as “humanities majors, how they think, what they do at school, etc... and different family structures, such as weak family bonds, strong ones, and those without families” (Nalan), which widened her horizons and provided her with a sense of future possibilities.

Nalan also visited Es-Alem.com, a Turkish mixed (same-sex and opposite-sex) dating site, where she looked at new profiles and read information. She described herself as “having a penchant for reading information” (Nalan). As for chat, she said she was very eager to chat with everyone in the beginning, but by 2003 she knew enough people and could meet new people through her friends, and so she did not feel the need to talk to strangers through the Internet. She also described herself as an avid follower of LGBT films. She remembered watching movies such as *Stonewall* (1995) and *The Celluloid Closet* (1995) as part of the LGBT advocacy organization Lambda Istanbul’s activities during Gay Pride week. She found out about other LGBT films, such as *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (2000) and *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), through Amazon.com: “For instance, you search for *Lost and Delirious*, a Canadian movie made in 2001, on Amazon. Then you check what other products the buyer of this product preferred. Eight to ten movies appear, and I download them directly from the Internet and watch them” (Nalan). Regarding how she feels about watching such films, she says: “I of course like happy endings. I am either like ‘I hope to turn out like that,’ or about those movies ending with death, I make comments like ‘How stupid is this!? One has to be at peace with oneself.’ So, I like watching those movies” (Nalan).



In the next section, I discuss Bilal and Nalan's practices of sexual literacy from three established perspectives in literacy studies—gateways of literacy, sponsors of literacy, and the accumulation of literacies—within the cultural ecology³ of Turkey as it applies to lesbian and gay literacy practices.

Discussion: Gateways of Sexual Literacy

Selfe, Hawisher, Woodbeck, and Walikainen introduced the concept of *technological gateways*, “the places and situations in which people typically gain access to computers for the purpose of practicing digital literacy” (84). In a later article, Hawisher and Selfe (2006) broadened the concept of gateways to digital literacies: “Schools, homes, and increasingly the Internet itself are primary gateways through which people gain access to digital literacies” (633). Bilal's and Nalan's experiences also reveal that there are multiple gateways of critical sexual literacy: media (television and the Internet) at home and college; campuses; cafes; and the offices of the local LGBT advocacy organizations.

While home has traditionally served as not only a gateway for but also the locus of heterosexual sexual literacy (I will discuss this in more detail in the following sections on accumulation and sponsors of literacy), media at home, such as television and the Internet, served as the first gateways for critical sexual literacy; television provided gay representations, and the Internet helped prove to Bilal and Nalan that they were not alone, that there were indeed people who identified

3 I use the term “cultural ecology” in the same sense as defined by Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, and Pearson: “In foregrounding the significance of multiple contexts for literacy efforts, we hint at the many related factors that shape, and are shaped by, people's adoption of computers as literacy tools and environments: social contexts; educational practices, values, and expectations; cultural and ideological formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and historical and material conditions—among many, many other factors. We refer to these contexts as the *cultural ecology* of literacy and, with this term, we attempt to signal the complex web within which both humans and computer technologies coexist, and all communication takes place” (644).



in similar ways. Once they realized that through search engines and chat, they could meet other lesbian and gay Turks and even reach the established communities, Nalan and Bilal found other online and offline gateways, such as Legato mailing lists, the cafes and university campuses where Legato groups met, and the offices of Lambda in Istanbul, through which they met people, joined communities, and participated in reading groups, film screenings, and discussions on such topics as sexuality, heterosexism, and homophobia.

In addition, these gateways and the community interactions they engaged in through them made both Bilal and Nalan into student activists as they took on community roles as mailing list moderators and campus organizers; in these positions, they engaged in activist initiatives and taught their peers what they learned from Legato peers at other universities. In this manner, Bilal and Nalan's experiences with the gateways of critical sexual literacy led them to maintain and create similar gateways and experiences for others.

Discussion: Sponsors of Sexual Literacy

Brandt (1998) defines sponsors of literacy in this manner:

Any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way ... it is useful to think about who and what underwrites occasions of literacy learning ... Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners. They also represent the causes into which people's literacy gets recruited. (166-167)

Based on this definition, three main sponsors of sexual literacy stand out in Bilal and Nalan's literacy experiences: their families, the Turkish state, and local advocacy organizations, such as Lambda Istanbul, Kaos GL, and Legato as an on-campus student activist group.



The role of their families and the state as sponsors of sexual literacy in both Bilal and Nalan's cases is twofold. On the one hand, their families modeled for them heterosexual behavior and family structure, which are reinforced and promoted in society at large through religious discourses and state policies regarding family values and LGBT activism.⁴ On the other hand, both their families and the state provided, albeit unwittingly, opportunities for them to go beyond the heterosexual model through access to media, such as television and computers at home and on college campuses. For example, Bilal's first encounter with a gay character was through television at home, and later he found out more about homosexuality through the Internet and chat on the computer his family bought for him. As for Nalan, her first encounter with homosexuality was also through the mass media she could access at home and the library at the public university she attended.

While the heterosexist social structure severely limited the discursive possibilities for expressing same-sex desire, it could not make it entirely impossible due to the means of communication available. When Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL were founded at the beginning of the 1990s, they provided further discursive possibilities by ushering in not only Western lesbian and gay discourse, but also human and gay rights discourses about freedom of (sexual and gender) expression. In this manner, both Lambda Istanbul and Kaos GL have served as new sponsors of sexual literacy, encouraging and modeling for individual Turks the critique of heterosexism and promoting a positive view of homosexuality through their print, and later, online publications. Both organizations also promoted lesbian and gay student organizing on college campuses, contributing to the emergence of Legato as a student-led sponsor of sexual literacy; Legato modeled and maintained Kaos

4 Homosexuality has never been illegal in Turkey; however, the increasing visibility of LGBT persons in recent years has led to legal attempts to stop LGBT activism, such as the 2006 court case brought against Lambda Istanbul by the Istanbul mayor's office, which argued that the existence and activities of the organization went against the general morality and family values of Turkish society. The appeals court in Istanbul dismissed the case in 2007. (Kaos GL)



GL and Lambda Istanbul's LGBT critique and activism for students like Bilal and Nalan and their peers at their respective schools.

Discussion: Accumulation of Sexual Literacies

In discussing how literacies accumulate, Brandt (1995) draws attention to:

... latent forms of older, residual literacies that are at play alongside emerging ones. Rapid changes in literacy and education may not so much bring rupture from the past as they bring an accumulation of different and proliferating pasts, a piling up of literate artifacts and signifying practices that haunt the sites of literacy learning. These complicated amalgamations of literacy's past, present, and future help to formulate the interpretive opportunities and complications facing current generations of literacy learners. (665).

In Bilal and Nalan's experiences, their existing sexual literacies—both primary (home) and secondary (religious, medical, and state) dominant discourses⁵ of gender and sexuality—also exist side-by-side their emerging community-based sexual literacies and the social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality.

There are a variety of primary and secondary discourses at work in Bilal and Nalan's processes of coming out to themselves and others, and they illustrate the accumulation of differing strands of sexual literacy in their lives. First, while neither Nalan nor Bilal came from religious families, Islam as a primary discourse at home and

5 I refer here to the social and ideological definition of literacy by Street and the specification of these categories of discourse by Gee, who also defined literacy from a social perspective as "the mastery of or fluent control over a secondary Discourse. Therefore, literacy is always plural: *literacies* (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others)" (529). Gee categorizes discourses as primary versus secondary, and dominant versus non-dominant. Our primary discourse is the one we learn at home; it is what we acquire to understand the world and interact with others. The secondary discourses are those we acquire at various non-home-based social institutions, such as schools, businesses, and religious communities.



a secondary discourse outside home determines attitudes towards homosexuality in most Turkish contexts, whether the people involved practice their religion actively or not. Secondly, when their sons and daughters come out to them, many parents' first reaction is to take them to a psychologist for treatment. And finally, current state challenges to LGBT organizing in Turkey, as in the aforementioned court case brought against Lambda Istanbul, show that sexual orientation is largely perceived negatively in relation to general morality and family values in the society.

While secondary religious, medical, and state discourses influenced Nalan and Bilal's views of homosexuality in general, their influence also varied based on their gender differences. As Nalan commented, "so much attention was paid to men." The most obvious example of this is the denunciation of homosexuality as a sin in the Muslim religious discourse, where male-to-male intercourse is expressly prohibited, with little mention of female-to-female same-sex contact. In terms of the state discourse, all males of age are required by law to serve in the Turkish army while women are not. While the army does not conduct a routine screening for homosexuality, if someone does not want to serve due to sexual orientation, they must provide photographic evidence of receptive (as opposed to insertive) homosexual activity. They must also undergo a set of tests at a military hospital, during which they have to demonstrate that they are indeed homosexual; one of the sure ways of doing so is to affect an "effeminate" demeanor. As a result, for Bilal, the challenge was to prove to himself that he could be a masculine (i.e., "straight-acting") gay man, whereas for Nalan, the challenge was to prove to herself that lesbianism and bisexuality existed, and that, unlike what people thought, "it was not a figment of women's imagination," as a veteran lesbian activist affiliated with Lambda Istanbul once framed the issue during my conversation with her. In facing these related but different challenges during their process of coming out, Bilal and Nalan had to grapple with the aforementioned dominant, anti-homosexual discourses in their lives. Their emerging



community literacies and their learning about the social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality helped them during this process and exercised their literacy skills in new and active ways.

The starting point for their community literacies was the Western representations of homosexuality in mass media and the Internet. Once they confirmed that there are different ways of being a homosexual—being a straight-acting gay man for Bilal, and existing as a lesbian or bisexual for Nalan—activities such as chatting with and meeting like-minded others, finding out about Legato and the existing LGBT advocacy organizations, getting in touch with fellow lesbian and gay college students majoring in different fields, and starting Legato groups on their own campuses, served to introduce them to social constructionist discourses of sexuality, LGBT activism, and diversity within the Turkish LGBT community. This was a tremendous process for both Bilal and Nalan, during which they navigated conflicting discourses of sexuality to emerge not only as activists with increasing literacy in alternative, non-dominant discourses of sexuality and gender, but also as individuals who are able to confront their own homophobia, as in Bilal's case.

Communities of Sexual Literacy and the Politics of Place and Use

The discussion so far illustrates Bilal and Nalan's progression through the gateways, discourses, and practices of sexual literacy; however, a look at the politics of place and use further contextualizes Bilal and Nalan's experiences with their communities of sexual literacy. In an article about his literacy practices while growing up in Nepal, Pandey (2006) discusses the importance of mentioning the politics of use and the politics of place since they "bear significantly on my literate practices in the digital environment" (252). Related to the politics of use, he mentions difficulties with access, language, and computer literacy. Concerning the politics of place, he discusses infrastructure and local political struggles. Bilal and Nalan had access to computers and the Internet at home and college, and as college students living



and attending universities in metropolitan Istanbul, they had ample opportunities to develop digital, print, and foreign language (English) literacies; therefore, the politics of use mostly took the form of how often they chose to use Legato mailing list and chat, while the politics of place mostly took the form of multiple communities and the ongoing conflicts among them regarding homosexuality. As such, the politics of place influenced their sexual literacies more than the politics of use and continued shaping and re-shaping their practices of sexual literacy.

Bilal and Nalan's progression through the gateways of sexual literacy changed their notions and experiences of community from online to offline, altering their politics of use; in the case of the Legato members who did not follow the same progression, however, this posed problems regarding expected Legato outcomes. While media representations on television and the Internet gave them a sense of possibility and hence enabled an imagined identification with Turkish and Western LGBT communities, their online initiatives led to their participation in offline communities in metropolitan Istanbul. In terms of the politics of use, this change of focus from online to offline communities meant a declining use of online forums, such as mailing lists and chat. At the time of our interviews, they were chatting on the Internet less frequently since they had many gay and lesbian friends and acquaintances offline. As for the Legato mailing lists, they continued following them but read only what they considered to be important messages. This change in their politics of use was in line with the larger goals of Legato to use the online venues to recruit students for offline activism; these goals were realized in Nalan and Bilal's cases, partly because living in a big city and attending college facilitated their participation in offline communities. However, the individual politics of use and the goals of Legato did not overlap in the cases of other Legato members, who, due to their location as well as other individual circumstances, continued using online venues and so far chosen not to come out and become activists. As a result, the online community has existed side-by-side the offline one, continuing to provoke controversy



and conflict regarding the goals of the larger Legato group and their feasibility in different individual circumstances *and* different parts of Turkey.

In terms of the politics of place, the transformation of their notions of community from imagined to real and from transnational to national and regional has further diversified Bilal and Nalan's notions of community from its general, everyday sense to more specific meanings based on discourse and academic fields of study. Nalan and Bilal's involvement with campus student groups and local LGBT organizations introduced them to fields of study-specific discourse and activist communities respectively, where they learned that sexuality was a social construct and that heterosexism needed to be confronted through social activist interventions by the community. This social sciences and the humanities-based knowledge of the social constructionist views of sexuality and minority consciousness were major revelations to the two engineering majors, and they both commented on how much they learned from interacting with peers majoring in social sciences and the humanities. The social constructionist discourses of sexuality, however, hardly represents the larger Turkish academic community's view of its LGBT members, calling attention to differences in outlook between the larger academic community and the activist one. For example, when the first LGBT student club in Turkey was allowed at Bilgi University, a private college in Istanbul, the presidents of prominent universities across Turkey responded to the news by stating that they did not have gay students on their campuses and that homosexuality had nothing to do with the educational mission of the institutions of higher education. Such news drew attention to brewing controversies between Turkish academia and campus activists that would only become more visible as students like Nalan and Bilal came out on their college campuses, putting their newly acquired skills of sexual literacy to social activist uses and thus increasing their fluency in social constructionist and activist discourses of sexuality.



Through participation in the non-university activist LGBT communities in Istanbul, Bilal and Nalan's notions and experience of the LGBT community were further refined, calling attention to the LGBT politics of place in Turkey. Prior to the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in Turkey, trans performance and transsexuality were widely known through cross-dressing entertainers and transsexual celebrities on Turkish television. When Bilal and Nalan discovered and identified with "straight-looking" gay and lesbian representations through Western and mostly U.S. media, this propelled their search for others who identified similarly. This search was fulfilled to a certain extent by the Legato student groups they joined; however, on joining the activist non-university LGBT communities through Lambda Istanbul in Istanbul, Bilal met many trans individuals who had been actively involved in the Turkish LGBT movement from the beginning.

Discovering the gender diversity within the LGBT community helped Bilal face his transphobia and attempt to truly embrace the diversity in the community. In Nalan's case, since she identified as bisexual, she had to face the lack of acceptance of bisexuality in the Turkish LGBT community. While participating in both student and community-wide activist groups made them recognize different gender and sexual orientation-based identifications within the Turkish LGBT community, learning about constructionist discourses of sexuality provided them with conceptual tools to negotiate their own place in that community and their relationship to others who identify in different ways.

Despite all the gateways they have passed through, the new practices of sexual literacy they picked up, and the communities they joined, Bilal and Nalan were not out to the one community they were closest to: their families; this is related to the politics of both place and use. As single young adults, both Bilal and Nalan lived with their families. In Turkish culture, it is typical for young adults to continue living with their families until they get married (unless, of course, their profession necessitates that they live in another town or city). As gay and bisexual-identified young adults respectively, this made their access



to technology at home crucial. Both of them had computers and an Internet connection in their rooms, which their families invested in as part of their education and professionalization. In addition, as college students in metropolitan Istanbul, both Bilal and Nalan could easily find and join urban communities. The computer technologies they had access to in their rooms at home, coupled with the urban communities they could access away from home, made it possible for them to express their sexual orientation outside, and act as expected (i.e., heterosexual) at home. Meanwhile, not only the prospect of coming out to their parents, but also, as Nalan mentioned, the future dangers of being out while on the job market or at her workplace loomed large. Such concerns about the larger cultural context added to their reasons for maintaining the status quo at home. In this manner, the politics of place and use were intertwined closely with the communities of sexual literacy. These communities, and the clash among them as it related to homosexuality, continued to shape and reshape Nalan and Bilal's practices of sexual literacy, and determined the extent of their relative fluency in the competing primary and secondary discourses of sexuality that accumulated in their lives.

Conclusion: Present and Future Configurations of Sexual Literacy and Community-Based Literacy Learning

In examining specific practices of sexual literacy by two Turkish college students living in Istanbul at a particular juncture (in summer 2003, when my interviews for this study took place); and drawing on established concepts of gateways, sponsors, and the accumulation of literacies, one can see sexual literacy emerging as a shifting terrain of accumulating practices taking place in multiple, and sometimes conflicting, community contexts and under the influence of multiple community sponsors.

Current scholarship in the studies of hybrid and global literacies and agency (Hawisher and Selfe, 2006; Lee; and Smith) emphasizes getting at the politics of place and use (Pandey, 2006 and 2007) in examining



and explaining how literacies are formed and put to use in unexpected ways in multiple contexts. To sum up how contingencies of place and use influenced Bilal and Nalan's practices of sexual literacy, my analysis shows that differing, and sometimes conflicting, notions and experiences of community further inflect these practices, drawing attention to subtle critical differences concerning communities of sexual literacy to which researchers need to attend actively. In addition, other factors also influenced the results of this study. For example, during participant selection, Nevzat (not his real name), a college friend of mine, helped find most of the participants for the study. Since Nevzat's involvement with Legato in Istanbul included many leadership activities, the participants he helped find for the study, such as Bilal and Nalan, often had interest and involvement in leadership and the use of online venues for offline activism. This, in turn, led to an emphasis on Internet-mediated activism and initiation into established LGBT communities and Legato groups. In a similar manner, the social class and urban location of participants also influenced the results of the study; if Bilal and Nalan were not middle to upper class, and if they were not from metropolitan Istanbul, their sexual literacies may not have been influenced so much by media, and their access to urban LGBT communities would have been limited, leading to entirely different outcomes. Therefore, researchers need to pay close attention to other variables, such as social class, geographical location, and personal interests.

In accordance with participants' interests and the literacy activities they engaged in, the narratives of sexual literacy presented in this article focus mostly on coming out and social activism, and the discussion highlights conflicts between the primary and secondary discourses and the communities to which the participants were exposed. However, there are other influences that narratives of sexual literacy with different emphases may highlight. For example, both Nalan and Bilal mentioned that they use technology for additional purposes: finding partners and dating; Bilal chats on Gay.com, and Nalan goes to Es-



Alem.com, a Turkish dating site. In addition, they said that the media representations they found on TV and the Internet also influenced their feelings regarding their changing sense of who they are and where they belong. As I discussed previously, the mostly straight-looking nature of these representations often underplayed the gender and sexual diversity in LGBT communities, which Nalan and Bilal had to face and negotiate eventually as part of their offline community involvements. Closer examinations of such media venues will probably further reveal consumerist values and other ideologies that might conflict with the social activist values presented in this article. In a media-infused world, it is inevitable that such venues and attendant value-laden representations will shape sexual literacy; therefore, researchers of sexual literacy need to construct alternative narratives that approach sexual literacy not only as social activist narratives of coming out, but also those of erotic practice and affect. Such multiple and conflicting narratives will help better explain present and future configurations of sexual literacy.

Finally, there are pedagogical lessons to be drawn from Nalan and Bilal's experiences and incorporated in service and other community-based literacy learning endeavors: most of their literacies are self-initiated and acquired in multiple contexts outside formal classroom instruction. The continuing conflicts they face due to differences among the communities they belong to are there to stay and will continue further shaping their sexual and other literacies and thus influence the extent of their relative fluency in the competing discourses in their lives. Due to the increasing access to computers and the Internet and the rapid development of social networking websites, students are developing and exercising new literacies of their own as they learn from fellow literacy learners outside the classroom; however, these new literacies do not replace completely the older forms of literacy, leading to an accumulation and sometimes conflicting co-existence of multiple discourses and literacy practices. New generations of literacy learners face this multiplicity of practices and discourses that provide both



interpretive opportunities and challenges, and their success depends on their ability to establish mastery of and fluency in the discourses important for their lives and careers in multiple contexts; therefore, current service and other literacy learning endeavors need to pay attention to this multiplicity so that they can help learners make use of new opportunities and cope with the concomitant challenges. Nalan and Bilal's experiences demonstrate that critical notions of community, as well as a working understanding of how communities influence literacy practices and fluency in discourses through the politics of place and use, are crucial to the effective pedagogical application of the lessons the practices of sexual literacy offer to all educators.



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