Use of Domestic Space & Privacy Practices In the Context of Gender

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The term gender, in feminist literature, is defined as a kind of hierarchical rules system which regulates the status of males and females in a certain cultural context in the society, and it determines their interactions with the others, and also privileges and responsibilities regarding these status of theirs (e.g. Mead, M., 1950). In environmental psychology literature, there are innumerable researches on gender which affect the meaning they attribute to places and the spatial behaviors of people are available. The consensus in this research is the house belongs to females, public space belongs to males: "the female is responsible for intra-family relations and organizing the house; on the other hand public space activities and generating an income are responsibilities of the male" (Hanson, 2010; Quinn, 2010).

One of the basic concepts of our research is privacy. To what extent the privacy, "of private self/of the self/of ourselves will open out on "the others" or "to public" is a process of the control which is regulated over and over again in every different case (Westin, 1970; Altman, 1976; Rapoport, 1982).

In our research, Individualism-Collectivism is used as a mediating conception for assessing domestic usage of space in terms of the gender. According to Hofstede (1991), in cross-cultural psychology literature, the sense of "self", autonomy, emotional dependency, pleasure is being emphasized in individualist societies. As for collectivist societies, the sense of "ourselves", collective definitions, emotional commitment, group solidarity, sharing, duties and responsibilities and group decisions are prioritized. Individuals place importance on group aims before theirs.

AIM: It is aimed to analyze domestic usage of the place of the men and the women in terms of privacy, gender and individualism-collectivism tendencies. Furthermore, the assessment of the males and the female's attribution of meanings towards different parts of the house is one of our objectives.

SAMPLE: For this purpose, in total 27 married couples, 12 singles and 66 participants from middle socio-economic level were interviewed in Izmir, one of three biggest cities in Turkey. The age of participants vary between 24 and 27. 16 female participants are unemployed, 17 of them are employed. There are 28 employees and 6 retired among male participants. Participants are from different professions.

METHOD: In-depth interviews have been made with a semi-structured interview form. After socio-demographic knowledge questions (birthplace, gender, educational level, level of income, ownership status of the house, and profession), some questions about privacy practices regarding to general use of domestic places in the house (has every member of the family got their own room? Where is the shared space of house? Is there a locked place inside house always?) are addressed. Thereafter, on the purpose of understanding how the gender reflects on domestic use of the places some questions (are there any places just belong to men and women in your house?, what are the responsibilities of you and your partner in the house?, When you change the place of a domestic utensil, does your partner realize this change and how do they react it?) are addressed. Finally, the questions which related to their domestic privacy practices (which part of your house is the top secret according to you? In which part of your house you feel most relaxed? What are the positions of the curtains inside the house? Who has the keys of the house? etc···) are wanted to be answered.

Subsequent to these questions, the participants have filled an attitude scale (Göregenli, 1997) associated with their individualism-collectivism tendencies. At the end of the meeting course, the participants are asked to draw cognitive maps of their house. At this stage, a blank page is given to the participants and they are expected to envisage their house and put down what they see freely.

ANALYSIS: At the end of the application, the texts which are gathered from semi-structured interviews, are analyzed with the discourse analysis technique after their transcriptions are being done. The data obtained from individualism-collectivism scale and cognitive maps is being digitized, and then they are analyzed with SPSS Statistical Package Program and suitable statistical methods.

FINDINGS: Domestic use of the places of males and females differs significantly from each other in terms of their gender roles and individualism - collectivism's tendencies. The privacy needs of females are characterized by their collectivist tendencies most of the time, as the privacy needs of males is motivated with their individual tendencies. It is observed that in individualism-collectivism scales, males' total point averages of individualism-collectivism (X=2.94, ss=0.56) are significantly higher than that of females (x=2.60, ss=0.46 in terms of statistics. (t(57)= -2.55, p<.05).

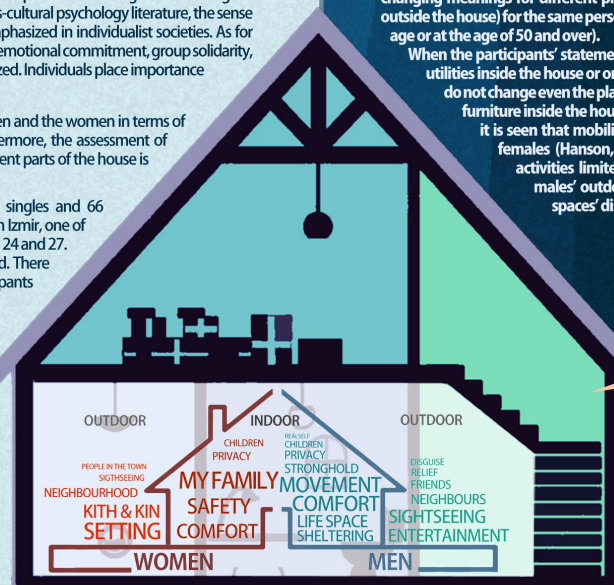
In this context, especially females who are married and in their domestic traditional gender roles are dominant ones are making sense of the privacy with their "domesticity" and they develop spatial behaviors towards conserving this domesticity. On the other hand without relevance to their marital status, males give meanings to privacy on the aspects of "sexuality" and they shape it according to their desires and wishes.

For the female participants who are more interested to make contacts with the others, usually, recalls the same experiences with each others about in and outside of the house. It can be said that the spatial contrast between in and outside of the house is stretched due to the age-associated situations, reduction of mobility among females. In response to this, that contrast gets decreased among the male participants as they get older, and especially at the period of retirement.

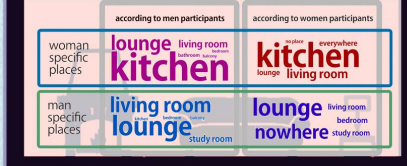
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: The gender ideology creates a dynamic effect on the privacy as in the form of "freedom/obligation" dialectics. The privacy of the male withdraws him from public space makes him free at home. As for the private life of the females at home serves her for becoming a part of the society, and builds herself and her identity, as public acclaims, in domestic relations. On the other respects, for females, the domestic privacy gives an opportunity to share her responsibilities and duties with the other members of the family and to be at ease. In this context, the privacy for females and males acts as a buffer against social oppressions and provides freedom while they interpret social norms.

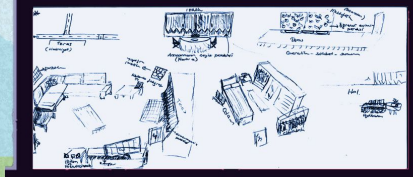
Consequently, the privacy has a dialectic structure (private-public, in-out, identity-togetherness, opening-closing) in terms of its different dimensions. (Altman, 1976) Also, as it is seen in the analyses as the privacy varies among individuals (e.g. gender ideology, individualist-collectivist tendencies), it has changing meanings for different places (e.g. in different parts of the house or inside the house and outside the house) for the same person's aspect and also for different ages (e.g. young under 30 years of age or at the age of 50 and over).

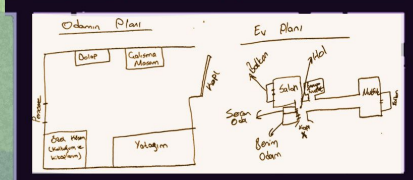
When the participants' statements are assessed, it is seen obviously that females are in charge of utilities inside the house or organization of it generally. Within this context, while males usually do not change even the place of any furniture, females can designate where to locate all of the furniture inside the house. When the gender ideology and spatial dialectics are examined, it is seen that mobility is attributed to the males, while "stability" is attributed to the females (Hanson, 2010). The stability, in one sense, describes females' domestic activities limited to private life just, on the other hand the mobility describes males' outdoor, namely his public spaces' activities, when public and private spaces' distinction are considered.













"Our private lives are the goings on inside our family. How do I know, it can be everything. You get angry, crossed, love or get financial difficulties··· Whatever happens in family stays in family." (Female, 54 years old, married, retired, homeowner, has two children)

""Now, my intention about privacy is someone else's messing with my private life space with a good or bad grace, Keeping track of my life or disturbing me verbally··· Putting the safety of my body and my personal freedom under threat, as well··· This is my intention about privacy." (Male, 45 years old, married, market keeper, homeowner, has 1 child)

"For me, inside of the house is comfort. Outside of the house is disturbance. You can't be comfortable outside." (Female, 52 years old, unemployed, homeowner, has 2 children)

"When it is mentioned about the inside I think about the real Emre, in the case of the outside a little bit fake Emre, you know the one who have to be..." (Male, 30 years old, married, teacher of mentally handicapped, tenanted, has no children)

"The place belongs to the woman is kitchen in our house. Besides, my sewing machine also is here. I usually sew for us and selling." (Female, 45 years old, unemployed, married, homeowner, has 1 child)

"Very beautiful, I mean when I see my house is clean I become very happy. When I clean it, I feel very happy; I become very happy because I can do it." (Female, 50 years old, unemployed, married, homeowner, has 2 children)

"The kitchen belongs to woman in our home. When cooking is done, she goes to living room. That place is also belongs to her. She makes her handicrafts. I sit at the living room, as well" (Male, 40 years old, engineer, married, tenanted, has 2 children)

In terms of this finding, it can be said that "stability and mobility" dialectics transforms to "tranquility and motion" dialectics, this time in a different spatial scale. The males are in a sort of immobility inside the house, which can be termed as "silence", on the contrary of his mobility in public space. As a conclusion, the gender ideology does not cause a formation of clear or sharp power relations with the traditional roles which are attributed to the males and females inside the house; it indicates the complex structure of existence processes of the males and the females in the places with different scales and these roles or responsibilities.

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