

REPRODUCTION OF THE MYTH OF MASCULINITY IN SOCIAL
MEDIA



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REPRODUCTION OF THE MYTH OF MASCULINITY IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of technology, computers and the internet have made our lives easier and become a part of our daily lives thanks to the opportunities they provide. Easy access to the Internet is one of the main reasons for its use in many areas, which has digitized our daily life practices. Internet technology is used in many areas, from communication to socialization, acquiring information, and shopping. From this point of view, we can say that a new digital culture has emerged. Demez (2011) writes, “Today, the internet takes place in our daily lives as a cultural medium, source, and transmitter. Today, individuals who can easily connect to the internet from almost anywhere can make and control all the shares they want on their private pages” (p. 327). The most important producers and transmitters of this culture are social networks.

In our daily lives, we can quickly realize our social relations, our communication with other people, and even our need to be visible thanks to social networks from everywhere where the internet is accessible. The internet is a network of people that hosts social relations, and technology affects the lifestyle of the society in which they live. As such, “the information revolution has the power to transform society” (Demez, 2011, p. 334). As Demez (2011) says, this is because information societies are not simply societies where information is essential. At the same time, in these societies, information networks penetrate social life and have the power to direct all social activities, from political attitudes to shopping, from leisure to education (p. 334). The media determines interaction styles in these societies, and people can be both producers and consumers. In addition, new media opportunities not only individualize the user but also provide a new virtual environment for socialization (Demez, 2011, p. 334).

According to Alemdaroğlu and Demirtaş (2004):

When the relationship between the Internet and social life is considered, there are two main views. One is that the internet is far from all social status, oppression, and control; therefore, it is an independent field. The other is that communication via computer is not an alternative to face-to-face social relations, but it creates resistance points by using the gaps in this field. (p. 206)

According to the first approach, the internet is a free and transformative space while ensuring the coexistence of people from different groups. Social media platforms such as Instagram are examples of these accessible and transformative spaces. However, there are striking inequalities in this virtual environment, particularly regarding gender. As Demez (2011) writes, “When the opportunities to use and access technology are considered in the context of gender, studies conducted in countries with internet access rates of up to 70 % of the population show that two-thirds of users are men” (p. 335). She maintains that the quantitative superiority of men also determines the content and direction of the texts in question. As in other areas where masculine domination is prevalent, it also gives relative clues about new media content (Demez, 2011, p. 335).

Masculinity is reproduced in many parts of social life. Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi (2018) say the following: “The social construction of masculinity takes place through psychological mechanisms such as imitation, modeling, reinforcement, and naturalization. In other words, masculinity (or femininity) is acquired or established in a particular culture through socialization processes” (p. 140). Masculinity, the distinctive element of gender, is involved in various power relations in the social process and interacts with other aspects of the social structure. Media, especially social media, is one of the most essential fields in this

production process. Social media platforms are very effective in reproducing masculinity as an area where men can share their lifestyles, bodies, habits, and interests as they wish and interact with other men. As Demez (2011) states, “Considering the appearance of masculinity on the internet, which has become a new media and social space, the need for a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to the subject is obvious” (p. 325). In fact, on the issues of gender relations and masculinity, developing communication technologies and the media, especially the new media, which have a significant impact on our lives, can be examined from an interdisciplinary perspective and can provide many insights into the reflections of masculinity on the internet.

As Peker Dural (2021) points out, the media is vital in transmitting cultural norms and values. It is argued that “new media” functions as an extension of real life in terms of creating an environment where daily practices and interactions can take place (p. 512). The fact that technology, especially the media, has penetrated the fields of private life, relationships, communication, and interaction and therefore is also influential in determining the practices of daily life has led social scientists to consider the importance of the media and its impact on everyday life (Demez, 2011, p. 333). From this point of view, we can think that the media, especially social media, which has significantly impacted our lives with the development of technology, can provide us with many insights into gender relations and masculinity.

This study examines social media, which we use in many areas today, regarding gender and analyzes the construction of masculinity through body representation in social media. It collects data by examining Instagram, one of today's most popular social media platforms. The aim is to contribute to the literature on the representation and reproduction of the myth of masculinity in social media. Accordingly, the answers to questions such as “How is

masculinity represented in social media today, and what is its importance in terms of gender?” and “How is the myth of masculinity reproduced in social media, and what are its effects on people?” are sought. For this reason, four male Instagram profiles from different countries, including Turkey, which we can understand are followed by many people based on the number of followers and interactions, were examined using the semiotics method.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the first questions studies on masculinity try to answer is what masculinity is and how it can be defined. For this reason, in the first parts of the literature review, what masculinity and gender are will be explained, and the concept of hegemonic masculinity will be discussed. An overview of the development of masculinity studies will follow this discussion.

2.1 Gender

First of all, it is essential to talk about what gender is. The concepts of gender and sex are different from each other. Ann Oakley, who first highlighted this difference, argued that sex corresponds to a biologically determined state. In contrast, gender corresponds to a socially constituted state (quoted by Erkılıç, 2011, p. 232). From this point of view, we can state that femininity and masculinity can be perceived differently in every culture and every society. We can also think that gender is not a fixed concept or a pattern but rather a process.

Gender is based on gender differences, organizes the meanings of these differences, and makes them socially meaningful. In this sense, Sancar (2008) writes that the gender of the body is like “a clothes hanger on which different clothes can be hung” (p. 179). People can wear dresses with different cultural meanings according to their personal preferences and identities. Thus, we can see that there are both disparate and common aspects of being a man and a woman. The shape of the hanger may make it necessary to wear some clothes. However, according to her, this determinant cannot be an inevitable relationship (Sancar, 2008, p. 179). As Meral (2011) similarly states, this concept refers to the social perceptions

of men and women and the processes of becoming a woman and a man culturally, regardless of the biological characteristics of gender (p. 297).

When we consider that the characteristics of femininity and masculinity can be perceived differently in different cultures and societies, we can state that gender is not just a biological concept but a social process. For a long time, even in feminist thought, gender itself was regarded as a fixed biological trait, and the different interpretations of this physical trait in different cultural contexts were thought to create gender-based power relations. Accordingly, biological sex was considered a fixed trait, but, as Sancar (2018) says, biology is incapable of creating meanings that would produce social order and power relations (p. 177).

Sancar (2018) mentions that in discussing the concept of gender by putting it in a new theoretical context, Joan W. Scott underlined that femininity and masculinity are mutually exclusive constructs that can only be defined by looking at each other's social positioning. She also said that gender is used to understand not only the present but also past social distinctions. Thus, gender is accepted by Scott as a mandatory analytical category to use (pp. 177–178). From this point of view, we can state that the concept of gender can help us understand and solve social problems, just like the concept of social class.

2.2. Masculinity

The concept of gender is based on gender distinctions, that is, on distinctions that separate men and women. For this reason, the idea of gender considers men and women. However, studies on men from a gender perspective do not go back very far because the

problems women experience under male dominance and their victimization have been regarded as more urgent and critical.

However, as stated, since gender studies constitute a field that examines both women and men, men and their problems should be included more. Still, when we say masculinity, we refer to a complex and challenging structure to explain and define. It is impossible to describe and define masculinity because masculinity permeates not only the world of men but the entire society of women, children, young people, and older people. Also, it has implications for the East-West debate, work and organizational structures, violence and family, patriarchy, and so on, as argued by Akıncı Yüksel (2011, p. 215).

We have mentioned that masculinity has a complex structure that is difficult to explain and define. Thus, it may be necessary to elaborate on this concept a little. Men ideally have different forms of power: over women, over other men, over their bodies, over machines, and technology (Meral, 2011, p. 302). In other words, masculinity is always relational; it exists within gendered power relations. Being a relational artifact that is institutionalized as a power practice and can change from culture to culture, masculinity is a collection of practices that determine how men think, hear, and behave in social life, according to Erdoğan (2011, p. 47). According to R. W. Connell (2015), who was among the pioneers of critical masculinity studies with her introduction of the notion of hegemonic masculinity, as will be discussed below, masculinity is a practical setup structured by gender relations. She talks about a multiplicity of historical masculinities and their construction and reconstruction, which are political processes that affect the balance of societal interests and the direction of social change (p. 96).

As it should be clear, we can consider the concept of masculinity from many angles, which is one of the reasons why this concept is complex. In this regard, Sancar (2008) says the following:

When we say masculinity, we mean masculinity established as identity, masculinity represented as relation, masculinity presented as an image, masculinity set as discourse, or masculinity directly experienced, observed, and practically performed. In this sense, masculinity as a concept is ambiguous, descriptive rather than explanatory. It always risks becoming an oversimplified term describing only negatives. (p. 20)

We may also need to examine the past to understand the concept of masculinity better. The factors affecting this concept from the past to the present will give us clues to understanding today's forms of masculinity and how they have changed and transformed. Masculinities are simply historical (Connell, 2015, p. 317), which indicates that the concept of masculinity is not fixed; it has changed throughout history and will continue to do so. Experiences in history and gender relations in the past constitute today's modern gender order. For this reason, when trying to understand masculinity, we need to look back to the past. As Connell (2015) writes:

If we want to understand the patterns of masculinity today, we need to go back and examine the period when they first emerged. Since masculinity can only exist within a whole structure of gender relations, we have to look for it in the formation of the modern order of gender relations, which means dealing with a process that spanned nearly four centuries. (p. 317)

When we look at ethnographic studies, we see four significant developments affecting the history of masculinity. We can list these developments as follows: the strengthening of Europe and North America like never before; the establishment of world empires; the establishment of the global capitalist economy; and the process of colonization that essentially reshaped gender relations in colonized countries. We can also state that the history of masculinity does not proceed in a single line: “There is no single developmental route in history to which all other routes are subject; the transition from traditional to modern did not happen in a single move” as Connell (2015, p. 338) writes.

Looking at the world, we see that masculinities constantly interact, changing and transforming each other in gender relations. As Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi (2018) state, with developments from the past to the present, old masculinity styles can be replaced by new male forms (p. 144). As a result, the changes, transformations, and interactions experienced by the nature of masculinity constitute the concept of masculinity today.

Some roles belong to men and women, distinguishing both sexes from each other and determining their place in life. These are determined by society, so we can state that they are called gender roles. Both men and women learn and accept codes of behavior related to gender roles (e.g., gender-segregated jobs, clothes, gender-defined colors, and attitudes within the family). Family, school, social life, business life, and primarily today's media effectively teach these roles. Meral (2011) says the following about this socialization process: “Both sexes' adoption and maintenance of determined values ensure the reproduction of gender roles” (p. 298), so it is not possible to say that concepts and perceptions about gender are static. In this sense, masculinity is “a collection of practices that determine how a man will think, hear, and act in social life, and which include roles and

attitudes expected from him simply because he is a man” (Erkılıç, 2011, p. 232). The socialization and learning process we are talking about starts at an early age. For instance, families direct their boys to sports from an early age so that they learn the values and roles of masculinity. “Beauty is perceived as the physical capital of the girl, while sporting ability is perceived as the physical capital of the boy,” as Akıncı Yüksel (2011, p. 219) writes. The participation of boys in sports events and teams helps them discover their masculine identities and reproduce masculinity.

As in the example above about sports, some characteristics are tried to be instilled in men by society from a young age. According to Brannon’s definition of masculinity based on four basic groupings, the qualities available in men are avoidance of all feminine behaviors and features; achievement, status, and ability to earn a living; confidence and independence; aggression, violence, and courage (quoted by Erkılıç, 2011, 232). In addition to such features, mythical laws of masculinity, which require determination, strength, and cunning, are conveyed in the stories about male heroes as features they must have to survive and succeed.

As we mentioned earlier, the concept of masculinity is quite complex. In this context, men’s relationships with women and other men within gender relations will help us understand masculinity. Connell (2015) writes the following in this regard:

Masculinity and femininity are relational concepts that are inherently related to each other... This relationship continues unchanged regardless of the changing content of the borders drawn in different societies and historical processes. Therefore, masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity in relation. (p. 96)

Therefore, we cannot define masculinity without examining gender relations as a whole. In fact, knowledge of masculinity arises from efforts to understand gender relations (Connell 2015, p. 96). In addition, as discussed above, the concept of masculinity implies that there is not only one masculinity but many different masculinities.

According to some arguments, masculinity is a phenomenon that originates only from men's bodies or consists of features that refer to their bodies. In other words, the body directs the action. For example, men are considered naturally more aggressive than women. The belief that rape results from men's unbridled lust or innate tendency to violence also manifests this understanding. The body is also thought to set limits on action. For example, it is considered a natural behavior for men to be indifferent to small children. According to Connell (2015), these beliefs also include the one that homosexuality is against nature and therefore confined to a perverted minority. They are part of modern gender ideology, at least in the English-speaking world (pp. 99–100). In addition, thinking that masculinity is only about the male body can bring many problems. According to research, a man whose body is damaged due to an accident may experience psychological disorders by thinking he is inadequate. Problems that men experience like this can also be called a “masculinity crisis.”

In recent years, discussions on this subject have dealt with the male body from two opposing perspectives in biology and social sciences: One adapts the dominant language of biological science. Accordingly, the body is “a natural machine that produces gender differences through genetic inheritance, hormonal differences, and the different roles the sexes play in the reproductive process” (Connell, 2015, p. 100). To put it more clearly, masculinity is all about the male body; that is biology. According to the other approach, which is very popular in the humanities and social sciences, the body is instead “a blank

slate or canvas on which social symbol systems leave their traces” (Connell, 2015, p. 100). However, some researchers combine these two contradictory views and argue that masculinity is the joint product of biological and social influences.

According to Sancar (2008), similarly, when it comes to gender relations, the primary issue of discussion is to what extent social differences referring to gender are related to people’s biological characteristics (p. 175). She writes that some see gender relations as inevitable features imposed by biology, or we can say that social facts that refer to biological imperatives gain gendered meanings. For example, the fact that men are soldiers and warriors is explained by the biology of masculinity; on the other hand, the courage and strength required to fight for one’s homeland are gendered with masculine meanings. Likewise, women’s fertility is seen as a requirement of their biological sex, but “this biological creativity does not prevent her from being feminized by being defined as a medical problem, a weak human condition that needs protection” (Sancar, 2008, pp. 175–176).

We can also consider masculinity in the fields of semiotics and culture. However, Connell (2015) says that trying to explain gender purely through semiotics or culture is “no more convincing than a reductive approach to biology because the ground on which cultural meanings are recorded is not flat or empty, nor can it remain stable” (p. 109). Semiotic approaches leave the personality level aside and define masculinity by comparing the masculine and feminine through a symbolic distinction system. So in this approach, masculinity is defined as non-feminine (Connell, 2015, p. 140). However, according to her:

Instead of defining masculinity as an object (a natural personality type, an average behavior, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships that enable men and women to lead gendered lives. Masculinity, assuming that this term can be

properly defined, is simultaneously a place in gender relations and practices that result in the attachment of men and women to this gendered place, as well as the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture. (Connell, 2015, pp. 141–142)

2.3. Hegemonic masculinity

Understanding gender is important because it will enable us to understand many issues related to society and masculinity. As Connell (2015) writes, “Unless we look closely at gender, we cannot understand phenomena such as class, race, or global inequality” (p. 149). Thanks to the theoretical connection between gender and masculinity, it has started to be argued that masculinities are many, and there is no single masculinity. Gay, black, and lower-class men may exemplify this issue.

We can examine these relations between masculinities with the help of concepts such as hegemony, subordination, collaboration, and marginalization. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is undoubtedly a concept that will be handled with a vast scope and can be adapted to various social phenomena. Therefore, the concept of hegemony, which is based on voluntary and spontaneous consent in general terms and which takes different forms according to the relations of the classes it contains (Gramsci, 2009, p. 22), provides rich material for explaining the relations between men and women and guiding gender studies (Akıncı Yüksel, 2011, p. 215).

In Connell's (2015) words, “the concept of hegemony, derived from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic that enables a group to claim and maintain a ruling position in society” (p. 150). The hegemony we are talking about here does

not happen directly through violence. Instead, “the hallmark of hegemony is the successful assertion of authority rather than the direct use of violence (although violence either underpins or supports that authority)” (Connell 2015, p. 151).

Hegemony can guide us in examining the power relations between men. She says, “One form of masculinity always stands out culturally over the others” (Connell, 2015, p. 150). In short, hegemonic masculinity means that a group of men in society stands out by putting pressure on other men and women. Connell (2015) defines it as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity is the apparatus of gender practice that embodies the currently accepted answer to the question of patriarchy’s legitimacy. In this respect, it ensures or is expected to ensure that men remain dominant and women subordinate in society. (pp. 150-151).

Also, as Sancar (2009) claims, “Despite the existence of different masculinity values, women’s approval of dominant masculinity practices plays a crucial role; hegemonic masculinity cannot occur without women’s approval” (p. 38). However, this consent relationship is not only between men and women but also between other men who have different sexual orientations, who are subject to racial or class-related discrimination, or who are assumed to be in a weaker position based on age and experience. So women are not the only victims. As Avşar (2017) states, hegemonic masculinity refers to a structure in which not only women but also men are oppressed” (p. 230).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity implies that there are various male groups and different social relations between these groups. Therefore, there is a hierarchical structure between them. From this point of view, we can state that not all masculinities are produced equally. Multiple patterns of masculinity have been defined in many studies, various

countries, and different institutional and cultural settings. It is also a frequent research finding that certain masculinities are more socially centralized or related to authority and social power than others. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, thus, envisages the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities. This process has been demonstrated in many international regulations (Ertan, 2011, p. 100).

According to Connell, in a culture, different forms of masculinity generally exist in divergent relationships, such as mutual hierarchy and struggle, rather than as alternative lifestyles. However, mostly, one of these masculinity forms dominates the others. This dominant form of masculinity is also hegemonic masculinity (quoted by Meral, 2011, p. 305). The dominance mentioned here takes place within gender relations. Accordingly, as Messerschmidt (2009) writes:

Hegemonic masculinity has no meaning other than its relationship with emphasized femininity and non-hegemonic masculinity or with forms of femininity that complement, obey, and subordinate hegemonic masculinity. Legitimizing this relationship of subordination and superiority reveals the meaning and essence of hegemonic masculinity. The emphasis on hegemony in gender relations has underlined the success of hegemonic masculinity through cultural prescriptive-discursive persuasion that encourages everyone to consent to, unite around, and participate in such unequal gender relations, mainly between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and masculinities. (p. 60)

“The male group holding power is very few in number, but this is a hegemonic formation fueled by the approval and complicity of a large section of men,” as Akıncı Yüksel (2011, p. 216) says, because financial gains and privileges are offered to different masculinities in

return for approving, participating in, or not opposing hegemonic masculinity practices.

These are:

privileges such as the freedom to participate in the world of men's entertainment that focuses on pleasure through masculine fantasies, to treat gay men humiliatingly and exclude them, to tolerate lower-class men's outbursts in bars, on the streets, and at football matches, to vent their anger, and to enjoy the power of men over women. (Akıncı Yüksel, 2011, p. 216)

We can detail how hegemonic masculinity maintains dominance over non-hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in the face of masculinities that Connell defines as four non-hegemonic masculinities. First, "complicit masculinities do not include hegemonic masculinities; however, they exercise some of the benefits of unequal gender relations through practice and, as a result, help to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in practice" (quoted by Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 61). As mentioned earlier, these are benefits such as enjoying dominance over women, participating in various men's entertainment, and humiliating men whose preferences differ. As Connell (2015) states, complicit masculinity tries to have a share in patriarchal gain by avoiding the risks and tensions that will result from struggling on behalf of patriarchy (p. 154):

Many men who enjoy the blessings of patriarchy respect their wives and mothers, never resort to violence in front of women, are used to sharing housework, bring home their monthly salary, and can easily convince their cat that feminists are bra-burning excesses. (Connell, 2015, pp. 154–155).

From this perspective, it can be stated that men who are accomplices dominate women indirectly. Secondly, subordinated masculinities, particularly gay men, are constructed as

atypical, deviating from hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 61). Indeed, according to Connell (2015), the most critical problem in contemporary Western societies is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of gay men. She adds, “Gay men depend on heterosexual men through a set of purely material practices” (Connell, 2015, p. 152). Today, gay men are harassed and threatened daily and experience many problems.

Thirdly, marginalized masculinities are trivialized and/or discriminated against due to unequal relations other than gender relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, and age (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 61). As Connell (2015) writes, “Race relations can also become an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. In the context of white supremacy, black masculinities play a symbolic role in the construction of white gender” (p. 155).

Finally, oppositional masculinities are constructed as “compensatory hypermasculinities that are shaped in response to social issues that lack economic and political power” (Messerschmidt, 2019, p. 61). All these masculinities help reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Meral (2011) explains this as follows:

While hegemony and hegemonic masculinity support power and dominance, they do not ignore those outside of hegemony; on the contrary, they push them to a secondary position. It is because the thing that creates the hegemony of masculinity is every non-masculine person and situation that it puts in a dual position. The fact is that women are a dual-class entity in society, and all forms of relationships other than heterosexuality can be considered within this scope. This subordination situation, in a way, ensures that hegemony is reproduced every day and every moment. (p. 307)

Hegemonic masculinity also exists in cultural ways. That is, hegemony can be achieved through cultural structures such as religion and the media. Especially in the cultural sense,

the media, the messages conveyed, and the images created are very effective in reproducing hegemonic masculinity, as the media maintain the image of men holding power. According to Sancar (2009), the general map on which the trace of hegemonic masculinity will be sought is drawn roughly as follows: “young, urban, white, heterosexual, a full-time job owner, reasonably religious, and active enough to do at least one of the sports branches” (p. 30). These characteristics define most of the features we see in today's famous male figures across various media. We can state that hegemonic masculinity tells others how to be men by suppressing others. In this regard, the media is vital in producing hegemonic masculinity and establishing and legitimating power relations.

Similarly, media critics and gender researchers define certain prominent features of hegemonic masculinity, including (1) physical strength and control; (2) gender segregation of professional achievement and work; (3) family patriarchy; and (4) heterosexuality (Ertan, 2011, pp. 100–101). However, the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity have changed from the past to the present and will continue to change. As Sancar (2009) argues, “the man of the 19th century who was confident in his fists must transform into the man with the new dominant masculinity values of the modern age we live in” (p. 57). She continues: “To be accepted into society as a man in the new times, it is necessary to succeed in producing, working, having technological expertise, and using the instrumental mind” (Sancar, 2009, 57). Today, we can state that the prominent male model is successful in business as an entrepreneur and even a manager.

Similarly, Meral (2011) says the following:

In the era of industrial capitalism, one of the most critical places where modern masculinity values are established is at work. Some of the most important aspects of

masculinity are established in the workplace. For this reason, it is necessary to work, to be a man, to feel like a man, and to prove masculinity. (p. 315)

Men with physical strength and a muscular body, along with mental strength and success, can prove their hegemony and thus affect the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Relatedly, as Avşar (2017) writes, “When it comes to hegemonic masculinity, the relationship between power and body becomes important” (p. 230). As Çarpar and Şavran Gönç (2019) writes, “In contemporary society, the importance attached to the body in the axis of consumption culture, the fitness/health industry, and globalization is increasing, and the body is turning into a project in which individuals build their identities” (p. 265). From a gender perspective, it is necessary to look at the relationship between the male body and hegemonic masculinity, which is also one of the elements that constitute the subject of this study. The body and bodily performance are essential for constructing and reproducing masculinity. A muscular body, which is accepted, idealized, and therefore associated with hegemonic masculinity in many societies and cultures, can mean looking good, being healthy, and being approved as a man.

Today, especially on social media, muscular male bodies appear as one of the images we frequently encounter that men share the most. Muscular male bodies are idealized by making them the symbol of masculinity and health. Men try to improve their bodies and increase their physical performance by turning to various sports. As Sancar (2008) writes, “Men’s sports have an important contribution to the construction of the power of the masculine body and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 252). In this sense, doing sports has different meanings besides being healthy. Sports is turning into a field where men try to prove their physical performance is excellent and robust. While this is the case, this area can

cause the female body to be subordinated to masculine power. Women's bodies are idealized and represented in stark contrast to men's, with features such as frailty, fragility, and powerlessness, thereby strategically producing hegemonic masculinity.

Sancar (2008) mentions a study that was conducted on primary school students: "When students from different social classes were asked to describe themselves, it was seen that male students defined themselves with the sports they were interested in, regardless of class (except for computers and electronics), while among female students, only licensed athletes identified themselves with the sports" (p. 254). Adult men, on the other hand, prefer sports such as bodybuilding and boxing, aiming to reach the mesomorphic body type known as the triangular body type, which is determined by broad shoulders, a muscular chest, large arms, and a thin waist shape, which is associated with masculinity in many cultures (Çarpar and Gönç Şavran, 2019, p. 269).

Meral (2011) says that people tend to view muscle as a biologically existing point in men; thus, "muscle causes the naturalization and legitimization of male power and dominance" (p. 308). Contrary to popular belief, however, muscle is acquired later and requires much work. Therefore, many men have to exercise regularly and eat accordingly. The fact that men achieve a muscular body by improving their bodies and increasing their physical performance indicates that, besides physically looking good and being healthy, they should have characteristics such as being successful, self-confident, strong, and disciplined, which are associated with muscularity. Therefore, a muscular body means that a man proves his hegemony while showing that he has all these features.

Connell (2015) makes the following comment about the issue: "The fact that masculinity is built through bodily performance also means that gender is endangered if this performance

is interrupted in some way due to unexpected circumstances such as accidents and injuries” (p. 115). She discusses that men who experience accidents and injuries have three different reactions in such situations:

The first is to prove that he has not lost his sexual power by performing well during sexual intercourse. Another reaction is to stretch the definition of hegemonic masculinity without compromising masculine themes such as independence and dominance and to bring it closer to the possible limits for them with their disability.

The third is to reject the hegemonic masculinity stereotypes by criticizing the stereotypes about bodies and adopting an anti-sexist idea. (Connell 2015, pp. 115–116)

In conclusion, male dominance is a social problem that disturbs both men and women. When we take a closer look at the behavior of men, we can say that many men are incompatible with their traditional masculine roles. In other words, some men do not conform to the dominant masculine values and live different lives. Their experiences are often overlooked and unnoticed, as Sancar (2008, p. 265) discusses. On the other hand, the issues from which women suffer the most are exposure to male oppression in many areas and masculine violence. At this point, we can suggest that men should support gender equality, establish various political organizations, and contribute to social change, starting with themselves. In addition, supporting education programs accordingly is an essential step for gender equality, and many countries around the world are trying to do this.

The way men have been brought up in the past, the thought that their change is complex, and especially the impositions and influence of the media are the most critical obstacles standing in the way of a more socially egalitarian structure. Despite all these negative situations, it is essential to emphasize the importance of personal strategies that men can

develop, for example, acknowledging that a man does not have to identify with his father, rejecting the need to separate and distance himself from his mother, learning from women what egalitarian behavior is, overcoming homophobia, and so on (Sancar, 2008, p. 272).

2.4 Development of masculinity studies

How the research on masculinity started and how it has developed so far can guide the studies in this field. Talking about masculinity and researching this subject do not have much history yet. As Serpil Sancar (2008) writes, “Masculinity has continued to be a topic that has been talked about, but that has not been studied much politically, ideologically, or academically” (p. 23). Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi (2018) add that the beginning of masculinity studies can only go back thirty years (p. 140).

According to Baştürk and Tönel (2011), since the 1970s, masculinity studies have been carried out from a feminist perspective. However, it can be said that studies on masculinity have intensified, especially in the last twenty years. They say, “The achievements and studies of feminist studies in Europe and the United States have not only started the conversation about men but more importantly, they have also led men to face masculinity” (Baştürk & Tönel, 2011, p. 13). Without emphasizing too much divergent class and race relations, early feminist thinkers recognized that women suffered common oppression. On the other hand, feminist policies gradually confronted the need to understand the different contexts of oppression created by divergent experiences of femininity. According to Sancar (2008), this development has also opened the door to masculinity studies (p. 25). In other words, talking and researching about femininity in the plural necessitated discussing masculinity.

Indeed, the constructs of masculinity and femininity socially affect each other and are in constant relationship. From this perspective, investigating them separately is not the right approach. As stated above, discussing femininity and feminism has been decisive in the beginning of masculinity studies. Thus, as Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2018) write, “The studies of men and masculinity owe much to the academic framework of women’s studies, which provides a broad repertoire of gender-based discrimination and social structures” (p. 18). They argue that feminist studies have determined the agenda of masculinity studies, and the starting point of studies on masculinity is feminist gender theory (Baştürk Akça and Tönel, 2011, p. 18).

In the 1970s, studies on feminism focused on the concept of gender, gender differences, and their formation. Thus, discussions started on forming social power relations within gender regimes based on gender differences. The gender regimes approach, of which R. W. Connell became one of the most important representatives, offers a crucial theoretical framework for understanding masculinity, according to Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi (2018, p. 143).

Sancar (2008) writes the following in this regard:

In analyses of social power, gender has begun to be counted among the explanatory variables as fundamental as class and race. Analyses made without considering the effect of power relations based on gender and the decisive power they have at almost every level, from a macro problem such as the distribution of economic resources in class societies to the micro level, where personality formation and interpersonal relations are determined, have become the subject of severe criticism. (pp. 25-26).

Along with these developments, masculinity studies dealt with masculinity primarily through gender differences between men and women and became a complement to gender discussions. From this point of view, we can state that one of the aims of research on masculinity is to understand what the concept of masculinity is and how it can be defined. However, while the first studies tried to explain what was understood by masculinity and what characteristics were meant, Sancar (2008) declared that there was never a “universal, single, and consistent definition of masculinity” (p. 26).

Sancar (2008) says that when we look at the literature, we see that defining gender-based behavioral differences has become a popular research topic since the 1970s and 1980s (p. 28). In her words:

Biology, anatomy, and psychology-based studies on masculine and feminine behavior began to increase. Power, intelligence, not avoiding conflict, being able to use violence, competitive ability and passion for success, willingness to have technological knowledge and expertise, desire to take risks and pursue adventure, and heroism were considered signs of masculinity. On the other hand, traits such as emotionality, passivity, peace, understanding, and compassion were also defined as signs of femininity. (Sancar 2008, pp. 28–29).

On the other hand, she says: “Discussions on the distinction between hegemonic masculinity and ‘different masculinities’ revealed that being a man should be seen as a complex phenomenon that does not comply with the claim of universality and vulgar generalizations” (Sancar 2008, p. 30). As Avşar (2017) states, studies in the masculinity field generally accept that masculinity is the product of a series of complex sociocultural interactions (pp. 227–228).

In the masculinity studies conducted to date, besides topics such as what masculinity is, discussions about gender differences and dominant masculinity have also been examined. The adverse effects of trying to adapt to dominant societal values on men's lives have been mentioned a lot. Scholars who were influential in the 1970s often stated that most men did not fit the image of strict, rigid, dominant, and combative masculinity that patriarchal ideologies were trying to promote (Avşar, 2017, p. 226). Among the pioneering works reconciling analyses of masculinity with the criticism of power were Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer's *Men and Masculinity* (1974), and especially Joseph Pleck's *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981), which were considered to be the first serious masculinity critique.

In these studies, masculinity was examined not only as regards women but also in terms of relations among men. They revealed that while the dominant gender system victimizes women, it also victimizes the male identity, where we encounter the concept of hegemonic masculinity expressed by R. W. Connell, as Avşar (2017, p. 229) says.

Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011) also maintain the following in this regard: "Men have discovered that there is not only a hegemonic relationship between men and women but also a hegemonic relationship between different states of masculinity" (p. 13). Hegemonic masculinity suppresses all other forms of masculinity and imposes a single form of masculinity on society. The research field called "critical masculinity studies" mainly confronts this hegemonic masculinity (Baştürk Akça and Tönel, 2011, p. 14). The debates around the concept of hegemonic masculinity have been brought forward with the claim that it makes it possible to understand how men who do not fit this definition are managed and controlled. These developments have been fueled mainly by new studies on masculinities defined as gay, ethnic minority, or simply "different." *Gender and Power* (1987) and

Masculinities (1995) by R. W. Connell, who is the author of the most discussed theses in this field, should be particularly noted in this regard, as Sancar (2008, p. 27) mentions. Thanks to these studies, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been elaborated.

Together with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, we can understand how idealized and even idolized masculinity forms in various cultural ways and spreads to society through structures such as the state, religion, and media. Besides, this concept has been found useful and popular because it highlights inequalities in gender relations and how these inequalities are justified. The concept of hegemonic masculinity can enable us to understand unequal gender relations and establish more humane, less oppressive, and equal gender relations. Thanks to this awareness, gender hierarchies can disappear. For these reasons, hegemonic masculinity is essential in masculinity studies.

In its most general sense, hegemonic masculinity has been at the center of the discussions as a concept that refers to the “image of masculinity possessed by men who hold power,” as Sancar (2008, p. 30) writes. The general map to look for the trace of hegemonic masculinity was drawn roughly as follows, according to her: “The masculinity represented by young, urban, white, heterosexual, full-time job holders, reasonably religious, and physically active enough to do at least one of the sports branches successfully” (Sancar, 2008, p. 30). Today, we see traces of hegemonic masculinity on social media, which fits this description. In particular, we can understand it from the efforts of men to prove that they have an active physical performance from the content they share on social media platforms.

Sancar (2008) says that, according to Connell, hegemony is always a relational concept (p. 30). In the formation of this relationality, cultural dynamics are essential. As well as the dynamics created by desirable models of masculinity, there is also the “naturalization” of

masculinity through religion, state, media, and local cultures (Sancar, 2008, p. 30). The construction of masculinity is not just about cultural images; institutionalized patriarchal support is also vital, including private corporate culture, bureaucracy, business/management, family, women's double work, homosocial cultural dynamics of men's groups, struggles for the control of school spaces by boys, dating patterns in male-female friendships, homophobic conversations, harassment and so on (Sancar, 2008, p. 40). "On the other hand, the concept of hegemonic masculinity describes very well the acceptance of masculine forms of violence embedded as normal in the overall culture or as admirable in the eyes of many men," according to Sancar (2008, p. 40). Thanks to this concept, so to speak, it becomes easier for us to understand the relationship between domestic and family violence, homophobic violence, and armed violence. Also, we better understand the difficulty of peace initiatives and conflict prevention policies. We can deal with and analyze many phenomena, such as rape, male fistfights, male fights, child abuse, military violence, police violence, banning and confinement of women, workplace violence, industrial injuries, imperialist violence, postcolonial wars, the arms trade, the "defense" industry, the gun lobby, and the "security" industry, through this concept of hegemonic masculinity (Sancar, 2008, pp. 40–41).

According to Connell, the concept of hegemonic masculinity emphasizes the vital role played by power relations based on gender inequalities/differences in the reproduction of material inequalities. It shows the gendered characteristics of social /political institutions (Sancar, 2008, p. 41). As Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi (2018) say, this understanding links the concept to feminist explanations of male dominance and sociological models of gender (p.144).

As the studies above show, masculinity studies have been socially discussed in many ways and have followed a comprehensive path. For this reason, it is tough to classify these studies. In the words of Edwards (2006), all talk about masculinity is still far from homogeneous or fully understood (p. 1) because the studies on masculinity have a fragmented structure, like the image reflected in a broken mirror. On the other hand, what we can easily say about male or masculinity studies is that, like feminist studies, it is a product of social movements and developments within these movements, as argued by Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011, p. 19).

In order to reveal how the identity of masculinity is established, studies have examined the rituals and social practices that ascribe power to men, starting in ancient Greece. These studies are critical in understanding patriarchal ideology and gender roles and seeking ways to create a more egalitarian structure by including men. However, it should be said that both academic masculinity studies and the men's movement are at the beginning of the road in Turkey, according to Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011, p. 14). They say, "It is possible to take the beginning of studies on masculinity in Turkey back to twenty years ago, albeit with some difficulty" (Baştürk Akça and Tönel, 2011, p. 14). In order to understand how different masculinities are formed and the relations between them, especially power relations, studies on a diverse range of topics are needed. Studies conducted in Turkey highlight multiple states of masculinity. Some studies reveal how masculinity is constructed through military service (Altınay, 2013; Selek, 2008). Masculine roles and attitudes (Onaran, Büker, and Bir, 1998) or the physical and social stages of masculinity (Barutçu, 2013) also stand out in Turkish literature (Gezici Yalçın and Tanrıverdi, 2018, p. 137).

The authors write the following: “The way to question hegemonic masculinity and to develop a stance against male domination is to talk about masculinity” (Baştürk Akça and Tönel, 2011, p. 36). However, the frequency and intensity of such male conversations in Turkey are low. As Sancar (2008) mentions, a rare example is the “We Are Not Men” Initiative, established in Istanbul. They describe themselves as “an initiative formed by some anti-authoritarian men who are against the dominant male forms in society, sexism imposed on gender identities, and homophobia.” In the statement they published, they say:

We do not want to play the gender roles imposed on us and that we fulfill occasionally. We reject these roles. If rape is masculinity, WE ARE NOT MEN! If guarding honor and customs is manhood, WE ARE NOT MEN! If killing is masculinity, WE ARE NOT MEN! If being homophobic is masculinity, WE ARE NOT MEN! If it is masculine to narrow life and streets to women, WE ARE NOT MEN! (quoted by Sancar, 2008, pp. 279–280)

Apart from the initiative mentioned above, we can state that very few male groups in Turkey directly oppose male dominance and turn it into a political struggle. Various suggestions can be offered to fill this gap in society, according to Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011):

Formal education processes and media, two critical areas where hegemonic masculinity is established, stand before us as areas that need to be studied. For this purpose, the first suggestions that come to mind are the preparation of course contents emphasizing gender equality, similar to the “Human Rights and Democracy” courses added to the secondary education curriculum during the process of harmonization with the European Union or the organization of various training seminars through non-governmental organizations. Women’s Studies Centers in Universities can be

instrumental in academic studies in this field, and it may be preferable to leave the talk about masculinity to men. (p. 37)

If we look at today's hegemonic masculinity, we should admit that it has undergone many developments and changes. Avşar (2017) writes that changes in social structure and institutions accelerate with modernization and globalization (p. 225). In particular, the weakening of traditions, customs, and beliefs, the transition to a more accessible life, industrialization, technical developments, urbanization, and migration have made it necessary to talk about and redefine many issues, and "the identities of men and women have been directly affected by these developments" (Avşar, 2017, p. 225).

The transformations that emerged in the formation process of modern society, or, in other words, in the age of industrial capitalism, also led to the development of certain masculinity styles (Sancar, 2008, p. 47). A dominant masculinity model with Western, white, and civilized qualities has emerged along with industrial capitalism. This development progressed as "racial science" discovered how diverse and underdeveloped the "primitive," "savage," and "barbarian" cultures in the rest of the world were, and the "enlightened" men proved the West's superiority in technology and science led the world. As Sancar (2008, p. 47) writes, it has become the right to rule. In the modern times we live in, we can state that the masculinity model underlying the definition of dominant masculinity is still the Western masculinity that has the right to rule the world to a large extent.

Along with social developments, the traditional family model has been replaced by the modern one. In the 19th century, the transition from agricultural production to industrialization started. For this reason, the male workforce has been transformed into

industrial workers, and new, modern families have emerged that are outside the production and public spheres. As Sancar (2008) claims:

While questioning when and how the models of masculinity we see today emerged, it is necessary to consider the changes in family structures that developed in parallel with the different development dynamics of capitalism, breaking away from land-based production and joining urban/industrial society. (pp. 121-122)

We can understand how male dominance works and its definition in today's modern family-based gender regime. We can list the privileges of men in these families as the power to provide for the family and to control the activities and movements of the spouse and children, sexual freedom, sexist division of labor, and favoring boys. In particular, the fact that men are considered responsible for the family's livelihood causes women to be kept in the background and subordinated. On the other hand, it should be noted that egalitarian changes also took place. The fact that women are more active in business life, working and earning money, prevents a rigidly hierarchical gender regime.

In this regard, Avşar (2017) writes the following:

In today's societies, the evolution of the extended family into the nuclear family, women's entry into working life, the prolongation of human life, the sharing of the livelihood of the household only by women, and the related social changes experienced show that the patriarchal structure has been transformed, albeit partially. The validity of traditional gender roles has been redefined. (p. 225)

In addition, new laws have been enacted in Turkey: the privileges men have as the head of the family and the decision-making authority they hold as a person who earns money have

been legally abolished with the recent amendments to the Civil Code. Moreover, responsibilities and rights are equally distributed between men and women in marriage (Sancar, 2008, p. 124).

In the modern age we live in, many issues, such as the appearance of a man, his body, his way of thinking, his way of life, and his clothes, are also changing. In Avşar's (2017) words, "The new male typology is the man who is narcissistically obsessed with his body and clothing, enjoys consuming and fashion, and places sports at the center of his life" (p. 226). We can also state that the modern man is more emotional and respectful towards women than the traditional male model.

When we look at today, we can see that gender roles have also undergone changes and softened more, and the roles of men and women are getting closer. Avşar (2017) even claims that the existing gender order is transforming into a new order (p. 226). In this new gender order, a modern male model emerges, which is more fragile, egalitarian, and desirable than the traditional male model. However, the effects of traditional masculinity continue through today's hegemonic masculinity. These changes may present a good picture of a more egalitarian social order. However, the modernization of masculinity does not seem to be enough to remove the old masculinity patterns altogether.

In summary, the knowledge that has emerged from masculinity studies shows us how masculinity has changed and evolved into a new (modern) model of masculinity from the past to the present. The change in the concept of hegemonic masculinity from the past to the present provides many insights into how today's masculinity myth in social media can be investigated. Social media has been the subject of studies focusing on the experiences of male and female users in order to reveal the inequality in gender relations. However, its

examination as a place of masculinity production has only recently begun (Kızılırmak Ata and Doğan Topçu, 2021, p. 60). On the other hand, mainly due to the ongoing scarcity of studies focusing only on masculinity on Instagram, this thesis can contribute to closing this gap and creating an up-to-date perspective on the reproduction of the masculinity myth in social media.

2.5. Men's representation in the media

So far, many studies have been conducted on the representation of women in the media. However, studies on the representation of masculinity in the media are much less common because masculinity studies start later than femininity studies. The field of “masculinity studies” is new compared to feminist studies. Women's studies have focused on the perspective of men and society on women, the representation of women in the media, and the effects of these forms of representation on women's acceptance of their assigned roles for nearly fifty years, according to Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011), and in this process, quite a few studies have examined male identity and male depictions in the media (p. 13).

In the masculinity studies carried out to date, the definition of masculinity, gender, masculinity roles, and hegemonic masculinity have been discussed. On the other hand, this study seeks to understand how male identities are reproduced in the media and on Instagram, one of the most popular social platforms today. It is thought that the research could help close the gap. It can be stated that this study is essential in increasing the number of studies on the representation of men in the media and adding a new dimension to the discussions on masculinity with its focus on the presentation of masculine bodies on Instagram.

The forms and representations of masculinity we see in the media are essential in showing us the masculinity of the time in which we live. Therefore, the media has a significant influence on masculinity studies. From the past to the present, it is seen that women are represented as sexual objects or in family-related roles, such as spouses and mothers, in mainstream media outlets. Conversely, men are represented by sexual drive, aggression, and dominance (Peker Dural, 2021, p. 512). These representations often point to culturally dominant notions of femininity and masculinity. At this point, we can state that the features of this dominant masculinity represented in the media also reflect hegemonic masculinity. In Peker Dural's (2012) words, “representations of men in the media are generally presented in harmony with hegemonic masculinity” (p. 514). For instance, in a study examining the characters in computer games, known as a form of “new media,” as it is called, it was seen that male characters were designed and presented as dominant, vital, and aggressive in line with hegemonic masculinity (quoted by Peker Dural, 2021, p. 514-515). We can say that the main male protagonists of TV series such as *Kuzey Güney* (2011), *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014), and *Söz* (2017) are also highly compatible with hegemonic masculinity. From this point of view, hegemonic masculinity can be thought to create a model for other men through both analog and digital media.

The media and media content has a vital role in the construction of masculinity and in bringing a particular type of masculinity to the fore. The media shows us the idealized masculinity with its contents and messages and brings it to the forefront by coding the ideal masculinity. The media is one of the essential tools that help the development of hegemonic masculinity through the collective perception of masculinity forms, which it shapes and reproduces. The importance of the media is that “it reflects the social structure in which it

exists and makes it popular by processing and re-establishing the valid values of the period,” as Demez (2011, p. 336) writes.

The media also has an essential effect on adopting and reproducing gender roles. For this reason, firstly, feminist studies and then studies about men have dealt with the roles of men and women in society and the representation of gender in the media as an ideological tool (Baştürk Akça and Ergül 2014, p. 14). The roles of femininity and masculinity are reconstructed within the social structure through daily life practices and gender-related social mechanisms. However, this existing sexist structure needs to be reinforced and sustained by the codes of patriarchal ideology. According to Karaduman and Adalı Aydın (2017), at this point, the media, which plays an essential role in the formation of dominant social values and identities, “comes into play and reconstructs and circulates this value system through content production” (p. 26). As İlhan (2011) also states, among the most critical factors in the construction process of gender in social life, family, school, religion, social environment, and media are the first ones that come to mind (p. 354).

Today, media, especially social media platforms, the most used digital media channels, are also very effective in this process. With the development of technology day by day and the increase in internet usage, daily life practices are also transferred to social media. Men have the chance to express themselves, to make sense of themselves, and to meet men from different groups. From this point of view, we can state that there is a connection between the development of technology and the reconstruction of gender. While technology is both the source and the result of gender relations, when we read the process backward, we can also argue that gender relations are both the determinant and the result of technology. In this sense, familiar cultural images and attitudes that define technological developments overlap

with masculine dominance, strengthening the relationship between technology and masculinity, Demez (2011, p. 336) claims.

Baştürk Akça and Tönel (2011) report that in the post-industrial age of the mass economy, new images and new male identities emerge in parallel with technological and social developments. Concepts such as “Atlas syndrome,” “workaholics,” “deadbeat dads,” and transgender people are discussed within this scope (p. 13). For example, Atlas syndrome, which takes its name from Atlas, whom King Zeus punished in Greek mythology for carrying the dome of the sky on his shoulders, is a psychological disorder that arises from the efforts of men to be successful not only in business life but also in the family. As in this example, the traditional male model has begun to change in contemporary societies, and as stated above, new masculinities have been shaped. This situation has various effects in terms of gender, which also creates a psychological battlefield for men. The situation defined as a “masculinity crisis” is argued to be based on the pressures on men caused by changes in the socio-economic structure. It is claimed that women's emancipation, greater participation in the public sphere, and economic problems, including unemployment, create doubts about the future and pressure men. In this regard, while the understanding of masculinity based on the patriarchal structure is somewhat broken, new masculinity models are discussed, as said by Erkıılıç (2011, p. 232).

According to Connell, today's hegemonic masculinity refers to “the ego-centered businessman character who can only establish conditional commitments, has less and less responsibility towards others, and does not have much commitment to anything and anyone except to earn money” (quoted by İlhan, 2011, p. 358). Apart from all these features, we see that today's modern man in the media also comes to the fore with the body. From this point

of view, we can state that together with the masculinity models that can change according to time, cultures, and societies, the masculinity models and representations that appear in the media also change.

Technological developments experienced today, including new communication tools and the internet, have led to the emergence of “new media.” We are now experiencing profound changes in many areas with the new media that has entered our lives. Communication and access to information are the most important of these. The new media era has enabled and improved our communication ability compared to traditional media. In this regard, the impact of internet technology and developing new devices is quite significant. This new era, in which people became active in networks, combined the concepts of producer and consumer and provided the user with an active communication space with many features that differed from traditional media (Öztürk, 2022, p. 98). With these developments and changes, we can access information much more easily and quickly and store it as digital data. In addition, the social arrangements and organizations formed around the devices and applications that emerged during this period are also very effective in people's lives. These regulations and organizations include blogs, virtual reality, social media, online newspapers, and digital games.

We can detail how social media, which is one of the elements that make up the subject of this study, provides all kinds of content sharing in digital environments, is interactive, and is independent of time and place. As Öztürk (2022) writes, social media are created by internet-based applications with Web 2.0 technology; they are the channels where the user expresses his/her thoughts, where content such as photos and videos are shared, and where communication networks are developed with different users, which enables friendships and

at the same time allows the formation of communities where communication is mutual and interactive (p. 106). Thanks to the interaction provided by social media platforms, users can create an active profile on these platforms and express themselves as they wish. In addition, these platforms have changed how people communicate and their habits of getting the news. Social media platforms that have entered our lives with technological developments have many features, and thanks to these features, they meet the communication needs of people, such as socializing, making friends, and getting the news. In this way, many people today use social media platforms. Another reason social media is preferred is that users can easily access it anywhere they have internet access.

One of the most popular social media platforms today is Instagram. As a social media platform, Instagram has all the features we mentioned, but what makes it stand out is its potential to create an agenda thanks to sharing visual content. From this point of view, we can say that Instagram plays a vital role in representing masculinity. Male users, like all other users, have a say in the content they share on this platform; they can limit the content they share as they wish and share it whenever they want. Thanks to these posts, men can represent themselves and have the power to make an impact, thanks to their interactions.

The Instagram platform has unique features where visibility, consumption, and entertainment are at the forefront. It is also easy to access because, thanks to the rapid progress of communication technologies, the Instagram application can be accessed via mobile devices without time or location restrictions. Users, especially men, can represent themselves in their free space on Instagram and be a part of a community. The fact that Instagram is a visual-based social media application allows men to represent themselves in

a non-verbal form. For these reasons, we can state that today many men prefer Instagram as a social media platform, which has become their daily experience.

Along with these, accounts with many followers, called “influencers,” have sprung up on Instagram, a popular social media platform among men. As Değer and Sina Nazlı (2022) writes, “Influencers, who are, in a sense, opinion leaders, have a large impact on their followers with their posts” (p. 25). In this context, on Instagram, where men can express and represent themselves through their posts, influencers are taken as role models in many areas, including manhood.

Influencers, as the name suggests, are people who influence. Influencers, who can focus on many specific topics such as sports, travel, fashion, lifestyle and food, have the power to influence their followers by making various posts about the topic they have interest, expertise or skills in. Their difference from other celebrities is that they are famous on the internet, that is, they are internet celebrities. Male influencers related to the subject of this study are also taken as an example by their male fans and are followed closely as an opinion leader. For example, a man who is interested in sports and bodybuilding can be influenced by a prominent influencer on this subject and benefit both symbolically and economically from it. With the increase in the number of followers of this influencer, he may have the potential to change masculinity in a sports-related way by making an impact in the lives of many men.

It is possible to find representations of gender and masculinity in social media, where masculinity can be reproduced and provided with anonymity, which opens up a space of freedom for its users. On the other hand, as Kızılırmak Ata (2021) writes, “Instagram, which differs from other social media applications with its young user profile and its effect on

shaping gender according to dominant attributions, is a fertile area for examining gender identities with these qualities” (p. 57), which is one of the main reasons why we have focused on the representation of masculinity on Instagram in this thesis.



3. METHODOLOGY

In this part of the research, various issues will be clarified, such as the subject of the research, the purpose, scope, limitations, research questions, research method, and its contributions to the literature.

3.1 Subject and Purpose

In the study, the research subject is the reproduction of the myth of masculinity in social media. This study examines the social media platform Instagram, which we use in many areas today, regarding gender. It is a study on body representation in social media. It aims to contribute to the literature by researching the representation and reproduction of the myth of masculinity on Instagram.

3.2 Scope and Limitations

Throughout the research, between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023, Lasse L. Matberg from Norway, Pietro Boselli from Italy, David Gandy from England, and Murat Simu Kılıç from Turkey were followed on Instagram.

To briefly introduce these people, Lasse L. Matberg is a lieutenant in the Norwegian royal navy and a sports coach. He is 37 years old. Matberg has been posting on Instagram since 2013. Photographs about his hobbies, profession, and environment, intertwined with sports and nature, where he and the body are in the foreground, are widespread on his social media accounts. His most active social media platform is Instagram.

Pietro Boselli is a model and also an engineer. He is 34 years old. Boselli has been posting on Instagram since 2014. His body, clothing style, the sports he likes to do, and his relatives are in the foreground in his photographs. The social media platforms he actively uses are Instagram and Facebook.

David Gandy is an English model. He is 43 years old. Gandy has been posting on Instagram since 2013. In his photographs, his body, clothes, cars, and the dogs he loves come to the fore. The social media platform he actively uses is Instagram.

Murat Kılıç is a Turkish Youtuber and social media influencer. He is 26 years old. Kılıç has been posting on Instagram since 2016. He often shares photos of his body, clothes, and places he has been. He actively uses Instagram and YouTube as social media platforms.

A semiotic analysis of three photographs shared by their Instagram accounts that received the highest likes rate was made. To select the accounts to be analyzed, purposive sampling was employed. First, a Google search was conducted to find the top ten Instagram accounts worldwide and in Turkey. Celebrities such as actors and athletes were excluded while making this selection since the research focus is mainly on social media influencers. In addition, attention was paid to the fact that the accounts had posts highlighting the male body and masculinity. Another criterion of selection considered age: The selected influencers showed diversity in age. The number of Instagram followers of the selected influencers is as follows: Lasse L. Matberg has 667B followers, Pietro Boselli has 3.4MN followers, David Gandy has 1MN followers, and Murat Kılıç has 84.4B followers.

As with many others, this study has several limitations. As mentioned, this study focused on the three most-interacted Instagram posts from each selected profile between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023. Therefore, posts shared at times other than the specified date and

posts that received less interaction within the specified date range are not within the scope of this research. The results do not represent all Instagram posts by each selected profile. Finally, the effects of sharing on other people have been evaluated through interactions, and no different studies have been conducted. In the future, getting their opinions by interviewing people or conducting a survey on this subject may be helpful.

3.3 Research questions

We can list the research questions of this study as follows:

1. How is masculinity represented in social media today, and what are the implications of this in terms of gender?
2. How is the male body represented and mythified in social media?
3. How is the myth of masculinity reproduced in social media, and how does it affect people?

3.4 Method

The research uses the semiotic method to examine four of the most followed male Instagram accounts on the specified dates. This analysis selected the sampled posts based on their interaction rates. For this reason, the three photos with the most likes from each Instagram account were selected and analyzed with the semiotic method. With this analysis, the literal meanings and connotations of the Instagram posts, that is, the selected photos, were determined, and the myth of masculinity reproduced was tried to be understood. To explain how this is done, a more detailed overview of the semiotic analysis will be provided below.

In short, semiotics is the study of signs. If we need to elaborate on this definition a little more, we can state that it is a branch of science that helps us understand how meaning is created using signs. According to Barkın and Özkartal (2018):

Semiology, a branch of science that examines signs without making linguistic or visual distinctions, examines everything that constitutes a meaningful whole by investigating what is intended to be shown based on the fact that the visible is not reality itself. (p. 169)

Interest in signs has a long history, but modern semiotics began with two crucial thinkers: the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce (1839–1914).

According to Saussure, language is a system of signs that express ideas, and a sign (*gösterge* in Turkish) consists of two parts:

SIGN	
<i>Signifier</i>	<i>Signified</i>
Sound-image	Concept

For example, “tree” is a signifier, while the signified is a large-stemmed plant. According to Saussure, the critical thing to remember about signs is that they consist of sounds and images, which they call signifiers, and the concepts that these sounds and images bring to mind, which he calls signifieds (quoted by Berger, 2016, p. 101). As Bozoğlu (2022) states, signifiers are symbols that refer to meanings and concepts, while signifieds are things referred to by signifiers. For example, the word “dog” is the signifier that expresses the mental image or the concept of a dog (p. 76). However, it should not be forgotten that the

signs are culturally specific, and their meanings vary according to the context in which they are considered. Besides, signs are not limited to words; many elements, such as images, sounds, and gestures, can be signs.

3.5. Roland Barthes' Myth Theory and the Myth of Masculinity

We should also mention the myth theory of Roland Barthes, who created his theory after Saussure's, which indicates a semiotic system. Roland Barthes (1915–1980), a French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, and theorist, was an important intellectual figure in France in the 1960s and deeply analyzed popular culture. According to Barthes, culture is like a language, and he explains how this language, that is, cultural signs, is used to create modern myths and serve capitalism and right-wing populism. According to Barthes (1972), myths are a second-order semiotic system (p. 113). Accordingly, denotation refers to the literal meaning. At the same time, connotation means what we understand by association, and finally, myths denote discourses about how we think about concepts that underlie a particular worldview (for example, masculinity, femininity, and freedom). The meanings extending to ideas such as masculinity (strong, superior gender, rational) and motherhood (a woman's most sacred duty) can be given as examples of myths.

According to Roland Barthes (1991), a myth is a unique sign in which a real sign becomes the signifier of a particular ideology. Again, according to Barthes, the meanings attributed to the signs can change according to people, time, and culture (p. 2). From this point of view, we can explain the myth of masculinity as follows: From past to present, the biological characteristics of men and the features and roles attributed to them by society are shaped with a strong emphasis on power, virility, and domination, and they become idolized

through various messages, and the concept we call masculinity myth has emerged. For example, a muscular and large body sign indicates that a man should be firm, forming the myth of the strong man. In the past, muscular and large bodies formed the myth of a strong man, but now, reason and success might be said to have replaced them.

In light of these insights, in the following chapter of the thesis, the posts of the male profiles on the Instagram platform will be examined semiotically to understand the reproduction of the masculinity myth in social media. For this reason, signs like facial expressions, postures, clothes, and the places where they are will be analyzed by focusing on the presentation of the men's bodies in the posts. In addition to these, the captions of the photos will be examined in order to understand the post as a whole.

3.6. Contributions to the literature

When we look at the studies done in the specific field of research that this thesis engages in, we see that a few studies focus on masculinity. Connell (2015) writes the following in this regard:

Although the overwhelming majority of studies in the semiotics of gender have focused on femininity, it is also the case that this approach has been extended to include masculinity from time to time. For example, Anthony Easthope's work, *What a Man's Got to Do*, reviews current issues of masculinity and reveals how men's bodies are defined as masculine through their depictions of their bodies in advertisements, movies, and news. (p. 108)

When we look at the theses and dissertations about social media and masculinity conducted in Turkey, it can be stated that the literature is very new, except for a few examples related to the relationship between Instagram and masculinity. In his thesis titled *Masculinity as a Narcissistic Presentation Style: The Naked Body in Social Media*, Doruk (2019) aimed to analyze the concept of masculinity as a sub-category of gender discussions through social media. However, the starting point is the reality of narcissism. In this context, in that study, narcissism was tried to be read through the nude posts of the male body on social media. Content analysis was carried out on the hashtags and photos they shared by selecting ten men with at least 10 thousand or more followers on Instagram and social visibility. In the analysis, “nudity” was determined as a primary category, and the study asked how nudity presents the concepts attributed to masculinity (Doruk, 2019). Another study is Görücü's (2022) thesis titled *Identity Construction in Social Media: Reproduction of Masculinity Through Instagram Fathers in the Context of Hegemonic Masculinity*. In this study, Instagram, seen as today's popular social media tool, has been deemed appropriate as the field of the thesis work due to its identity-creating and influencing power. This study used the content analysis method in the context of eight users' posts (Görücü, 2022). Thus, new insights can be developed from the findings of this study and contribute to the literature.

4. FINDINGS

The selected posts will be examined individually with the semiotic method in this part of the research. The meanings, connotations, and myths they contain will be explored and discussed.

Before going into the details of the analysis of their most liked posts, we should make some notes about the overall aura of the selected male influencers' Instagram accounts. In many of the posts they shared, the natural and robust features of the locations in which they are portrayed and the notion of male power come to the fore. Besides, they try to highlight their unique cultural and national identity with the signs they carry or those surrounding them. For example, Lasse L. Matberg's photo below highlights the prominent features of Norwegian nature and manhood.

Figure 1

L. Matberg's post with a unique cultural focus



Similarly, the photo below posted on Instagram by Pietro Boselli highlights the beauty of the Italian Alps as associated with the idea of being an athletic and powerful man. In addition, it reflects the Italian identity and Italian culture of the men who use motorcycles.

Figure 2

Pietro Bosselli's post with a unique cultural focus.



In the photo below of David Gandy, as in the ones above, the attractive features of the nature of his country (England) accompany the emphasis on male power and elegance. This photo also represents the idea of freedom as associated with manhood and the countryside.

Figure 3

David Gandy's post with a unique cultural focus.



Finally, in Murat Kılıç's photograph below, the location's natural beauty is emphasized and made to seem in harmony with the characteristics of the man as being young, joyful, and sportive. In addition, the location used in the photograph, namely the Bosphorus, also expresses the Turkish identity and culture.

Figure 4

Murat Kılıç's posts with a unique cultural focus.



As seen in the examples above, these male influencers try to portray a globally oriented image of the new dominant form of masculinity in their photos by emphasizing the so-called universal characteristics of being a man, such as being elegant, athletic, young, and muscular. However, they try to equip this rather idealized image with a cultural tone by featuring locations uniquely associated with their countries of origin.

The pages below will analyze each influencer's three most-liked posts semiotically.

4.1. Semiotic analysis of Lasse L. Matberg's posts

Matberg's three posts on his Instagram account will be examined in this section. As mentioned, the posts that received the most interaction between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023, were chosen for review. We can see the dates and interaction counts of the selected posts in the table below:

Table 1

Dates and interaction rates of Matberg's analyzed posts

Post Number	Date Posted	Interaction (likes)
Post 1	October 16, 2022	13.165
Post 2	January 26, 2023	7.341
Post 3	May 14, 2023	7.489

Figure 5
Matberg's first photograph



The first selected post contains more than one photo, but the first photo of each post is included in the analysis.

This photo shows a modern-looking man with a sporty and stylish clothing style. His body is quite sporty and muscular, so his stance is confident. There is a tree-lined road in the photo's background and a rainy autumn, as can be seen from the color of the trees. Finally, we see a black Mercedes car. All of these are signifiers with literal meanings. The connotation of a muscular and good-looking male body is that a man with these traits has power and impressiveness. Here, the black car with the Mercedes logo represents a luxury

brand. Its connotation is that it is a quality, expensive car everyone, particularly men, would like to have but only some can achieve. Symbolic messages about the car are masculinity and power since cars are usually regarded as phallic objects. To put it simply, while horses fed the power of men in history, it is now cars. Moreover, the sign of the tree-lined road in the background of this photograph indicates the characteristics and beauties of nature. Trees with yellow leaves symbolize the variability of nature. Against this variability, the man with his car stands as a symbol of power and stability.

The myth this photograph produces about masculinity is that the male body is fit, muscular, strong, and, therefore, impressive. In addition, men can support their masculinity with the quality and expensive things they have. Finally, to fully understand the shared content, it is necessary to examine the description, and the photograph's caption, which is given below.

Figure 6

Description of the first photograph



This description expresses appreciation for the new version of the car model in the background, which is the literal meaning of this description. Admiration for the new model of the said car evokes love for a woman, and this has a connotation. Namely, the myth is that men value the cars they own or want to have and attribute feminine meanings to them.

Figure 7
Matberg's second photograph



In the second post, a man with a sporty and muscular body is in the foreground. In the background, we see a red car and a snow-covered tree-lined road; these are indicators that express the literal meaning of each sign.

The meaning associated with the sporty, muscular male body, which can stand comfortably without getting cold even in cold and snowy weather despite not wearing thick clothes, is its endurance and strength. More precisely, the connotation is that the male body expresses endurance and strength. The red car with the Mercedes logo on the back indicates a car of the Mercedes brand, which is the denotative meaning of the display. Its connotation is that it has properties suitable for snowy weather and is durable. The symbolic message that is desired to be given by the car is masculinity, strength, and endurance once again. The message is that the characteristics of cars are similar to those of men, and they complement each other. Also, the symbolic meaning of the snow-covered tree-lined road in the background of this photograph points to the harsh and challenging conditions of nature.

The myth formed in this photo is that the male body should be solid and durable. Also, men can support and showcase their stamina and strength with what they have.

Finally, we can see the caption of the photo below:

Figure 8

Description of the second photograph



In this statement, the expression of love for the winter season expresses its literal meaning. The connotation of “I made you cold, but I love winter” evokes the stamina and strength of masculinity. The ideological message to be given here is that men are rugged and strong.

Figure 9

Matberg's third photograph



In the third photograph chosen, we see a broad-shouldered and muscular man in modern clothes standing in an enclosed space. These signs refer to a modern, well-built man in a closed environment.

Here, the connotation is that a broad-shouldered and muscular male body is one of the characteristics of a modern man that should be brought to the fore. When we look at the photo, the most striking thing is the broad shoulders and muscular arms of the male body, which represent the man's strength. The indoor environment used in the background of this photo symbolizes warmth and safety. So, he is also portrayed as a man who likes to have time at home. This idea is not usually associated with the traditional conception of manhood. So, this environmental clue indicates a new understanding about being a man.

In connection with the meanings mentioned above, the myth in the photo is that men are broad-shouldered and muscular, so they are strong, but they can also be stay-at-home people.

Now let us look at the caption of the photo:

Figure 10

Discription of the third photograph



This statement states that the sweater on the man in the photo is from a new collection; various information is given about it, indicating this sign's denotative meaning. The expression that the sweater on a man belongs to both a man and a woman evokes gender

equality and modernity. The myth formed by this statement is that men should be contemporary and tolerant of fluid gender roles.

4.2 Semiotic analysis of Pietro Boselli's posts

This section will examine three posts from Boselli's Instagram account. As mentioned, the posts that received the most interaction between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023, were chosen for review. We can see the dates and interaction counts of the selected posts in the table below:

Table 2

Dates and interaction rates of Boselli's analyzed posts

Post Number	Date Posted	Interaction (likes)
Post1	February 24, 2023	92.216
Post2	March 11, 2023	86.943
Post3	May 28, 2023	86.776

Figure 11
Boselli's first photograph



Pietro Boselli's first photograph shows a muscular, half-naked man in a swimsuit. In the background are two muscular men and a vehicle. One of the men in the back is dressed more modestly than the others and is holding a surfboard. There is an open-top vehicle in the back, suitable for use in summer. The photo shows sunny weather and clouds; we can think it is summer. All these express the denotative meanings of the signs. To put it more clearly, they are the literal meanings indicated by those who show two muscular, half-naked male bodies and one male body holding a surfboard on the beach in summer.

The beach-like area in the background of this photo symbolizes summer and hot weather. The symbolic meaning and message of the car behind it are adapting to changing conditions as a proof of masculinity and strength. The muscular and semi-naked male bodies here evoke the attractiveness of the sexy male body, and thus it has a connotation. In addition, the connotation of the male body, dressed close to the others and holding a surfboard in his hand, is that sports, especially surfing, increase men's attractiveness. From this point of view, the myth about the male body and masculinity in the photograph is that muscular and sporty male bodies are sexy and attractive, supporting all these by doing sports.

Finally, to better understand the whole of the shared post, we can look at the caption below:

Figure 12

Description of the first photograph

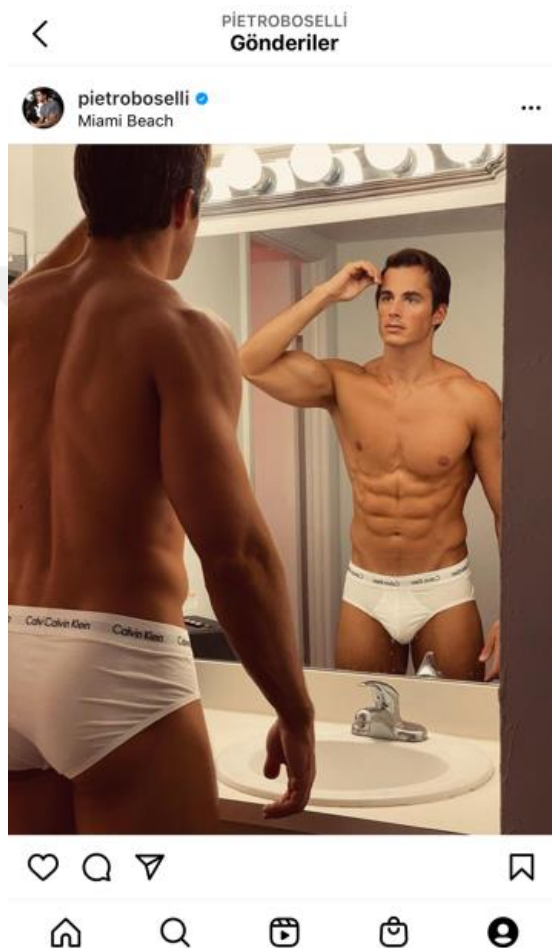


This statement mentions that the photo was retaken after a long time for a brand's campaign, expressing satisfaction with it, which is the expression's denotative meaning. In addition, Pietro Boselli thanks his friends and states that it is work they have done with them. The explanation suggests that the campaign is a team job and that success comes only from

working with talented teammates, which is the explanation's connotation. The myth in this expression is that if men can work as a team and are talented, they will also be successful.

Figure 13

Boselli's second photograph



Pietro Boselli's second photograph shows a muscular man wearing only underwear in the bathroom. This man is well-groomed, with his hair combed, and looking at himself in the mirror, which expresses this sign's literal meaning.

The fact that a man has a muscular body also means that he takes care of himself and likes himself, which is the connotation intended to be shown in this photo. The bathroom in the background of this photo shows a private space and symbolizes privacy, again implying

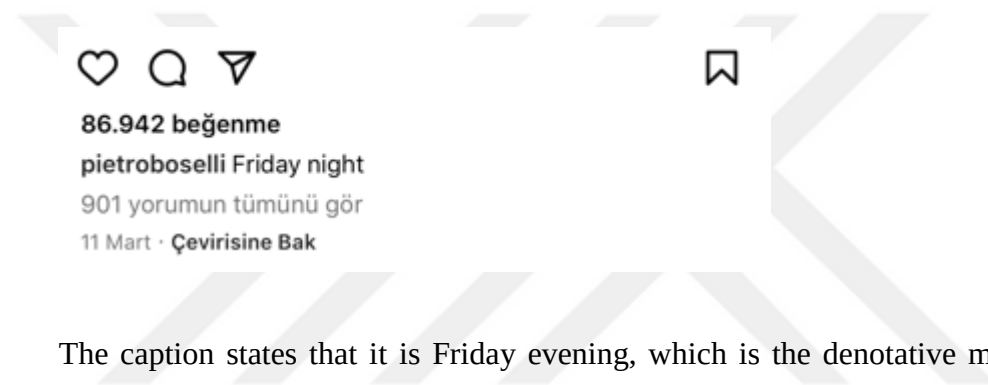
that gender roles are becoming fluid since taking care of one's body at home is not traditionally associated with being a man.

The myth produced by the photograph is that men have muscular bodies because of how they care for themselves and express their appreciation for their bodies.

We can see the caption of this post below:

Figure 14

Discription of the second photograph



The caption states that it is Friday evening, which is the denotative meaning. Friday evening evokes that the weekend is coming and enjoyable leisure activities can be done, which is the connotation of the caption. We can state that the idea that Friday evenings are essential and enjoyable for men is a myth produced by this statement.

Figure 15

Boselli's third photograph

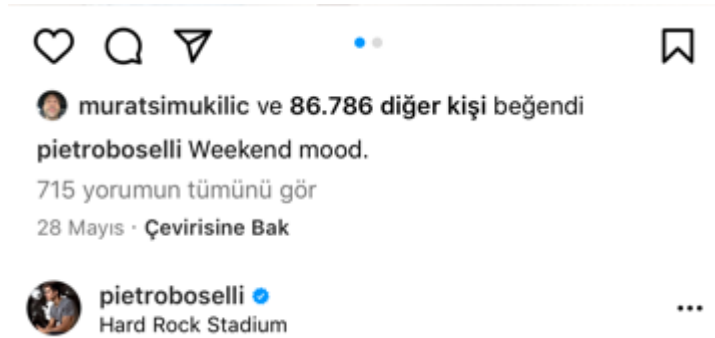


In the third photograph, we see a man, dressed only in trousers and bare-chested, lying on a house sofa, relaxed, representing the sign's literal meaning.

The connotation of the photo here is that a man with a muscular and beautiful body can feel comfortable at the same time. The sitting area of a house used in the background of this photo symbolizes comfort and the idea of being at home.

If we refer to the myth that photography produces about masculinity and the male body, a man with a muscular and beautiful body feels and/or should feel comfortable at home.

We can see the caption of Pietro Boselli's last photo below:

Figure 16*Description of the third photograph*

In this description, the phrase “weekend mode” indicates that the weekend leads to a mood change, which is the literal meaning here. The fact that the weekend has arrived suggests it is time to rest, which is also a connotation. The thought that may be a myth about masculinity in this statement is that men are in a different mood at the weekend, engaging more in free-time activities and taking care of themselves.

4.3. Semiotic analysis of David Gandy’s posts

This section will examine three posts from Gandy’s Instagram account. As mentioned, the posts that received the most interaction between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023, were chosen for review. We can see the dates and interaction counts of the selected posts in the table below:

Table 3*Dates and interaction rates of Gandy’s analyzed posts*

Post Number	Date Posted	Interaction (likes)
Post1	November 24, 2022	35,087
Post2	November 26, 2022	38.857
Post3	February 28, 2023	34.730

Figure 17
Gandy's first photograph



In the first photograph, we see a healthy, fit man dressed in a tuxedo, stylish, and holding an award at the ceremony. They point to the denotative meaning of the sign. In the photo's background, we see an area where the award ceremony was held, which expresses the literal meaning.

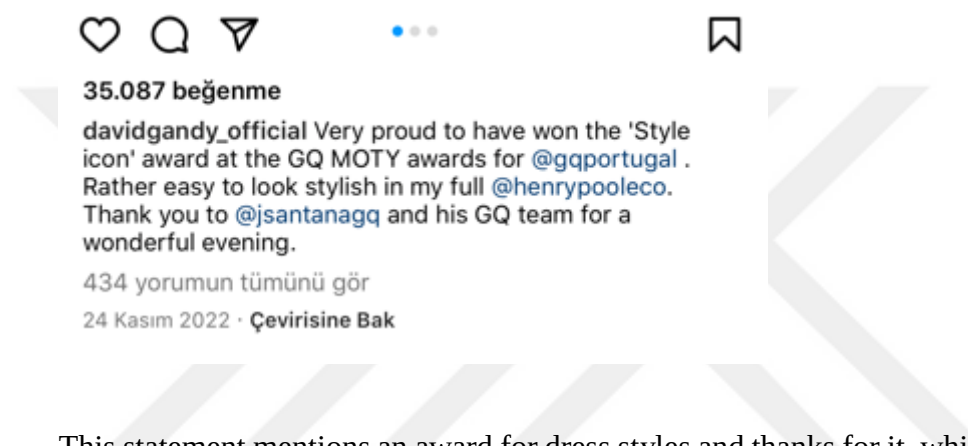
Having a healthy, fit body and wearing a tuxedo evokes this man's self-care and elegance, which is the connotation. The place where the award ceremony is held, used in the photograph, symbolizes a unique and vital day and points to the idea of success.

The myth is that a successful man should have a sound body and dress elegantly. In connection with this, a man with a good body and stylish clothes proves that he cares for himself.

We can see the caption of this post by David Gandy below:

Figure 18

Discription of the first photograph



This statement mentions an award for dress styles and thanks for it, which is the phrase's denotative meaning. The connotation here is the success gained with the award. The myth in the caption is that a man is and should be successful.

Figure 19*Gandy's second photograph*

In the second photo, we see a broad-shouldered, muscular, and sporty but stylishly dressed man, which is the literal meaning of the sign. The background of the photograph shows an exhibition space.

Broad shoulders, a muscular body, and sporty-chic clothes show the man's health, strength, and style, which are connotations. The exhibition area in the background of the photograph symbolizes ostentation and pleasure.

This photo has spawned the myth that men should have broad shoulders, a muscular body, and style.

We can see the caption of David Gandy's second post below:

Figure 20

Discription of the second photograph



In the description of this post, David Gandy states that he always supports British brands and celebrates the opening of a brand's store, which is the expression's true meaning. Supporting British brands in this expression also connotes that British brands are good, which is a connotation of the expression. Also, the statement's myth about men supports what men like and dislike.

Figure 21
Gandy's third photograph



In David Gandy's last photograph, we see a muscular upper-body man, dressed simply and comfortably, sitting in an enclosed space, and this expresses the literal meaning of these signs

Here, the plain clothes and the muscular arms highlight the man's most distinctive and striking feature, which is the connotation. The place, understood to be a shooting area in the photograph's background, symbolizes trust and comfort.

The myth formed in the photograph is that one of the most striking and defining features of a man is a muscular body.

David Gandy's last post does not contain any description of the photograph. However, it gives details about the professionals who are charged with styling his look. Implicitly, the message given by this information is that a man should take care of his body and get help from professionals to this end, if necessary.

Figure 22

Discription of the third photograph



4.4 Semiotic Analysis of Murat Kılıç's Posts

This section will examine Kılıç's three posts on his Instagram account. As mentioned, the posts that received the most interaction between October 15, 2022, and June 4, 2023, were chosen for review. You can see the dates and interaction counts of the selected posts in the table below:

Table 4

Dates and interaction rates of Kılıç's analyzed posts

Post Number	Date Posted	Interaction (likes)
Post1	October 24, 2022	2.864
Post2	May 13, 2023	1.732
Post3	May 26, 2023	1.209

Figure 23
Kılıç 's first photograph



In the first photograph, we see a man holding coffee, wearing a leather jacket, broad shoulders, earrings, and tattoos among the tall urban buildings, and these are the denotative meanings of signs.

Contrary to other photos, this one evokes a more modern and feminine man with earrings, tattoos, and coffee alongside a muscular body, which expresses the connotative meaning. The location of tall and modern buildings in the background of this photograph symbolizes innovation and power as associated with height. It also signifies an urban lifestyle.

The myth here is that a muscular man can also be feminine.

There is no caption in this post by Murat Kılıç:

Figure 24

Discription of the first photograph



2.864 beğenme

20 yorumun tümünü gör

24 Ekim 2022



Figure 25

Kılıç's second photograph



The second photo shows a muscular, tattooed, and hairy male with a bare upper body in a mountainous region. In addition to these, he has a large earpiece on his neck. These indicators express the denotative meaning of what we see in the photograph.

On the other hand, the muscular, hairy, and tattooed male body evokes the combination of traditional and modern men, which is the connotation to be shown. The mountainous region in the background of this photo symbolizes nature and wildlife, on the other hand.

The myth in this photo is that a man can have both a traditional and a modern look.

There is no caption in this post by Murat Kılıç:

Figure 26

Discription of the second photograph



Figure 27
Kılıç's third photograph



In the third photo, we see a fit man with tattoos on his arms and wearing a shirt, representing the literal meaning. In the background of this photo, there is an open urban place at night.

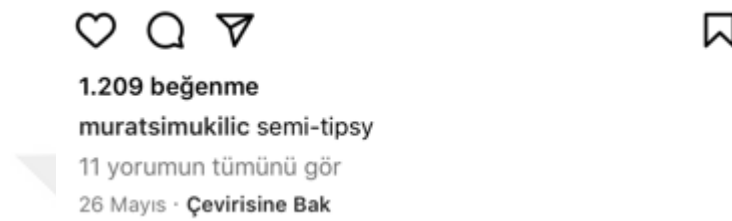
Here, a muscular, fit body, tattoos, and shirt evoke an anomaly that states that a muscular, tattooed man looks serious with the shirt he wears while appearing marginal, and this is a connotation. The place in the background of this photo symbolizes the city's nightlife and emphasizes the idea of being an urban man.

The myth in the photo is that every man should have a muscular and fit body, even if his style is different.

You can see the caption of Murat Kılıç's last post below:

Figure 28

Discription of the third photograph



In this explanation, “semi-tipsy” means that the person in the photo consumes alcohol but is not entirely drunk, which is the expression's literal meaning. Although alcohol has been consumed, not being completely drunk suggests that the body is resistant to alcohol. Thus, "men can consume alcohol, and their bodies can withstand it" is the message of this statement about men.

Based on the findings above, it can be stated that there are various similarities and differences in all the analyzed posts. In the examined Instagram accounts, it was seen that men from different cultures, geographies, ages, and professions represented themselves by highlighting their solid features and bodies. In summary, we can say that men with different characteristics meet on a common point in body representation and represent the transition from traditional to modern manhood in different ways. For example, the passion for luxury, taking care of one's body and being happy to stay at home, etc. appear like modern features of manhood, but the muscular, strong, nature-dominated male image represents traditional

masculinity. The photographs combine these two understandings. In doing so, they also emphasize their own cultural characteristics, especially with space symbolism.



5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, four popular male Instagram accounts worldwide, including Turkey, were sampled. The three most interacted photos shared by these accounts between October 14, 2022, and June 4, 2023, were semiotically analyzed. As a result, it has been attempted to obtain information about the reproduction of the myth of masculinity in social media by looking at how the male body is represented and mythified in this online space. In light of the research findings, masculinity representation in social media will be evaluated from a gender perspective below.

We can state that the history of gender and masculinity examined and touched upon in this study is closely related to masculinity in its present form. In particular, the fact that masculinity is historical and exists and evolves within social relations are two essential notions that guide our understanding of masculinity and the myth created around it.

Institutions, religion, family, the social environment, and especially the media are very effective in reproducing the myth of masculinity. In the age we live in, new media, which have penetrated our lives with the development of technology and social media platforms, one of the new media channels, have also been included in this process as very effective actors. In this direction, the photos shared by popular male profiles on Instagram were looked at to investigate how the reproduction of the masculinity myth is reflected there. In addition, it has been observed from the posts examined in this study that the myth of masculinity is reproduced in the representations of the male body on Instagram.

When we look at the four Instagram profiles selected for analysis, we see that some specific themes emerge. Looking at the first of Lasse L. Matberg's posts, we can say that a

fit, muscular, and strong male body is emphasized, and the strong man legend is underlined. In addition, the message that men's clothing styles and elements such as cars support their power and self-confidence is conveyed. In the second post, besides a sporty and muscular male body, the emphasis is on the durability of the male body. Considering the third and last post, it is seen that a broad-shouldered and muscular male body is emphasized, and the modern male myth is reproduced. In addition, it is seen that the message is given that men should have a broad-shouldered, muscular, strong, and contemporary appearance. This message is also intended in the first and second photographs.

When we look at the first photograph of Pietro Boselli, one of the selected male profiles, we can say that the naked, muscular male body is exhibited and highlighted. In connection with this, we can see that the message that doing sports reinforces these features is given by emphasizing that muscular and naked male bodies are sexy and attractive male characteristics. In the second photo, the prominent message is that they have a muscular and well-groomed body, which is how men can express that they care for themselves and like themselves. There is, in fact, an emphasis on taking care of themselves and their bodies. When we look at the third photo, we see that a muscular and good-looking male body is brought to the fore. The message is tried to be given that men can feel good and comfortable only when they have it.

The first photo of David Gandy emphasizes a beautiful and muscular male body and a calm and confident stance. Therefore, the message is that men should have good physical features and dress stylishly. In addition, a myth that a man should be successful is formed through this sharing. It conveyed a message of success with the award held by David Gandy and the photograph's caption. In his second photograph, it is seen that the masculinity myth

that men should have broad shoulders, good looks, and style is reproduced by emphasizing a broad-shouldered and beautiful male physique and a sporty-elegant clothing style. When we look at his last photo, David Gandy's muscular arms and broad shoulders are highlighted together with plain and monochrome clothes, conveying that one of a man's most striking and defining features is his muscular body.

The last male profile selected belongs to a Turkish citizen, and in his first photo, a broad-shouldered and muscular male, like men from other countries, is highlighted. When we look at the photo, we see a muscular man, as in the others, albeit with a different and more feminine style. In parallel, we can state that the modern male myth is reproduced with the message that a muscular and strong man can also be feminine. When we examined his second photo, we saw an emphasis was placed on his muscular, hairy, and tattooed male body, combining the traditional and modern conceptions of manhood. It aimed to convey that a man can have a muscular, strong, traditional, innovative, and different appearance. In the last photo, a muscular, fit body, tattoos, and shirt are emphasized, producing a relatively marginal appearance beside the myth that a muscular, fit body should be in every man, even if his style is different.

In the posts we have examined, the modern male myth is generally produced with messages such as success, self-confidence, elegance, and self-care, even if the emphasis on the male body, superior physical features, and strength contain meanings pointing to the traditional male model, and, accordingly, we can say that the understanding of masculinity has changed from past to present in a negotiated manner. The posts present a new masculinity model by reproducing a masculinity myth with a muscular, rugged, modern appearance and self-confidence. Along with these, positive and normative messages such as doing sports,

being successful, being open to change, and being modern are given. In addition, emphasizing men's strength and physical characteristics in every photograph examined means that men are still in the foreground as the superior gender and are thought to have superior physical characteristics compared to women. On the other hand, with the posts' emphasis on the notion of the modern man, we can positively state that some changes in masculinity have been experienced and can be experienced. These positive changes can contribute to forming a more egalitarian society where some men are not superior to women or other men. Therefore, when the photographs are evaluated from a gender perspective, it can be said that they have both positive and negative effects.

While the themes of these posts are male bodies and the emphasis on muscular male bodies and male power may have adverse social effects (for example, evoking violence with a focus on male power), they may have positive effects regarding gender equality. On the other hand, we see that the mostly shared muscular, strong, and good-looking male bodies are idealized and encouraged, and the myth of masculinity is reproduced through this theme. Considering that it seems almost inevitable for men who do not conform to these characteristics to feel excluded and inadequate, it should be noted that the masculinity myth reproduced here points to hegemonic masculinity. In this respect, the analyzed posts provide essential insights into hegemonic masculinity. Besides, considering the influence of social media, we can state that the analyzed posts are of critical social importance.

Along with the examinations made in this study, the social importance of social media has been understood. It can be stated that social media reproduces the myth of masculinity, manages the communication between men, and causes them to be influenced by each other, thanks to the interaction and many opportunities it provides by its nature. Social media,

especially Instagram, is essential to reach and influence people. It has been seen that Instagram, a friendly and comfortable medium generally used by young men, provides a lot of insights into the changes in the understanding of the male body and the representation of masculinity. In parallel, it allows us to understand how the myth of masculinity is produced today.

When we look at the literature, we see that masculinity studies and discussions usually deal with topics such as the definition of masculinity, masculinity roles, and hegemonic masculinity. However, the number of studies focusing on masculinity and body representation in social media is low. Today, we can say that social media is one of the critical places where the myth of masculinity is reproduced because it is very effective across many areas. In this context, this thesis will contribute to the literature and provide insights for similar studies to be done in the future. Finally, in this study, no analysis was conducted to understand the effects of shared photos on Instagram users. For this reason, getting the opinions of Instagram users about such popular male accounts' posts can make an essential contribution to other studies and literature in this field.

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