

## The Representation of Masculinity in Cinema and on Television: An Analysis of Fictional Male Characters

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### Abstract

Mass media, especially cinema and television, are important devices that build and strengthen males and female roles in societies. The representation of gender in media is crucial because individuals get to know gender roles in the process of socialization. Besides the female identity, masculinity is also a constructible element and fictional male characters produced both in cinema and on television send messages about masculinity to the audience. In this study, the male representation both in the television series and in films were compared with this assumption and the question how male characters are represented on the two different mass media is examined in Turkey. Furthermore, the question "whether masculine representation reinforces the existing patriarchal male image or produces an alternative male model" is in the interest area of the study. The method of this study is reception analysis and in-depth interviews were undertaken with audiences with different demographic characteristics. As a result, it has been found that male representations in cinema and television are produced with similar myths, symbols, metaphors and messages, similar gender languages are used in different media, and fictional male characters in cinema and television have common characteristics.

**Keywords:** gender studies, masculinity studies, mass media, audience studies, Turkey

### Introduction

Just as femininity, masculinity as an identity is produced by societies according to gender approach; we can see that there are many femininities and masculinities identities cyclically and culturally. This phenomenon is similar in Turkey just as the other countries. Hegemonic masculinity is a kind of cultural structuring. The characters of a man with particular ideal can be identified by the power domain belonged to culture. The man with particular ideal in the modern societies where we live must have these qualifications which serve to the institution of the social structure. The man with particular ideal may be described as a productive man who interiorises gender roles by following the social rules. However, on the other hand, it is not possible to mention that there is only one masculinity definition. Masculinity is shaped by the codes of every society.

Both cinema and television are the two of strongest mass media which reflect social values. Films have plot which has the power both reflects and influences social values system. The narration provides the identification. Besides cinema, television illustrates the power of mass communication to inform, educate and influence the public. While industry insiders often deny this power, saying television is just for entertainment, it is clearly obvious that both adults and children learn a great deal from watching television week after week. Some critics urge that television teaches negative values such as stereotyping, consumerism, a superficial and trivial approach to life.

In this study, the male representation both in the television series and in films were compared with this assumption and the question how male characters are represented on the two different mass media is examined in Turkey. Furthermore, the question "whether masculine representation reinforces the existing patriarchal male image or produces an alternative male

model" is in the interest area of the study. The method of this study is reception analysis and in-depth interviews were undertaken with audiences with different demographic characteristics. As a result, it has been found that male representations in cinema and television are produced with similar myths, symbols, metaphors and messages, similar gender languages are used in different media, and fictional male characters in cinema and television have common characteristics.

### **Masculinity & Hegemonic Masculinity**

Gender theory brought by the arising second-wave feminism has initiated the studies on masculinity (Akca & Ergül, 2014). Feminism has begun to be supported by some men questioning gender inequality since 1970s. This concept, so called as pro-feminist, has led to the spreading of critical masculinity studies discussing the men and masculinity by sticking to the feminist principles (Bozok, 2009). Critical studies on men and masculinity has emerged from several criticisms and debates on gender relations such as feminism in particular, and gay and queer studies. Moreover, critical masculinity studies refer to a group of studies pointing out men critically in terms of gendered power relations (Hearn, 2004). Masculinity which is developed with hegemony notion generated by Gramsci, refers to the hierarchical relations among the different masculinities. Multiple masculinities by Connel (2000: 216) tell that gender has been generated with different ways in different cultures and different eras, particularly in a culture such as at a school or a work place we may encounter with these masculinities.

The first generation critical masculinity studies continued their discussions over an ideal masculinity state. This concept continued to the end of 1970s and based on the sex role paradigm minimized the masculinity to a role model (Akca & Tönel, 2011). Accordingly, there is only one personality cluster characterizing the men, thus describing masculinity. The same situation is valid for the women (Connell, 1998). In 1980s, the viewpoint that there are more than one form of masculinity has begun to be widespread (Renkmen, 2016: 249). Accordingly, different cultures and different historical eras create different gender regimes, so different patterns of masculinity (Connell, 2002a: 141). That means masculinity is not static and eternal but it is historical. Its meaning may vary due to the changes in time and people (Kimmel, 2005: 25). This viewpoint about masculinity also claims that several masculinities can be produced within the same gender regime. These masculinities develop different relations with each other and different power focuses and institutions, and they are represented in various forms in various cultural products (Özbay & Baliç, 2004: 92-93). Therefore, masculinity differentiates depending on some factors such as historical, class, cultural, sexual identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, and ethnicity, and as a result of this differentiation various inequalities emerge.

On the other hand, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that the supporter of hegemonic masculinity may not only act with the standards presented by the culture of the society all the while, but also modernise gender relations and form the masculinities over again. According to them, since gender relations are a kind of stress field, an ascribed masculinity may stay as hegemonic during to solve for these tensions. The authors do not base hegemonic masculinity on social reproduction theory. In other words, they mention that gender theory cannot guess which pattern wins within the hegemony struggling.

### **Masculinity Forms in Popular Media in Turkey**

Generally, it is possible to see that the social status of man as "new" and "changing" in film genres. Many of films, figured in genres, are in a struggle for keeping order status quo. Individualistic man profile dominates in film genres such as westerns, gangsters, and detectives. Mannish images and iconographic tools such as knife, gun, telephone, car which create a hero are essential elements of these films (Schatz, 1981).

Abisel (1984: 33) states that many of Turkish films move in the direction of keeping order status quo. Even though traditional values are not valid, it is desired to be sustained and reinforced. Certainly, the same fact obtains in terms of values related

man. When we analyse Turkish cinema, it is possible to see that Turkish cinema is based on types. There is a cinema based on types opposite the cinema based on characters.

Uluyağcı (2000)<sup>1</sup> states the masculinity in Turkish cinema in her insightful article. In Turkish cinema, it seems that there are male types that we can generally describe as traditional until 1950 and 1980. However, after 1980s, a new type of male appears on the screen. It is observed that though this type is out of “traditionality” is preserved as it is, but preserves the existence of the traditional male image that existed before. Whereas women are passive and trouble-maker, men are observed to have an unlimited sense of courage, ambition and revenge in films. Therefore, it is possible to state that masculinity is reproduced in every time on the screen.

For instance Yesilcam cinema<sup>2</sup> cannot get a clear attitude when it fronts it (Ayça, 1987: 38). Thus, the values for the man come in the face of the viewer. In the Turkish cinema, leading actors always play as “good men”. However, these are also divided into groups among themselves. The actors who act a role for the viewer with the “hard male type” are better suited to the traditional Turkish man type both physically and behaviourally. The so-called romantic boys separated from the more traditional male image. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, new male image appeared in mass media. The changing male image emphasizes that the traditional values are no longer valid and that the more emotional type of the man of contemporary world of that time should be well-groomed, briefly more contemporary, and closer to the female type.

Moreover Oktan (2008) states that it is possible to see the representations of masculinity presented in a significant part of the films made in the Turkish cinema since the second half of 1990s as a demonstration that there is a threat perception in terms of masculinity. In the most of these films, which are the subject of friendship with male men, male domination, which maintains its weight in Turkish cinema in general, is dominant. However, in these films made in the 1990s, masculinity is rather problematic, depressed, fragile, diseased, prone to extreme violence to women and homosexuals, constantly depressing has a pessimistic, guilty, insecure qualities.

On the other hand, Gürbüz (2016) states that after the 2000s in Turkish cinema, various masculinity situations began to appear. This representation of masculinity has become a story of a crisis stemming from the change in the values of gender roles in a few films. Moreover, in some movies it was created in such a way as to allow us to criticize these values directly.

Masculinity representation on television in Turkey is not different from cinema. The academic scholars indicate that the heterosexual neo-liberal entrepreneur has become a hegemonic male in the world and in Turkey. Akça and Ergül (2014) state that the presentation of leading male characters as a hegemonic man in the series in Turkey shows that despite the change in the hegemonic masculinity, the traditional masculinity patterns still remain in Turkey and this change only reveals a hybrid structure.

### Reception Analysis

Each of audiences will decode texts in ways that reflect their personal biographies, their own histories. The researchers have attempted to link the social position of the audience with their readings of media texts. They also place an emphasis on the idea of ‘pleasures’ and ‘audience interpretation’. This theory is very popular in cultural studies and would describe watching television as a cultural practice (Morley, 1980, Buckingham 1993, Ang 1989). Reception analysis is one significant critique of the field has questioned the extent to which audiences are free to interpret texts in different ways. Emphasising the interaction between text and reader, combined with an integration of micro and macro levels of analysis, offers a response to the attack on the concept of the audience. In brief, this attack is critical of the tendency to adopt the broadcasters’ concept of audience (Livingstone, 1998). According to Hall (1993, 101) there are three different positions

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1 On the other hand, Uluyağcı states in both Turkish cinema and in other cinemas such as Hollywood and some other countries’ cinema masculinity type is similar to each other.

2 Yesilcam refers to the 1950-1960 era in Turkish cinema.

receivers take in order to decode the meanings within cultural texts, particularly televisual discourses. These are the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional position.

### **Receptions of the Audience**

The aim of the study is to determine how the Turkish cinema audience and the audience of Turkish television serials have received the main male characters in those productions physically, psychologically and socially and compare these characters with the male characters in daily life. In this context, selected audiences are asked to answer these questions without any limitations by asking three open ended questions.

To provide information on the participant profile, audiences can be included in the middle class and upper-middle class social categories. The audiences' age range is 18-50. Five of them are women, and four are men. The aim of the work is not just how the audience see the male characters in the series and movies they watch, but also how these characters are in harmony with real life. Similar findings of different audiences were not reported in the study. The page limit of the search is considered and we as the researchers intended not to repeat similar info.

Each participant in the study is coded with the letter A and listed starting at number one.

#### **A1**

In Turkish films, male characters in the comedy films such as *Recep İvedik*, *Sabit Kanca*, *Olur Olur*, *Dedemin Fişi* are vulgar, brutal, hairy, distant from civilization, fat and ugly people. They are trying to do comedy with profanity, rudeness, and disgusting behaviour. These can in fact be interpreted as the hidden aspects of some men. When we look at the romantic Turkish films, all the male actors seem to have popped out of modelling competitions. All men are handsome, muscular, bearded, skin smooth, tall. Some are brunette and some are blonde. They have no physical defects, their self-confidence is high. They oppress the other characters in the line and judge them. This character absolutely falls in love with a very beautiful woman and gets her. In this process, he overcomes all kinds of difficulties and is always perfect. He is absolutely rich and has luxurious houses and cars. He belongs to the upper class and is the owner of the holding. There are similar issues in the Turkish series. The main characters are handsome and fit men. They are rich, well-educated and high-class members. They usually fall in love with a crowded, tribal family member and an urban girl who does not fit into the family. All male characters put pressure on everyone. There are no such characters in everyday life. The perfected characters are the profiles that do not fit in everyday life. None of us meet a rich, handsome, holding boss, a suit in a cage or on the road.

#### **A2**

There are two types of men in Turkish films: Firstly, they are overly in love with their love, they are extremely romantic and emotional men. These profiles are usually handsome and rich or handsome and poor. They are charismatic and beautiful smiles. They are physically sporty, muscular. The other male type is malicious, bad physics. In the Turkish series men are physically well. They are sporty, well-fed, muscular men. Either a dark or coloured eyed or blond and coloured eyed. These people are all sensitive, helpful, modern, quality time passers.

The men we communicate with in daily life are men in the opposite direction of these sequences and films. People, who use slang, do not pay attention to style; do not know where to act. His clothes and his physics are not like in the series and movies. We are usually full-bodied, short-lived, and full of people who do not pay attention to their nutrition and who cannot communicate with women. They are not tied to their houses, their families, like the men in the series, the movies.

### A3

Generally, male characters in Turkish movies are handsome, rich and business man. The types that people admire as characters, which seem unconcerned. They live in good homes; they have good cars and want to have what they want. Unlike the films in the Turkish series, all the main characters belong to a company, an agency, a holding. They live in the scenic houses. All the women in their surroundings tolerate them, but they choose a single woman. He runs after the woman he wants at every opportunity, doing everything to get it.

In our everyday life, while such types are admired for some, they are unnecessary professions for me.

### A4

Male characters acting according to patriarchal ideology are generally good-natured, holding people with excellent qualities. There's no flaw in their character. In these constructions the physical and characteristic features are given in contrast. Poor - fat, rich - poor qualities are transmitted with different characters. The main character never dies. He never has a tragic incident either.

### A5

In Turkish films, male main characters usually appear as two types: first type is overweighted, coarse, dark and patriarchal mannered. Other type is stylish, muscular, handsome and romantic. These types (second) are mostly seen in romantic movies. In the Turkish series, the main characters usually play a role in the network. Women around him are in love. There is a wife and a woman he loves. The actors are all models.

In real life, there are no men who pay attention to clothing and fitness. With the influence of these series, men may have started to play sports. The male characters we saw on the series apologize for making mistakes against their wives. However, there are even those who kill their wives in everyday life.

### A6

The main characters in Turkish movies are different according to the film style. Romantic movies have charming, charismatic, emotional, tall, cute male characters. She has the ability to express herself. They look like one of us in comedy movies. They're usually fat. Tall, muscular, mysterious characters are selected in action and similar genre films.

In the series, the male characters are rich, handsome, and know what they want. Their financial situation is good. Self-confidence is high.

In real life, we do not see the characters we see in movies and series. Comedy-type productions are full of characters from us, but the male characters in romantic productions are unlikely to come out.

### A7

Physically handsome men are used in romantic movies. These characters are rich at the same time. The audience is satisfied by seeing things that are not in them. The diction of these characters is flat, rich, envied by others. They attach importance to family relationships. They appeal to the traditional audience. They do not look like brand fans, but the brand is highlighted in the movie they own. In comedy films, people are made fun of ignorant people. Physically very fat or very weak people are used. I do not find it similar to real life.

### A8

In Turkish movies, male main characters generally vary by genre, but there are mostly muscular, handsome, attractive, powerful men. In the Turkish series, we see rich, handsome, strong characters. The male characters we encounter in the

Turkish film and series do not resemble the people we communicate in everyday life. On the contrary, some people move away from their natural state by trying to resemble those characters.

## A9

In romantic movies, the male character has to be absolutely handsome. The character and appearance of this man is perfect. He's in the perfect male profile. If there is a problem, this character definitely solves that problem. It's like Superman's unflinching state. In comedy films, there is the opposite. An ugly male character is used as possible. We see fat, hairy, bald, vulgar or stupid men.

In everyday life, I see men who try to resemble characters in movies and series. As a character, there is no one who can be exposed to such evil and approach the events with goodness.

## Conclusion and Analysis

Being a man in society is as difficult as being a woman which is a process that carries big responsibilities and burdens. Men have been socializing with a number of codes in society since they were born. This socialization, which started in family at first, continues with other ideological apparatus of the state. Mass media such as films, television are effective on this process. Masculinity does not exist on its own. Although their ideal masculinity characteristics change over time, men can appear in society with these qualities.

It is possible to state that the most people do not meet these standards but are influenced by these standards. In this study, which uses the method of reception analysis when asked how the cinema and television viewers evaluated the male characters in these productions, two stereotypes appeared. The first one is romantic, handsome, rich and powerful in every sense. The latter is funny, simple, rude and frustrating. It is as if the two characters reflected in inner appearance. According to the common perception of the receptions, both in Turkish TV series and in Turkish films, women are the second plunge. The role of the woman in the narrative is to be with the male character, to be loved and protected by him. Male fights against life, overcomes difficulties and protects his woman. All gender roles are strictly distinct from one another. In all these constructions men are described by their external appearance. Wealth is a very important element. These productions create a pressure on how the men in the real world should be and also an expectation of how woman's ideal man should be. Consequently the face-to-face interviews in this work show that the male characters on television and in the cinema are not convincing.

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