

De-gendered or Re-gendered? Rethinking Ageing Masculinity Through Conversations About Car Advertisements

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Abstract

Historically and culturally, a close connection has been built between the car and masculinity. This relationship is particularly evident in representations in advertisements. Masculinity is also commonly depicted as something that declines in old age. Based on these two presumptions, this study focuses on how elderly men construct the relationship between car and masculinity through car advertisements and how they construct their sense of masculinity. The specific aim of this research is to explore how elderly men in Türkiye construct the relationship between cars and masculinity through car advertisements. The general aim is to observe how elderly men construct their masculinity in the Turkish context. Using a qualitative methodology, two focus-group interviews were conducted with a total of eleven male participants over the age of sixty. The purposive sampling method of criterion sampling was used in the research. Data collected in Amasya, Türkiye, in July 2022 were analyzed using the qualitative-analysis software MAXQDA. According to the results of the research, elderly men see the car as a masculine object and as a primary/essential object for men; they also agree with the stereotype that a car adds some masculine characteristics to and/or reflects the masculinity of its owner. Yet they also associate reliable cars and a safe driving style with feminine characteristics and with old age. As a result, it can be said that elderly men in Türkiye experience a fluid, bricolage masculinity, shifting between different masculinities depending on the situation or context. These findings have the capacity to contribute to the formulation of numerous new research questions concerning the relationship between masculinity and ageing, an issue that has hitherto been largely overlooked in existing literature.

Keywords: Ageing, masculinity, elderly men, advertisement, car

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Cinsiyetten Arındırılmış mı Yoksa Yeniden Cinsiyetlendirilmiş mi? Otomobil Reklamlarına Dair Konuşmalardan Yaşlanan Erkekliği Yeniden Düşünmek

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Öz

Tarihsel ve kültürel olarak otomobil ile erkeklik arasında yakın bir bağ kurulduğu görülmektedir. Otomobil ve erkeklik arasındaki bu ilişki özellikle reklamlardaki temsillerde gözlemlenebilmektedir. Bununla birlikte yaşlılık da erkekliğin görece çözüldüğü bir dönem olarak tasvir edilmektedir. Bunlardan yola çıkarak bu araştırma, yaşlı erkeklerin otomobil reklamları aracılığıyla otomobil ve erkeklik arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl kurduklarına ve erkeklik algılarını nasıl inşa ettiklerine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırmamızın özel amacı Türkiye'deki yaşlı erkeklerin araba reklamları aracılığıyla araba ve erkeklik arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl kurduklarını keşfetmektir. Genel amaç ise Türkiye bağlamında yaşlı erkeklerin erkekliklerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini gözlemlemektir. Çalışmada amaçlı bir örnekleme yöntemi olan ölçüt örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Nitel metodoloji bağlamında yarı-yapılandırılmış sorular aracılığıyla 60 yaş üstü toplam 11 erkek katılımcı ile iki odak grup görüşmesi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Temmuz 2022'de Amasya/Türkiye'de toplanan veriler nitel analiz yazılımı Maxqda kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmada 60 yaş üstü erkeklerin otomobiller ve erkeklik arasındaki ilişkiye dair söylemlerindeki coğrafya ve yaş temelli anlam inşaları analiz edilmektedir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre, yaşlı erkekler otomobili erkeksi bir nesne ve erkekler için birincil/zorunlu bir nesne olarak görmekte; otomobilin erkeğe bazı erkeksi özellikler kattığı ve/veya erkekliği yansıttığı klişesine katılmaktadır. Kadınsı özelliklerle ilişkilendirdikleri güvenilir araba ve güvenli sürüş tarzını yaşlılıkla ilişkilendirerek bu normları aşındırmaktadırlar. Tüm bunların sonucunda Türkiye'deki yaşlı erkeklerin duruma/konuya göre erkeklikler arasında kanal değiştirdikleri, akışkan bir brikolaj erkeklik deneyimlediklerini söylemek mümkündür. Bu bulgular, şimdye kadar mevcut literatürde büyük ölçüde göz ardı edilmiş bir konu olan erkeklik ve yaşlanma arasındaki ilişkiye dair çok sayıda yeni araştırma sorusunun formüle edilmesine katkıda bulunma kapasitesine sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlılık, erkeklik, yaşlanan erkekler, reklamcılık, otomobil

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Although the literature discussing the relationship between cars and masculinity is partially developed in the West (O'Connor and Kelly 2006; Balkmar 2012), it is relatively limited in Türkiye (Duruiz 2016; Aktürk 2016; Özkan 2020). Moreover, there is no literature on how this relationship is shaped by ageing. In contrast to the literature on old age and masculinity that has been developing in the West for some time (Spector-Mersel 2006; O'Neill and Léime 2023), there is almost no similar literature in the Turkish context (Erol and Özbay 2013). Furthermore, the issue of car advertising and masculinity is also rarely addressed in the literature, with only one study found that discusses how male participants make sense of masculinity in car advertising (Sandhu and Singh 2017). Based on these independent studies in the literature, the specific aim of our research is to explore how elderly men in Türkiye construct the relationship between cars and masculinity through car advertisements. The general aim is to observe how elderly men construct their masculinity in the Turkish context. In order to create a conceptual exploration process for these purposes, we conduct a qualitative thematic analysis based on the data from the focus group interviews.

In our study, we analyse geography and age-based constructions of meaning in the discourses of men over 60 about the relationship between cars and masculinity. "Masculinities", which is our theoretical approach, is conceptually two-dimensional. First, there are three types of masculinities: local masculinities constructed in the face-to-face interaction spaces of

families, organisations and close communities; regional masculinities constructed at the level of culture or the nation-state; and global masculinities constructed in the spheres of world politics and transnational business and media (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Second, it refers to a hierarchical system that establishes a subordinate-superior and dependent relationship between men, positioning the hegemonic man at the top and excluding those at the bottom (Şahin 2018). In this hierarchical system, there are four different masculinities depending on the hegemonic one (Messerschmidt 2019). (1) Complicit masculinities help to maintain hegemonic masculinity by using unequal gender relations to their advantage in their choice of practice. (2) Subordinate masculinities (such as feminine men) are constructed at a greater distance from the hegemonic masculinity, or they deviate from it and are atypical. (3) Marginalised masculinities are trivialised and/or discriminated against because of inequalities outside of gender relations, such as class, race, ethnicity and age. (4) Protest masculinities are constructed as compensatory hyper-masculinities, formed in response to social positions that lack economic and political power. Therefore, this approach argues that masculinity is differentiated across time, place (Walker et al. 2000), society (Thompson 2006), geography (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), sexual orientation, religion (MacKinnon 2003), race, class and age (Connell 2005). In this context, it is possible to observe different masculinities in Türkiye, which are positioned differently according to social classes, ethnic and religious communities, age, occupational groups and physical characteristics (Sancar 2009). Therefore, our research focuses on urban, heterosexual, Muslim, middle class and over 60 masculinities in Türkiye in 2022. In terms of understanding how ageing shapes masculinity in the local geography of Türkiye, we believe that our research is unique.

Masculinity in Old Age

In old age, it is widely accepted that men gendered identities enter a stage of social de-gendering (Silver 2003). For men, there is an assumption that ageing reduces their masculinity and increases their femininity (Thompson 1994). This is because culturally there is a close and deep-rooted connection between masculinity and youth (Spector-Mersel 2006). In particular, hegemonic masculinity is considered young and heterosexual (Slevin and Linneman 2010). Since young men are seen as athletic, muscular, strong, pain/illness resistant, active, confident, controlled, powerful and masculine, they are associated with hegemonic forms of masculinity and therefore valued (Coles

and Vassarotti 2012). However, it is underlined that hegemonic masculinity in Türkiye has nothing to do with “incomplete, immature, young masculinities that have not completed their transition and evolution” and “old men who are washed-up, disconnected from the world, powerless” (Özbay 2013, 190-191): “Hegemonic masculinity ... needs power and strength, and this is available in middle age, when both physical strength, health, performance and intellect ... are at their peak.”

Although it is difficult to identify and describe the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in Türkiye (Alemdaroğlu and Demirtaş 2004), it is assumed that all male bodies in the country, except the effeminate ones, automatically represent it (Erol and Özbay 2013). The hegemonic masculinity in Türkiye is characterised by “urban, professional, able to provide for the household, financially well-off, protecting his family, dominating his wife and children, powerful, influencing those around him, capable of using violence, both the guardian of honour and the one who has the right to disobey the rules of sexual morality” (Öztürk 2020, 36). With the dissolution of geriatric patriarchy in Türkiye and the construction of a gender regime based on the dominance of the male breadwinner in the family, the power of elderly men in the family over younger men disappeared and the “market”-based masculinity authority of the producing-earning young man gained importance and elderly men were excluded as the type of labour that did not fit the needs of the capitalist market (Sancar 2009). This inevitably marginalises elderly men and their “impotent” lives (Özbay 2013).

However, it has been argued that hegemonic masculinity continues to provide guidance in evaluating oneself and others throughout life (Thompson and Whearty 2004) and that it remains constant as a cultural reference for ageing men (OliFFE et al. 2013). In this context, contrary to the arguments that the cultural codes associated with masculinity of male individuals dissolve with ageing, there is evidence that masculinity can be important in all life stages of men and that masculinities do not remain in the background in old age (Ribeiro et al. 2007; Thompson and Langendoerfer 2016). Moreover, there is also information that elderly men perceive old age as a threat to their sense of masculinity and develop some strategies for this (Clarke and Lefkovich 2018). For example, operating in the field of older masculinity allows them to maintain a dominant masculinity in which their experience, wisdom and maturity are valued (Coles and Vassarotti 2012). Therefore, we can say that ageing does not prevent men from being men, on the contrary, there is a

different masculinity that changes according to the age scale and is born from later life (Thompson 2019). Indeed, elderly men, especially in their speeches in the context of their bodies, care about performing masculinity by maintaining traditional gender norms with expressions that will distinguish themselves from femininity in the process from youth to ageing (Glendenning et al. 2017).

Cars and Masculinity

The transformation of the car into a symbol of masculinity (Bengry-Howell and Griffin 2007) starts from the childhood of men (Walker et al. 2000). Boys get acquainted with toy cars before they go to school and imagine themselves driving cars in all areas of the house (Ergüven 2000). In addition, boys learn real car repair, driving and culture from their fathers or male role models such as uncles and neighbouring brothers, thus internalising the idea that the car is a part of male identity from an early age (Özkan 2020).

The cultural interpretation of gendered cars is a persistent phenomenon that extends into adulthood. According to this interpretation, the home is regarded as a domain of responsibility for women, while the car is considered a domain of responsibility for men (Garvey 2001). (Male) consumers turn their cars into their homes by touching, repairing, cleaning and equipping them with various accessories, and define them as an extension of the home (Karmasin 2010). In this respect, the car resembles a domestic space that men are interested in and reserved for them, while masculinity in the driver's seat constructs a kind of second living room dominance with its disciplined and seated immobility (Jain 2005). Therefore, the car is influenced by the traditional gender ideology of separate spheres (Gartman 2004).

The gender-related meaning of a car is not only associated with the life stages of male individuals, but also with other gendered characteristics attributed to cars. These include technical specifications, usage, shape, colour, size, type, price and brand. For instance, with regard to the issue of gender, certain model cars, including trucks, are perceived as masculine (Thomas and Pojani 2022). Conversely, small, fast and stylish cars are often regarded as feminine and are not accorded the same level of seriousness, being instead referred to as "chick cars" (Lezotte 2012). These types of cars, which do not require technical skills, are considered feminine, especially because they have automatic gears; manual cars are considered masculine because engine control/dominance and technical skills are considered masculine (Gedik et al. 2021). Another example is that the newest and most expensive cars are associated with the head of the family, the man of the house, while second-

hand cars are associated with the women in the house. According to this distinction that emerged with the automobilisation of family life, women are directed to want safer/family models, while men are directed to want fast sports cars (Urry 2004).

The gender-based differences in the meanings associated with cars are also clearly evident in the way cars are driven. In this context, the cultural association of cars with speed, youth, and young masculinity is a salient factor. For young men, acquiring a driving licence and owning a car is indicative of a transition to adulthood and manhood (Freund and Martin 1996). Young men, eager to seize every opportunity to prove themselves, often find pleasure in controlling a powerful and potentially dangerous machine like a car. (Dichter 2017). For young men, the excitement and pleasure of driving at high speed, overtaking rival cars and having a beautiful girl sitting in the front passenger seat are very important (Walker et al. 2000). Thanks to the car, the young man is able to discharge his sexual energy by means of speed and violence, as if he has infinite horsepower behind the wheel (Ergüven 2000). However, according to the traditional gender dynamics, the car is an advertisement of male wealth that “women look for” in dating (Belk 2004).

Finally, the synchronisation of the car with the concepts of gender and age is highly visible. Speed, symbolising progress and dynamism, is associated with young masculinity, while slowness, symbolising femininity, regression and weakness (Freund and Martin 1996), is associated with women and older individuals.

Masculinity in Car Ads

Gender is constructed socially, historically and culturally and this construction is reinforced through mass media (Shaw and Tan 2014). Especially as cultural mediators of media cultures, advertisements make extensive use of gender stereotypes (Craig 1993; Rutherford 1995; Schroeder and Zwick 2004). Advertisements can have a particularly strong influence in reinforcing our gender role attitudes, values, perceptions, beliefs and behaviours (MacKay and Covell 1997). On the one hand, advertisements provide cultural codifications of how we behave as women and men, and on the other hand, they convey how we think about the behaviour of women and men (Gornick 1979). In this context, it is possible to say that car advertisements do not adopt a gender-oriented approach that emphasises masculine dominance in car culture (Chatti 2020).

In a historical context, shortly after the publication of the first car advertisement in 1898 with the message “Dispense with a horse” (Corey 2023), it is realised that the long-lasting justification of gender in car advertisements began. In the advertisement of the Chandler brand, which introduced its convertible car between 1915 and 1922, the message was that the car would bring power to men and beauty to women (Şentürk 2000). Later, in post-World War II car advertisements, the car was presented as a family vehicle, with the driver always being a man, the woman in the passenger seat and the children sitting in the back seats resembling the virtual design of the household (Wernick 1992). In the gendered car advertisements that continued in the 1960s, cars were depicted as the means of transport used by men to go to work or for long distance travelling (Thomas and Pojani 2022). By the 1970s, sex-gender riots affected car advertisements, reducing masculine imagery to some extent, and the portrayal of the nuclear family was rarely presented in these years (Wernick 1992). In the 1980s, as perceptions of gender in working life changed, representations diversified and women’s independence and individuality began to be emphasised (Thomas and Pojani 2022).

Even if it is associated with both genders, sexism about the car persists. For example, in adverts, large cars are supported with masculine symbols and stories, while small cars are compared with the female body (Smith 2014). However, even if a woman driver is preferred instead of a man, the message of masculinity remains constant. For example, in the BMW Z4 advertisement, due to the speed and performance of the cars, a message conveyed is that the masculine instinct emerges when the driver gets behind the wheel, even if the driver is a woman (Bernard 2017). Therefore, although there is some evidence that stereotypical cultural signification has changed in the representation of masculinity in advertisements, traditional masculinity is still presented as a positive cultural representation in advertisements (Garst and Bodenhausen 1997).

According to the gendered discourse in car advertisements, the driver is symbolically coded as a man and the car as a woman, and driving is associated with the realisation of a man’s sexual performance (Işık and Oksev 2022). The archaic self, which is coded with the horse, the woman and the gun, continues as a woman and a car with the attractive woman used in advertisements (Çiftçi 2009). Some adverts portray the car as a woman, marking it as a symbol of the womb and paradoxically as a phallic symbol of power (McLuhan 1951). Other advertisements associate owning a car with having the women portrayed in

the ads, suggesting that having the car will bring a romantic partner (Reichert 2003) and imply that it adds an irresistible sexual charm to the owner (Belk 2004). Therefore, for these attractive “passenger princesses” (Dundes 2023), who do not interfere with the driver’s control, resemble a kind of ornament and sit in the passenger seat, it becomes important to own that car.

Another prominent interpretation in the advertising discourse is on the basis of gender-specific abilities / driving skills. In advertisements focusing on speed, power, manoeuvrability, high-speed cornering, risky off-road driving, stopping ability, braking and similar features, the skill and mastery of the male driver is underlined (Redshaw 2018). According to the adverts, driving a car is as natural an activity for men as walking. Unlike women, men in the adverts are genetically portrayed as cool, confident and skillful in the car experience (Yüksel 2006).

Furthermore, sexist implications in car advertising are perpetuated through the use of metaphorical comparisons. Such narratives are based on the idea that “there is a connection between those who are strong and fast in nature and those who own cars” (Çiftçi 2009). Indeed, the fact that manufacturers are producing cars with higher horsepower and that men are trying to reassert their masculinity, which their old cars could not afford, by buying them (Packard 2007), can be attributed to this. In fact, the attribution of images to cars by naming them after strong and fast creatures of nature and using the image of horse and woman together in their advertisements is aimed at making men feel strong and secure (Elgezdi 2003). The portrayal of the car with animal vitality is used to produce sexist images (Freund and Martin 1996).

Methodology

The specific aim of our research is to explore how elderly men in Türkiye construct the relationship between cars and masculinity through car advertisements. The general aim is to observe how elderly men construct their masculinity in the Turkish context.

RQ1: According to elderly men, what is the relationship between car and masculinity?

RQ2: How is the message of masculinity presented in the car advertisement interpreted by elderly men?

This study adopted a qualitative paradigm. Data were collected using the focus group technique.

Focus group interview

The focus group method was preferred because it creates a synergistic environment in which individuals have a group brainstorming experience and are able to reveal, recall, and express feelings and thoughts about a particular topic that they may have difficulty revealing on their own (Krueger and Casey 2015), has the power to access rich data (Bernard 2006), and provides an opportunity to examine how a particular topic is processed and developed in a particular cultural context (Kitzinger 1995). In accordance with extant methodological literature, the optimal number of participants in a focus group session ranges from four to twelve (Kitzinger 1995; Morgan 1997). However, it is frequently the case that sessions comprising four to six participants are employed, as such numbers engender a sense of comfort among the participants (Krueger and Casey 2015). In accordance with these methodological considerations, a maximum of six participants were invited to the sessions. Interviews were conducted after six participants in the first session and five participants in the second session accepted the invitation. The extant literature generally concurs that the optimal number of focus group sessions is between three and five (Morgan 1997; Glesne 2013). However, shortly after the second focus group session was completed in the present study, it was discovered that one of the participants had contracted the virus. This gave rise to concerns regarding the potential for viral transmission. Consequently, the present study concluded that the focus group discussions were conducted over two sessions, as is exemplified in the literature (Rubin 2004; Liao et al. 2020; O'Neill and Léime 2023). This was due to the life-threatening nature of old age and the pandemic, and the sufficient data diversity. The first session took place in a café&restaurant with separate rooms, in a closed environment where there was no contact with other visitors, while the second session took place on the second floor of a two-storey café, whose owner showed sensitivity to the researchers' request and did not allow other visitors during the session. Snacks and drinks were provided during both sessions. These were paid for by the researchers. Interview questions are in Appendix 1.

The data collection process in the research started with the decision of Selçuk University Faculty of Communication Ethics and Evaluation Board dated 18.04.2022 and numbered 2022/9. Data were collected in the Amasya/ Türkiye in July 2022. The interviews lasted a total of 3 hours, 10 minutes and

35 seconds. A 103-page data document was obtained from the recordings taken from 1 camera and 1 audio device.

The ad rationale

A relevant commercial was used as a methodological tool to stimulate discussion in the sessions. The BMW ad “Kerem Bursin & BMW 3 Series” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vk-sc_ZGoho) was chosen for its message strategy, which visually and verbally emphasises the cultural and historical link and continuity between masculinity and the car. The ad features three generations of middle-class men (grandfather, father and son), namely boys, young men and adult men, and uses the slogan “He always shows me the right way, always carries me further”.

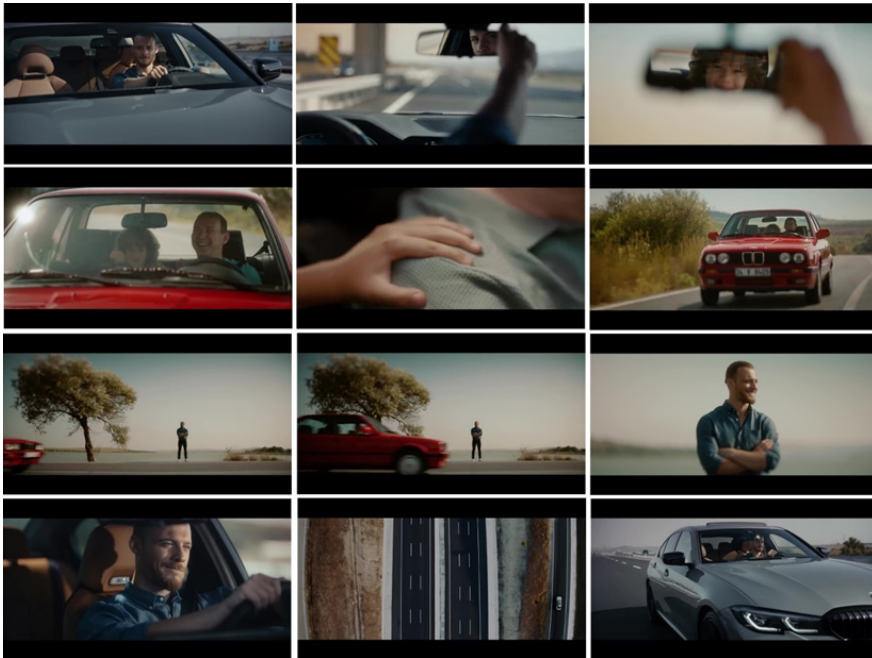


Figure 1: Sample scenes from the commercial

Participant information

Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the research. The research criterion was “to be a man aged 60 and over who has driven a car at some point in his life and is not under guardianship”, which follows the logic that a focus group is a specially recruited group of

participants (Kitzinger 1995). The age at which ageing begins is controversial. It is difficult to establish a precise starting point by following the literature chronologically. In conceptualisations of older people, which include key terms such as “later life”, “older age/person/people”, “ageing” or “older people”, there are different starting ages of ageing, such as 50 years and over (Thomas and Thurnell-Read 2024), 60 years and over (Villar et al. 2023; King et al. 2020), 65 years and over (Clarke et al. 2014; Clarke and Lefkowich 2018). On the other hand, it is also observed that national (TİHEK 2021) and international (WHO 2022; UN 2017) organisations have accepted the age of 60 and above as a starting point in recent years. Because of this complexity, we think it is possible to focus on ageing, as the starting age of our participants is 62 and the average age of our participants is 65. Our participant group consists of people aged 62-74, socio-economically middle class, mostly married and retired:

Group	Dura- tion	Docu- ment	Partic- ipant	Age	Marital Status	Education	Profession
1st Group	1.35.39	46 pages	P1	65	Married	Bachelor’s	Retired Teacher
			P2	66	Married	Associ- ate’s	Retired Teacher
			P3	67	Married	High School	Tradesman- Working
			P4	70	Married	High School	Retired Public Employee
			P5	64	Married	Bachelor’s	Retired Public Employee
2nd Group	1.34.56	57 pages	P6	74	Married	Associ- ate’s	Retired Teacher
			P7	62	Single	High School	Retired Trades- man
			P8	63	Married	High School	Retired Officer
			P9	64	Married	Secondary School	Retired Trades- man
			P10	63	Married	High School	Retired Officer
			P11	63	Married	Associ- ate’s	Retired Teacher

Table 1: Demographic information

Three issues are noteworthy in the focus group discussions. Firstly, in these interviews conducted by two young female researchers with elderly men over the age of 60, the cultural situation of the distinctions between genders, ages and professions was reflected in the statements: “Don’t misunderstand... I’ll say it to your face, I’m not saying it for everyone” (P9). Secondly, the participants used 49 different memories, stories, experiences and testimonies from their personal histories to strengthen their narratives: “in our youth... let me tell you a memory of mine, ...let me tell you from my experience (P2). Thirdly, the participants made negative interpretations of “old age” at personal and general level: “We are in the last stages of life, ...after this age” (P1).

The researchers were aware of the differences in age, gender and education level between the participants and themselves, and they adopted a critical approach to the subject. Therefore, throughout the research (from December 2021 to today), they took care to reflexively question themselves, each other and the theoretical background in order to avoid any bias.

Coding

First, the data were first transcribed by the second author and the transcription files were uploaded to a new project opened in the qualitative analysis programme MAXQDA. Second, the authors coded the focus group files together by reading and discussing the focus group files line by line during an online meeting lasting about a week in which the second author screen-shared. Coding was carried out by the second author by selecting the relevant section of the file in the programme’s coding system and adding the codes agreed during the meeting to the relevant section using the add “new code” button. Coding was performed using a data-driven technique based on direct quotations (in vivo) from participants’ direct words and expressions (Creswell 2007). Third, in a similar meeting that lasted about two days, the authors discussed and decided together which categories and themes the codes they added to the code system could be related to. At this time, category and theme names were opened with the same features of the programme, and merges were made with plus-minus and direction buttons. During the coding process, the authors discussed which term to use for similar expressions: for example, unhurried (2nd author) or cold-blooded (1st author); man and speed (2nd author) or man speed (1st author). Four, the second author created visual diagrams of the coding using the MaxMap feature in the visual tools of the programme and uploaded them to the Google Drive folder used for the

research. Finally, the reporting of the results was done jointly by two authors. A large amount of data was accessed and coded beyond our research aim and questions, but as some diagrams are beyond the scope of our research and it is impossible to discuss all of them in a single paper, they are presented in the appendix (2) for other researchers who may be interested.

Comprehensive Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents the core empirical findings, offers thematic interpretations supported by selected diagrams, provides critical discussions of two key diagrams (Figures 2 and 3), and concludes with descriptive commentary on additional diagrams included in Appendix 2.

Overview of main findings

First, since the participants conducted the discussion with age and gender-based comparisons, coding was generally based on the axis of “men, young men, elderly men, women”. This distinction made by the participants while speaking shows that they implicitly construct a hierarchical relationship. When men were discussed in general terms, the reference was actually to the hegemonic male in Türkiye, a figure positioned between the immature masculinity of youth and the weakened, world-detached masculinity of old age (Yürek and Karaboğa 2018, 968). Woman is the type of identity that the hegemonic man is most concerned about resembling and is at the bottom of the ladder (Cengiz et al. 2004). It is clear from this hierarchy established by our older male participants that hegemonic masculinity remains a powerful, perhaps the dominant, script in the evaluation of the self throughout life (Thompson and Whearty 2004; Thompson 2006).

Second, participants generally interpreted the car as highly significant for men, while describing it as a passing fad or new interest for women (“It started to be a fad for women too” - P3), thus placing men in a hegemonic position in the cultural universe of meaning of the car and subordinating women (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Third, participants generally associated the car with conspicuous consumption in the Turkish context, which is due to the high cost of car prices, oil and spare parts, and the fact that the car is privately owned (Aktürk 2016). Since the participants consisted of urban middle class men, they make sense of ideal masculinity through financial power (Sancar 2009; Kahraman 2019). In the individual sense, the role of the car as a provider of both internal and

external status, especially for men, was recognised: “It gives the man a status” (P5); “Go to the tender with the latest model Mercedes and the latest model Audi and BMW and see what happens” (P9). “People on the street say ‘oh look at him, look how much money he has’. They start to respect him” (P10). Age does not seem to matter when it comes to status.

Discussion of the relationship between cars and masculinity

This section examines how participants conceptualise the relationship between cars and masculinity. As demonstrated in Figure 2, participants predominantly associated cars with masculine characteristics and emphasised gendered assumptions embedded in car culture.

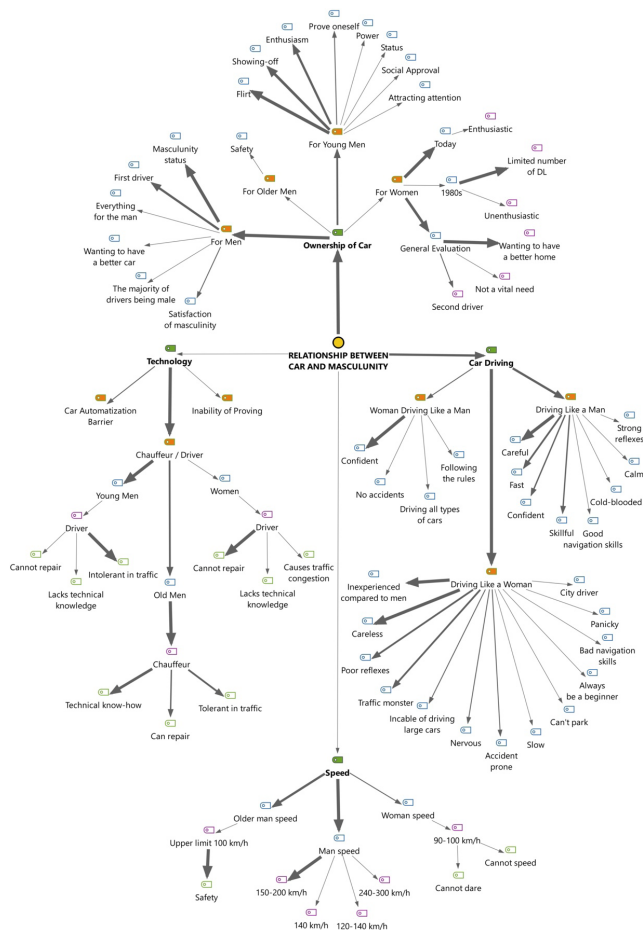


Figure 2: Relationship between cars and masculinity

In general, there is an intensity in the codes of the car associated with men and young men, which is consistent with the assertion that the car has traditionally belonged to the domain of masculinity in the West (O'Connor and Kelly 2006; Bengry-Howell and Griffin 2007; Balkmar 2012) and Türkiye (Aktunç et al. 2000; Aktürk 2016).

The ownership relationship between the man and the car is produced by the gender ideology of separate spheres (Gartman 2004). The traditional placement of women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere is reconstructed in the intersection of car and man. Elderly men perceive the car dichotomously as a strategic object (Işık and Oksev 2022) that enables separation from the feminine sphere and the maintenance of masculinity:

Men care most about cars... Women don't really care about them — they care about the house. A man has just one thing: his car. And it means everything to him. For us, the car is what the house is to a woman. Let me tell you something about men: they buy a Murat, like a Murat 124, and then say, "No, I don't like it, I need something better." That's how men are. They always want the fanciest car, just like women want the fanciest things in their homes (P10).

Participants compared their masculinities with young masculinities in many ways. Both masculinities show that the non-hegemonic positions of masculinity (Messerschmidt 2019) constructed by the middle-aged Turkish hegemonic male (Özbay 2013) through age-based marginalisation are internalised by the participants. While younger men are interested in proving their masculinity in order to move on to the stage of hegemonic masculinity, elderly men experience a stage where hegemonic masculinity has already ended (Spector-Mersel 2006).

In this context, the participants stated that the car is a symbolic capital tool that affects many relationships of men in their youth and adds some masculine values to them: "In our youth you have a car, it's a very wannabe thing, it's a whim for a man to buy a car" (P5); "To attract attention for young men" (P10); "He wants to be accepted in society" (P7). The importance young men attach to cars is linked to the acquisition and display of status, power (Kincaid 2022), competitiveness, heterosexuality and sexual prowess (Yunusoğlu 2021), which are constitutive elements of hegemonic masculinity:

To impress the ladies... To attract attention... The car is like a mannequin... You put the mannequin on your arm... The moment you enter somewhere with it, people start noticing you more, even their interest in you goes up (P9). Taking a

friend, travelling, driving around is a great thing for him or driving around with his friends (P3).

These views of the participants overlap with the idea that irresponsibility, self-indulgence and flirtatious behaviour of young and single men are easily accepted in Türkiye and that these characteristics help to prove masculinity (Uğurlu et al. 2021). A similar example of these behaviours that are considered legitimate in youth are not given in the context of old age. This finding may be related to the possible crisis of masculinity that may arise from the risk of stigmatising elderly men in Türkiye as men in andropause who have already lost their physical, mental and sexual power (Erol and Özbay 2013; Yunusoğlu 2021).

Participants also described their driving style with gender stereotypes: “driving like a man” and “woman driving like a man”. While it was stated that men are more skilful in driving than women, technical skills are attributed to genetics and / or experiences starting from childhood. Participants emphasised the gender differences in driving style (Veevers 1982), stating that men are “self-confident, follow the rules to the letter, never had a real accident... more dominant, more cool-headed... more confident” (P7), “hasty” but “controlled” (P11) and careful (P10), while women are the ones who “mess up the traffic” (P3). However, male drivers in Türkiye, while constructing their masculine identity, accuse women of strictly following traffic rules (Işık and Oksev 2022). Participants criticised the technical inability to intervene in high-tech cars (car automatisisation barrier) and stated that this is why everyone today is relegated to the position of driver. The fact that young men do not master the technical knowledge of cars, which historically indicates a strong and naturalised association between masculinity and technology (Bengry-Howell and Griffin 2007), is seen as a problem. Participants constructed a distinction between elderly men and younger men in terms of mastery of technology on the one hand, and gender equality among the new generation on the other. However, this is a contradictory narrative that points to the loss of the sense of technical mastery (Walker et al. 2000) that boys and young people traditionally gain through learning to drive:

A chauffeur is someone who knows everything. For example, most of the men I mentioned above are over 60 years old, some of them know five or ten percent... Very, very old men over 70, men over 70, men over 80, etc... (P10) They don't even care if they run out of water or oil... Driving licence is something else, chauffeur is something else... I don't call them chauffeurs, they are drivers... If you ask many

drivers when they get into a car where is the gearbox... most of them do not know (P9).

Discussion of the representation of masculinity in a BMW commercial

This section explores how participants interpret the portrayal of masculinity in car advertisements. As shown in Figure 3, the BMW commercial is evaluated by participants in terms of gender and age-based representations:

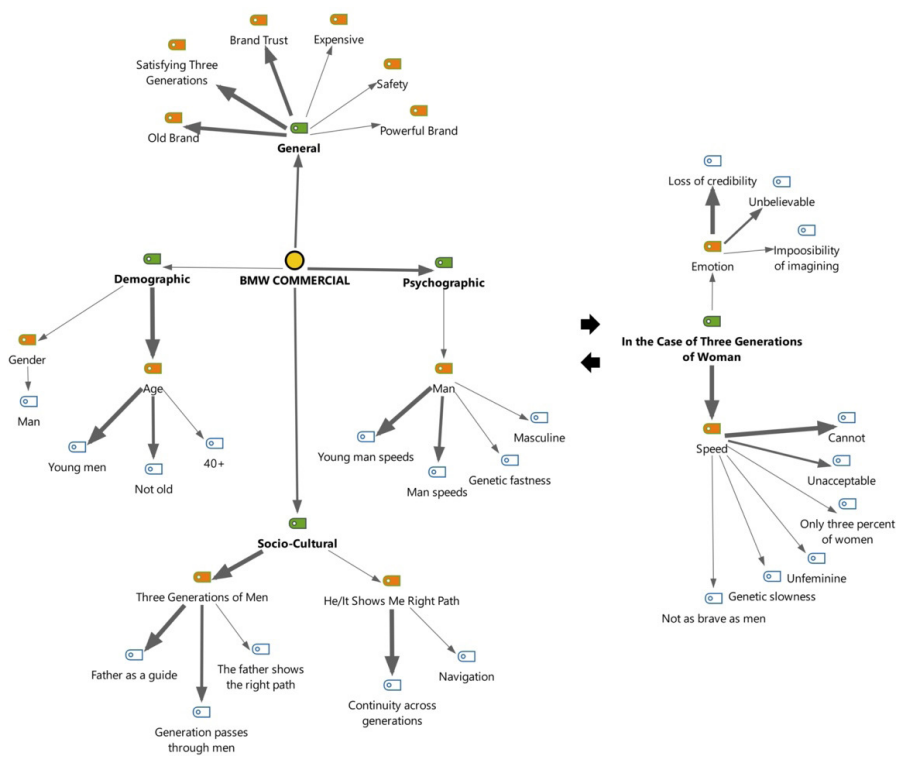


Figure 3: Masculinity in BMW commercial

The participants stated that the car belongs to a large extent to men in the family, at home and in the advertisement (“90% of them are men”-P11; “Men more”-P8). While discussing who the target audience of the BMW advertisement is, it is seen that the semiotic link between driver-car and driver-family is interpreted from the guide of hegemonic masculinity. Although women’s participation in the labour force is increasing in Türkiye (Aydın and Atalay 2021), the role of providing for the family and being the head of the

family (Boratav et al. 2017) seems to be important in producing hegemonic masculinity and legitimising their superior position (Yunusoğlu 2021). In this regard, participants reconcile themselves with hegemonic masculinity through the performance of complicity masculinity (Connell 2005):

Because men always do the purchasing, the economy... Men will buy. Because men have the economic power... Men usually have the power, 80 per cent (P1). Whoever is the head of the family, whoever has the earnings, whoever has the money buys (P5). But when buying a car... the car is mostly bought according to the man's preference. Because 90% ... car is used by a man, but if a woman will use it, if it is a second car, then the preference changes. Then according to the preference of the woman (P7).

According to participants, the BMW ad appeals to young men: "BMW already shows excessive speed in the ad. Only a man would do that, and specifically, a young man. Not one of us... Only a man can do that speed, not a woman." (P5). Through the speed of the car, our participants constructed a hierarchical narrative between young men, hegemonic men, elderly men and women: Young "men aged 18-25" (P8) "go up to 240-300" (P10); in general, men have a speed between "120" (P3) and "200" (P4) km/h; elderly men stay within the speed limit (P10), as in the statement "I don't exceed 100. 90-100... at most" (P4); women, like elderly men, can only reach "90-100" (P3) km/h. For young men in the first tier, cars provide an environment in which they can display masculine strength, virility and prowess, which includes the ability to control a vehicle at high speed and their courage and daring through risk-taking (Walker et al. 2000). This is related to combustion masculinity, which includes the dominant driving standard where the young man's aggressive and competitive driving skills are at the forefront, emphasising skill over caution (Redshaw 2008). In discussing the impact of young men driving in this way on themselves and on women, they performed two different masculinities. First, although they subordinate women in this situation, they partially challenge traditional gender stereotypes with an egalitarian performance of masculinity: "We say "look, this is the younger generation, they (women) are in a car, maybe they're just learning... We need to be understanding to them (women) (P7)". Second, they perform hegemonic masculinity by referring to the characteristics of being a father (Boratav et al. 2017) and protecting weak women and children (Aydın and Atalay 2021), which are important in the construction of masculinity in Türkiye:

Men our age don't think like young men... Because they haven't had children yet... they haven't had daughters. That's why... they don't appreciate it now. But

when they become parents, when they raise a daughter, at a certain age they will understand it too (P9).

The hegemonic man, who is neither young nor old and is in the second tier in terms of speed, is a man who rationally manages risk (Erdoğan 2013) as a man who has work, family and control (Fuller 1996) and therefore makes rational decisions about his speed. According to the participant, unlike these two men, the older man is in the same tier as the woman in terms of speed, but he cannot drive at high speeds for different reasons. As the elderly man is still a man, there is no discussion about whether he can drive at high speed or not, but the issue of “safety” is emphasised due to the fears of old age:

We are at the end of life, ... after this age (P1). Also, what people of our age look for in cars is more safety (P2). Life is sweet... The older you get, the more important safety becomes for you (P3). You said after the age of 60... I mean, after that age, safety becomes more of a priority (P4). Of course, the need for safety increases with age, ... so you will disregard your life and hit 200-250. Is that possible? For example, if I don't trust the car, nothing can happen. I have to trust the car (P10).

In the comparison, participants assumed that women are in a subordinate position under male domination (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) in terms of traditional gender stereotypes, biologically (Bilton et al. 1996) coward, weak, delicate and fragile (Uğurlu and Kuzlak 2018) and unable to dominate the machine. They also reproduced important elements of hegemonic masculinity such as oppression, restriction and violence against women (Cengiz et al. 2004) through the car object:

99% of them cannot do it... I can't imagine a woman driving a BMW at that speed (P3). It is not possible, she would not dare (P8). The advert would not be convincing if it was a woman driving at that speed, even if it were, it would seem fake (P5). I would be astonished (P4). How many women would do this (P5). Maybe 3%... that means 97% wouldn't (P10). I completely agree...(P11). If a woman had driven the car there... I know that a woman would not be able to drive at that speed. A woman... because she does not have the courage to speed... She is not like a man... Do men and women have the same courage? No... Accept it... I would take the car away from her (P9). Because she doesn't drive safely (P7). I would think like this, I would say to myself “she is out of line”, “look at her, she is a woman”... And even if she does it, can society really accept that? I absolutely do not accept it (P2).

Here, participants reflected the masculinity associated with cars throughout history: power, control, dominance, speed, and technological

precision (Balkmar and Mellström 2018). In particular, the fact that men are seen as brave compared to women is due to the fact that one of the basic emotional conditions of masculinity in Türkiye is fearlessness (Aydın and Atalay 2021), and a fearless driver is strong (Ergüven 2000), and power is the basic feature of hegemonic masculinity (Beynon 2002). Participants interpreted BMW's message as the passing of interest in cars from father to son in the context of the historical continuity between cars and masculinity (Walker et al. 2000), addressing the male as the perpetuator of the lineage with reference to patriarchal ideology:

Three generations have used it... his father used it... he says his child and grandson should use it too. By showing father, son and grandson in this ad... they have used this car for three generations and they will continue to use it (P5). In other words, the generation passes from man to man in our minds. Unfortunately, such an image exists (P1).

The emphasis in the interpretations goes beyond the doctrine of the transmission of masculinity from father to son and establishes an immutable bond of natural/biological origin between father and son (Sancar 2009). On the one hand, the participants normalise this situation in their thoughts, on the other hand, they criticise this situation with an expression like "unfortunately", but they do not produce any other supportive discourse. On the contrary, it is naturalised with a statement like "Genetically, men are better at many things than women... Driving and general temperament are already genetically related... (P10)". However, they move away from this essentialist approach by stating that men and women have different experiences growing up and that women can drive as "well" as men as they gain more driving experience:

We were making the toys ourselves... the cars ourselves, the wheels... Our reflexes were developing. Women are more passive in that regard (P5). If they are keen on driving, then they should train themselves (P9). Have you ever seen...? I have never seen a woman... teaching her son to drive... But a man can easily teach his son or daughter to drive. But women don't go for it... There are women who drive very well. For example, my daughter-in-law... She used to drive very uneasily... When my son went abroad, the car was left to her... What did she do this time... She drove every day. She took her child to school ten-fifteen kilometres away, then he went to pick him up again. She travelled to and from her workplace by car, and her desire to use a car changed much more in these six months (P7).

Such remarks illustrate that in car culture, boys are prepared from toy cars to real cars under the guidance of distant or close relatives such as fathers, uncles or brothers (Walker et al. 2000). It is known that boys in Türkiye are interested in cars from an early age, that this interest is encouraged and that they even learn to drive at an early age through informal education or by watching other people drive (Özkan 2020).

Overview of supplementary diagrams

As previously indicated, a broader set of coded data was collected, and its corresponding visual representations are provided in Appendix 2. Although these diagrams extend beyond the primary research questions of the present study, they offer valuable supplementary insights that may guide future studies. Below, brief descriptions of the additional diagrams are provided to offer contextual clarification for the supplementary data presented.

First, the diagram illustrating participants' conceptualizations of the car revealed six distinct thematic categories. These categories reflect two main interpretative dimensions: a concrete perspective, including "need" and "economic" evaluations, and an abstract perspective, encompassing "individual", "spatial", "personality", and "discipline" associations. When the concentrations in the categories and sub-codes are examined, it is seen that older men interpreted the car as "a compulsory need that offers individual pleasures to men such as status, power, showing-off, freedom, happiness, socialisation and satisfaction, that men see as a part of themselves, that others have an idea about their personality traits, that disciplines men and that reflects men's purchasing power". In this context, it can be said that the car is perceived as a basic need on the one hand, and on the other hand, it gains importance in terms of desired individual and social image.

Second, the diagram addressing the gender of the car, which shows which gender is assigned to the car object by elderly men, revealed four categories: gender, type of car, design, and road route. In general, elderly men described cars as a delicate object, and therefore, they gendered them as a woman who needs to be treated with care and attention. However, they associated cars with different genders according to their types. They described long road trip, load-carrying, large cars as male; short road trip, passenger cars, small cars as female; and sports and fast cars as young men. They also stated that in terms of design, the interior of the car is likened to a beautiful and elegant woman, while the exterior is depicted as a strong and safe man.

Third, the diagram analysing the relationship between car advertisements and masculinity indicates that participants predominantly perceive the target audience and drivers depicted in car adverts as male. They underlined that women are frequently featured in car adverts, but the female figures of the adverts are used as sexual for the male target audience, as a decorative object positioned next to the car and as the voiceover of the advertisement. Although there is no concrete evidence that the car driver is a man in recent years, it is emphasised that the advertisements target men by default.

Fourth, the diagram concerning participants' interpretations of car brands revealed that although various sub-codes emerged, a notable concentration on the sub-code of "safety" was observed, particularly in relation to brands such as Mercedes, Volvo, and Audi. However, it was determined that elderly men admire the Mercedes brand compared to other brands. For men, the motivation to own not only a car but also a better brand that they themselves accept is an important issue. On the other hand, it was observed that the discourses on the pairing of fast cars with young masculinity and small cars with women were also repeated in the car brand. It was noticed that a woman who cannot speed is paired with a Mini Cooper, a small car.

Conclusion

In line with the fact that cars are traditionally seen as gendered (O'Connor and Kelly 2006; Bengry-Howell and Griffin 2007) masculine objects (Balkmar 2012; Aktürk 2016) and driving is seen as a masculine skill (Weber and Kröger 2018), the elderly men in our study revealed that cars are very meaningful to men in Türkiye; they are a determinant, especially in terms of power and vanity (Miller 2009; Duruiz 2016); have a natural connection with genetics and the learning process; are a space reserved for men (Garvey 2001); are expressive of personality (Dichter 2017); have gendered (Lezotte 2012) and ageist meanings according to certain types; and have gendered (Işık and Oksev 2022) and ageist differences in driving style (RQ1).

For elderly men, the BMW brand whose advertisement was shown is related to young and fast masculinity and this brand has nothing to do with them because they are "old". According to them, it is important for a man in his old age to drive slowly and to prefer a reliable brand car that stands out with its durability. This result overlaps with the idea that women prefer slow (Freund and Martin 1996) and reliable cars (Urry 2004) and shows that the assumption that masculinity becomes feminised in old age (Thompson

1994) is approached. According to this interpretation based on BMW, it is understood that elderly men also consider youth as the most productive age period in terms of displaying the performance of manhood (RQ2).

In our research, mostly contradictory interpretations are observed, indicating that masculinity in old age is characterized by contradictions in Türkiye. For example, while it is said that the machine disciplines all human beings, it is also argued that men's superiority over the machine is genetic and that women are naturally "inadequate" in this respect. Elderly men are supportive of women owning cars. However, they label the car owner as male in the context of breadwinner and head of the family. On the one hand, the participants evaluate the relationship between masculinity and the car from a modern perspective, within the framework of the gender equality approach, and associate men's unregulated car use with backwardness (uncivilised); on the other hand, from a traditional perspective, within the framework of the biological reductionism approach, they see women and themselves in a hierarchical, subordinate position compared to men.

This finding is consistent with the claim that masculinity in Türkiye is a dualistic experience, both traditional and modern (Alemdaroğlu and Demirtaş 2004; Kandiyoti 2013). In particular, this can be seen in the participants' construction of modern discourse when discussing the relationship between masculinity and the car before watching the ad, and traditional discourse when discussing young masculinity and speed after watching the ad. The dominance of traditional discourse is also seen in the participants' establishment of a hierarchy between young manhood, masculinity and femininity and their self-marginalisation (Messerschmidt 2019). This finding supports the idea that masculinity can be important in later life (Olliffe et al. 2013; Glendenning et al. 2017; Kincaid 2022; Burns and Drentea 2023; Thomas and Thurnell-Read 2024) and that hegemonic masculinity in particular is a powerful, perhaps the dominant (Thompson and Whearty 2004; Thompson 2006) masculinity script (Spector-Mersel 2006; Twigg 2020) in self-evaluation throughout life. However, following these scenarios seems to become more difficult with age, especially in the context of reduced physical strength and proximity to death (Burns and Drentea 2023; O'Neill and Léime 2023).

As can be seen from this discussion, elderly men in Türkiye experience a fluid bricolage masculinity, moving between masculinities depending on the situation / topic, in line with broader generational shifts observed in many contemporary societies (Beynon 2002).

Since this is a qualitative research, it has certain limitations such as sample size limitation (volunteers who agreed to participate), sample diversity (socioeconomically middle class), geographical and national limitations (Amasya/Türkiye), time limitation (2022 July).

In future research, a scale enriched by these findings can be used to conduct comprehensive studies with a quantitative paradigm. Focus group studies where men's age or socio-economic status changes, similar studies on older women's perceptions of masculinity, but most importantly, discussions on how elderly men construct pastiche masculinities can be conducted.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

Pre-Viewing Questions (Before watching the ad)

- 1. What comes to mind when you think of the word “car”?
- 2. What’s the link between cars and men?
- 3. What are your thoughts regarding the BMW brand?
- 4. What do you think about the male representations preferred by the brand?

Post-Viewing Questions (After watching the ad)

- 5. What do you think the ad is trying to say? What’s the message?
- 6. What do you think is the reason behind the preference for men in the ad?
- 7. What do you think about the representation of three generations of men in the ad?
- 8. What do you think the slogan in the ad, “He always shows me the right path, he always takes me further” means?
- 9. What would you think if three generations of women were represented in the ad instead of men?

Appendix 2. Diagrams

