



## Everyday gendered performances at home: Masculine domesticity?

Hande Eslen-Ziya<sup>a,\*</sup>, Güler Okman Fişek<sup>b</sup>, Hale Bolak Boratav<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute of Media and Social Sciences, University of Stavanger, Norway

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey

<sup>c</sup> Department of Psychology, Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey



### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Masculinities  
domestic masculinities  
work life balance  
Covid-19  
pandemic

### ABSTRACT

This article explores how men living in Istanbul talk about the sociality of house and care work – vacuuming the house, cooking, doing the laundry – in their everyday lives. It shows how these tasks are crucial for understanding contemporary Turkish men and how they are intertwined with notions of masculinity. This research is part of a larger study conducted between 2008 and 2010 across Turkey exploring the negotiation of masculine subjectivities by married men. Overall, the men's narratives indicated a relationship in transition with both their children and their wives, where dilemmas and contradictions were presented with the emerging modernist discourse of egalitarianism (Boratav, Fişek, Eslen-Ziya 2017 and 2014). In this paper, such dilemmas reflected in the egalitarianism discourse between the genders are studied in relation to the division of labour within the household. While the data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that the existing trends in so-called ordinary days will enable us to understand the extent to which gender roles are either challenged or reconstructed at home during extraordinary times.

### 1. Introduction

"I clean the whole house, and if someone gets in my way, I get really annoyed" (Bora), said a 57-year-old male university graduate who lived with his wife and two children, while a 52-year-old male university graduate proudly announced that he could fill the dishwasher very well and that his table setting was good (Cemal). These are only two instances of household work that came up during the in-depth exploration of the negotiation of masculine subjectivities by married men in Istanbul. Our focus was on the construction of masculinity – i.e., the creation of a masculine identity through developmental trajectories across one's life span (Boratav et al., 2014). By building on this larger data set, this paper looks specifically at the domain of household activity where men either choose to participate or to opt-out. Despite the existing research identifying the links between home and masculinity (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Tosh 1999), little is known about the dilemmas men are facing with regard to performing or not performing such domestic activities. While studying men's domestic enactments, this article addresses domestic masculinity in relation to men's discussions of gender equality as well as the value of house and care work.

There is growing interest in the relationship between domestic space and gender identity (Blunt, 2005 and Gorman-Murray, 2008), with a

recent emphasis on alternative domestic masculinities (Rezeanu 2015). Research on domestic masculinities diverges from home studies (Mallett 2004), which focus on how gender differences are reinforced by domestic space and legitimise masculine hegemony. Domestic masculinities on the other hand take into account the multiple masculinities perspective developed by Connell (1987, 1992) and study how men interact with the domestic space in different cultural frameworks. According to Rezeanu (2015: 10), such interaction is "advanced by moving the accent from the traditional hegemonic gender relations based on differences, to signs of emergence of alternative masculinities and femininities, transcending differences, united by the positive orientation towards the domestic space".

Several years after the in-depth interviews were conducted, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses, schools, and universities were closed down, and people were asked to work from home. Working from home meant combining work with home schooling of children and with securing care arrangements for the elderly family members and adapting to the so-called new normal and its challenges. While the lockdown had gendered consequences aggravating gender inequalities within the home, we come across images in our social media timelines of men getting into the kitchen. To shed light on such a gendered setting, we need to address different types of masculinities constructed within the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [hande.eslen-ziya@uis.no](mailto:hande.eslen-ziya@uis.no) (H. Eslen-Ziya), [fisekgul@boun.edu.tr](mailto:fisekgul@boun.edu.tr) (G. Okman Fişek), [hale.boratav@bilgi.edu.tr](mailto:hale.boratav@bilgi.edu.tr) (H. Bolak Boratav).

home. While there are obvious differences between specific countrywide contexts and disciplines, there are also common issues impeding men's positionality and power relations within the domestic sphere. Our main goal in this article is to uncover and discuss the common and persistent gendered problems experienced within the Turkish context. While we are fully aware of the need for an intersectional analysis, our main focus in this paper is on men's experiences, and less on issues related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical ability. In this respect, this paper explores reflections of the domestic space, acts of doing and undoing gender by our participants, and their dilemmas as well as their experiences at home.

## 2. Doing and undoing gender

Reproduction of gender through performances and interaction was first theorised by [West and Zimmerman \(1987\)](#) as doing gender. This later became the hegemonic theoretical framework for understanding gender inequality ([Connell, 2010](#), p. 31) in which conventional ways of explaining biological sex and gender norms were challenged. Doing gender means to perform gender, and it defines the creation and learning of a natural and non-biological social phenomenon between girls and boys and between women and men. Doing gender as a term was coined after [Goffman's \(1976\)](#) notion that gender is an act that is performed within certain institutional contexts. Later, with the work of Judith [Butler \(2004](#), p. 42), the firm and binary division of gender was replaced with a "wide range and breadth of both biological sex and gender manifestations". Gender is a socially produced and ever-dynamic concept shaped by social institutions – such as schools, family, and religion. [Weedon \(1997](#), p. 3) states that "as children we learn what girls and boys should be and later, what women and men should be...from the family, schools, colleges, teenage fashion, pop culture, the church and the worlds of work and leisure".

Such institutions and popular culture assign responsibilities, beliefs, and loyalties that are central to establishing and strengthening gender roles where the patriarchal family system is protected by giving maternity and child-rearing responsibility to women. Hence, gender is shaped by cultural ideals and the do's and don'ts of masculinity and femininity. As with every performance, gender is also recited to an audience who knows these codes. This in return genders social spaces, making venues like bars, stadiums, and coffee houses belong to men ([Bhasin, 2003](#)) and the home and the kitchen belong to women. In her paper, [Swenson \(2009](#), p. 38) discusses how social institutions and popular culture turn the kitchen into a gendered space that is "naturally" feminine.

Here, when we talk about "doing gender" or "undoing gender" within the domestic sphere we are referring to occurrences where gender differences and/or similarities arise. We present instances where gender roles are challenged, if not de-constructed, along with cases where traditional heteronormative performances are displayed. We show that domestic masculinities are executed in more egalitarian households, where not only husband and wife are equal, but also the father–daughter relationships are not patriarchal. In the following section we will look further at what we mean by heteronormative performances and domestic masculinities.

## 3. From hegemonic to domestic masculinities

Gender role learning allows for the existence of multiple masculinities and femininities, and within the traditional and hegemonic gender order we may observe them in many different forms. Because there is no homogenous, universal masculinity, masculinities can also be fluid and may vary across one's life span. But still, "a wider range of masculine identities that are hierarchically structured around hegemonic understandings" do exist ([van Hoven & Horschelmann, 2005](#), p. 8). Such hegemonic masculinity, when perceived and performed as the idealised masculine identity, leads to patriarchy by legitimising hierarchical relations between men and women and by subordinating both feminine

traits and alternative masculinities. Such hierarchical relations between masculine and feminine are, according to [Bourdieu \(1996\)](#), coupled with the binary distinction between so-called public and private spaces – within which women are identified with the home and the domestic suburban environment and men with the world of paid work. In this context, gender performances while shaping masculinities and femininities are defined and ranked in relation to their working environments. Within the capitalist societies, while such masculinities are constructed with labour market participation, for instance, they are also formed within the family and home ([McDowell, 2005](#), p. 19). Although we clearly meet this in the 'breadwinner' and 'master of the house' narratives, according to [Rezeanu \(2015\)](#) domestic masculinities are also created within this work/home boundary. The primary interest of this paper is thus whether or not this provides an opportunity to challenge hegemonic masculinity discourses, to undo gender and whether the relationship between domestic space and gender identity simply allows a space for domestic masculinities to evolve.

According to [Gelber \(1997: 70\)](#), domestic masculinity is defined as the "creation of masculine identity by forging a distinct male domain of consumption activity at home". Consistent with this perspective then, domestic masculinity is created not in opposition to, but parallel to the normative masculinity that [Connell](#) refers to as the hegemonic masculinity (1987). Because different masculinities may co-exist not only across cultures, time, and people, but also within the same individual throughout one's life-course ([Connell 1987, 1992; Kimmel and Messner 2007](#)), the private space within the home permits men to negotiate such alternative masculinities. According to this view, domestic masculinities are constructed with reference to the gender order – or patterns of power relations between men and women and not necessarily in opposition to hegemonic masculinities. Defining masculinities within the home thus allows for the creation of male identity in the private sphere through its manifestation within popular culture. As [Moisio, Arnould, and Gentry](#) argue (2013), it is through the depiction of the 'man-of action' or the 'hero framework' within popular culture that domestic masculinity is produced. In [Hollows's \(2003\)](#) article on Jamie Oliver's famous cooking and lifestyle programme, it is discussed how domestic activity is accepted among certain circles. Oliver not only takes care of his children, but also shows affection towards them and cares for their wellbeing and talks about healthy meals. According to [Gorman-Murray \(2008: 370\)](#) he is the image of the 'new man'. This image constructs being in the kitchen as a 'recognizably manly' domestic activity. [Gorman-Murray \(2008\)](#) argues that Oliver's use of language and choice of words and his gestures while creating a space within the domestic sphere "occupies the domestic but is not contained, or defined, by it" ([Hollows, 2003](#), p. 242).

Domestic masculinity is created not in relation to the so-called femininity of the private sphere, but as [Gelber \(1997: 73\)](#) argues through "a male sphere inside the house". [Kimmel \(1987](#), p. 262) refers to this male sphere within the home as a challenge to forge "islands of untainted masculinity and purified pockets of virility," where hegemonic masculinity co-exists with domestic masculinity. Such an assertion involves two important assumptions. First, in order to create themselves as men within the home, they must generate an autonomous identity with its own masculine rituals. This will allow men to exist in what is conventionally considered women's space. Second, men's positioning between the private and public sphere allows them to be "both a part of the house and apart from it, sharing the home with their families while retaining spatial and functional autonomy" ([Gelber, 1997](#), p. 69).

A further view regarding domestic masculinity is that "the private space of the home allows men to negotiate alternative masculinities where they could be expressive, emotive and engage in domestic labour and childcare" ([Gorman-Murray, 2008: 369](#)). Relatedly, [Pink \(2004](#), p. 119) argues that men's engagement with domestic tasks helps them "depart from the traditional masculinity of the housewife's husband". Such domestic masculinities then serve to challenge traditional gendered norms and their spatial constructions, thus transforming the spatialisation of power and the definitions of both masculine and feminine

identities. According to both Swenson (2009) and Meah (2014), this not only challenges the traditional and gendered use of spaces, but at the same time also brings forth evidence for undoing gender. As men are engaged with domestic work and perform what are conventionally perceived as feminine tasks, the public and private borders of gender become blurred. Before going into our participants' dialogue on domestic work and the link between home and gender identity construction, we will first review masculinity research in Turkey.

#### 4. Understanding masculinities within the Turkish context

In Turkey, masculine identity is defined and performed along with the conventional understandings of gender and patriarchy (Eşen-Ziya and Koc 2016). In an extensive study conducted by the authors, it was found that being a man meant being the breadwinner and the master of the house (Boratav, Fişek, Eşen-Ziya 2017 and 2014). Similarly, in her research conducted on Turkish masculinities Sancar (2009) found that when men lose their economic means, being the head of the household becomes a way to maintain their masculine identities. Such characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are merely the reflection of the patriarchal Turkish culture where the gender hierarchy and male domination are justified either through having offspring (Gedik, 2020), stable employment and providing for the family (Bolak, 1997) or via the protection of women's honour and safety (Sunar & Fişek, 2005). While the former puts pressure on men to keep a steady and well-paying job, the latter becomes the main trigger behind high rates of violence against women in Turkey.<sup>1</sup>

Within Turkish culture, masculinities are constructed at the individual, familial, and societal level. The political practices and discourses in recent years support male supremacy over women and openly reject gender equality. For instance, in 2014 President Erdoğan declared that he does not believe in equality between women and men. "Women can only be equal to women",<sup>2</sup> he uttered. Emphasising biological differences, he argued that women and men could not serve the same functions, and that some work is not suitable for women due to their "delicate nature".

Women and men cannot be treated equally because it goes against the laws of nature...Their characters, habits and physiques are different...You cannot place a mother breastfeeding her baby on an equal footing with men...You cannot make women work in the same jobs as men do, as in communist regimes...You cannot give them a shovel and tell them to do their work. This is against their delicate nature.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional family values and gender stereotypes, coupled with Erdoğan's anti-gender discourses, justify the notions of masculinity in Turkey leading to a decline in women's rights.

The AKP's (Justice and Development Party) and its leader Erdoğan's uninterrupted electoral success through the last two decades requires amplification. Whilst the AKP government adopted right wing populist<sup>4</sup> discourses involving neoliberalism, Islamism, nationalism, and authoritarianism, it started freely opposing gender equality. This in return led to the emergence of anti-gender public discourses. Anti-genderism

<sup>1</sup> As Kogacıoğlu (2004) asserted, the so called honour killing or crime is the murder of woman/girl by her family members due to their disapproval of her behaviour that is perceived as defying the gender roles.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/24/turkeys-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-women-not-equal-men>.

<sup>3</sup> Guardian (2014). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: 'women not equal to men' Available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/24/turkey-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan-women-not-equal-men>.

<sup>4</sup> Here we follow the definition of populism defined by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013, 2018) as a set of morally charged ideas leading to conflict over political decision making between the so-called lay person and the elite, and discuss it in relation to opposition of gender equality – referred as anti-genderism.

appeared as a counter narrative of gender equality and evolved where gender roles and duties were defined with reference to Islam and familism (Eşen-Ziya, 2020; Korkman, 2016). The anti-gender development of the AKP government is directed to issues related to reproductive policies and abortion, violence against women, LGBTIQ rights and gay marriages, gender mainstreaming and sex education at schools as well as antidiscrimination policies.

The previous analyses of men's narratives have indicated a relationship in transition with both their children and wives, where dilemmas and contradictions have been presented with the emerging modernist discourse of egalitarianism (Boratav, Fişek, Eşen-Ziya 2017 and 2014). In this paper such dilemmas for egalitarianism between the genders are studied in greater detail, especially in relation to the division of labour within the household. The interviews conducted with men living in Istanbul are analysed for the sociality of domestic work in everyday life. By looking at the construction of domestic masculinities among men living in Istanbul and how such tasks are intertwined with the notion of masculinity, we will focus in the following on whether or not social and cultural beliefs and expectations influence and shape masculinity and men's gender roles and how domesticity influences men's gender roles. Two theoretical perspectives relating to gender and masculinity comprised the conceptual framework of our study, namely hegemonic masculinity and domestic masculinity. Although the data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that the existing trends in so-called ordinary days will enable us to understand the extent to which gender roles are re-constructed during extraordinary times, and this the paper concludes with a commentary on COVID-19 and its possible impact on household roles.

#### 5. Method

This study is based on interviews with eighteen men between the ages of 23 and 52 who were married with children and living in Istanbul. The interviews took about an hour and a half and were carried out on a one-to-one basis with the help of a research company that specialises in social research. Although the bigger research data set is composed of men from across Turkey, the sample for this research is the data collected in Istanbul. Istanbul is the major metropolis of the country, located in the northwest Marmara region, and reflects and represents the geographic and socio-cultural diversity of the country in a unique way. The interviews were conducted by a research company that specialized in social research and all interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1990). All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

The theoretical framework of the paper is based on gender theory and its conceptualization of gender as a social construct. As argued by Sümer (2009), here it is utilised within the constructed characterizations on biological sex that produce and sustain structured inequalities between men and women. Herein viewpoint, gender is composed of social performances that distinguish men and women and ascribe distinctive attributes to constructions of masculinities and femininities. Gender as the 'structuring structure' serves as a mean to influence 'what gets privileged and side lined' (Blackmore, 2014, p. 86) which roles appreciated and not valued within the society. In analysing the challenged or re-constructed gender roles at home, it is focused on social construction of masculinities theories where masculinities are constructed through gender relations, and are composed of symbols, practices and ideologies that are associated with men and with reference to the gender order (Connell, 1992 and, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

During the analysis, all transcriptions were structured in a coding scheme by the authors as a team, where both commonalities and differences in the data were decided on. Later, the codes were organised into several narrower themes, which, after the second round of analysis, were accumulated into broader categories. In the analysis, discussions about domestic labour and the gender roles defined by the participants

were given special attention. The quotes presented here were chosen as examples of such patterns and diversities. Consensus on the codes was achieved through the coding of a number of interviews together as team, and this led to the final codes and code families. Based on the analysis of code families, the research team came up with the basic categories. For purposes of anonymity, all the participants were provided with pseudonyms.

## 6. Findings

Two themes emerged when studying the performances of men in the home. The first was the construction of gendered roles, and what masculinity meant for them within these roles, and the second was their performances within the home, what we refer as masculine domesticity. The interviewed men argued that being a man was something they learned throughout their life course in relationships with their families and friends as well as through the norms within society, cultural beliefs, and expectations (Boratav et al., 2014). As we will discuss further in this section, what is striking is the fact that it was these relations and the interpretations of the cultural norms that defined their masculinities and their gender performances. In other words, though there were similarities, every man had a unique way of reflecting on their experiences of being a man.

Among our participants there were two distinct tendencies that enabled us to elaborate on masculinities at home. The first was in line with Connell's (1992) hegemonic masculinity constructions where the gendered division of labour is intact, while the second included narratives of participants who performed the house and care work but did not challenge the traditional gendered roles. As we will show, while the former was done by following the traditional hegemonic masculine order, the latter was discussed through the gendered spatialisation of power within the household. In order to present these two masculine existences, this section will first discuss the men who take on traditional discourses and masculinity as a gender role and then turn to men who perform domestic masculinity by being emotionally and physically engaged at home.

### 6.1. Masculinity as a gender role

Among our participants who held strong gendered identities, their conceptions of masculinity were based mostly on the work they did outside home. The occupational and breadwinner role portrayed their reliance on the gendered stereotypes in their everyday lives. These men also believed that the house and care work was the responsibility of women, and "görevi odur" (İst12KY) – her duty – was one of the phrases uttered by our participants who talked about the division of labour in their households. Some of our participants defined themselves as a "classical Turkish man" and used this as an excuse to escape from housework. For these men classical Turkish men would have the qualities of being the sole breadwinner in the home. They defined "masculinities within the public domain: being successful at work, earning money—being the breadwinner and the head of the household—as well as having prestige in the eyes of their friends." (Bolak-Boratav et al., 2014, p. 310) and being a father (Sancar 2009; Gedik, 2020). They said, "all the responsibility is on the shoulders of men" (Kayhan). For this reason they believed that they had the right to opt-out from household work:

There is a tremendous amount of pressure on men. A lot is expected of men. Be it about work, or other things, this is a duty on men...I don't think women have many responsibilities. (Kayhan)

Men are responsible for outside, and women from the home. Men think about the livelihood of their home and children...the man brings, the woman cooks. (Burak)

Our participants also talked about the importance of either being the sole provider of the family or stated that their wives worked just for

'pocket money'. As the following quote illustrates, the general assumption is that once a woman starts working outside the home, it leads to more expenses:

The working woman costs more. She has to dress accordingly ... if she uses three pairs of shoes over the period of one year normally, she will need 20, so it is costly...The money she earns goes to her expenses. It does not make much sense for a woman to work. (Ahmet)

This is in line with Sakallı's (2001) study where it was men who were expected to take on the sole breadwinner role in the house. With few exceptions, our participants believed that women could have a job as long as they took care of their so-called household duties. But they believed that having a paid job was not something their wives wanted. Such a perception was justified by the domestic or sometimes even lazy image of their wives and even daughters:

I say it anyway, what will happen if she studied, she will end up being just a housewife. (Ahmet)

My wife is a domestic person. (Sedat)

Well, she is not the type of person who likes to work. My elder daughter is like her too. Let her do the housework, cooking, cleaning. This is a woman's nature. (Ahmet)

Such images of women in the eyes of men are significant for three reasons. First, they define the 'real work' as only the work done outside the house and not the housework and care work done at home. Second, they devalue women's roles within the household. The following quote clearly depicts how house and care work is viewed:

Because the housewife sends her child to school and cleans her house. She then visits her friends. Or sits down and watches TV. Therefore, women's duties are lighter than men's. (Kayhan)

Third, by attributing women's choice not to have a paid job as a quality that is common to almost all women, they construct womanhood as an essentialist category. While the first two assumptions are apparent in Hochschild and Machung's (2012) work emphasising the centrality of care work in the reproduction of gender inequalities, the latter is the discourse used by populist governments to attribute universal, innate, and biologically essentialist categories to women.

Let us start with discussing the first two assumptions, the distinction between real work and house and care work and its gendered implications. Devaluation of housework and care work (Leira & Saraceno, 2002) is one of the signifiers of gender inequality where a range of activities related to taking charge of the well-being of others – children, the sick, the elderly – are not valued by the capitalist market economy.

At our house all she [his wife] thinks about is the children..."are the kids fed properly", "are they eating well at school"...and if they have a little stomach pain, "have they eaten something bad at school"...like this, it's all about the kids, nothing else! (Sedat)

As Wærness (1998, p. 207) puts it, the logic of the market not only "runs up against the logic of care", but the gender gap in unpaid house and care work also influences women's ability to actively take part in the labour market. One of our participants similarly talked about how his wife decided to quit her job once their first child was born:

I told her, either we will find someone to take care of the child or give the baby to the grandmother...and I told her "take care of the house and the child, as I am working anyway." (Hamza)

One of the fathers interviewed was disappointed about the path his daughter had chosen after her master's degree:

She is 26 years old, and she has been married for a year. She finished university...finished her masters, but she is not working. That's awful. I am very sad about this. We did so much for her...and she was

very successful, but her decision not to work after getting married made me very sad to be honest. (Ahmet)

Now we will discuss the implications of gender essentialism among our participants where innate and biological justifications are used to describe house and care work as well as women's roles. During the interviews, narratives of 'natural' gender differences, and women's roles within the home, were used by respondents to justify their behaviours. As the following quote implies, this was done through glorification of motherhood and was something learned from the social world:

Okay, well, being a father is a great feeling, but motherhood is something else. (Sedat)

For our participants, what others – their friends, neighbours, and relatives – thought and expected from them constituted one of the pressures that shaped their everyday masculinities, as well as their familial roles. They talked about how men's familial responsibilities were ideologies imbedded in them when they were young. Masculine attributes are shaped via societal expectations, cultural norms, and rules and the recent political discourses of President Erdoğan further the conservative ideology and strengthen the hegemonic masculinity discourses. In his speech at the Istanbul summit, for instance, he stated: "Our religion [Islam] has defined a position for women: motherhood". This is in line with Beşpınar and Beşpınar's (2018) work studying the fatherhood experiences of upper middle-class men in Istanbul and Ankara, where patriarchal discourses affect how men come to define their roles within the household. Similarly, considering the house, housework, and care as the areas of their sovereignty women in Kocatepe and Bilgi's (2018) research while idealizing the "new father" nevertheless protected the clear divide between the gendered roles within the family.

Both the AKP government and President Erdoğan, who has been the dominant actor within Turkish politics over the past two decades, have had an influence on everyday gender practices. For instance, the government's emphasis on complementarity between women and men and its emphasis on such differences as being due to nature was reflected in our interviews. Our participants, when talking about the differences between women and men, mostly referred to the conceptions of complementarity between the genders: that men work better outside the home and that women are natural care providers.

Such perceptions in turn allocate women and men to different social roles and duties, easing the way for a gender-based division of labour where duties are naturally assigned to women and men. While the man is identified as the father of the family and the head of the household, the woman becomes the carer within the family and the mother of the future generations (Korkut and Eşen-Ziya 2018). Because the representation of home is marked by a solid link between women and femininity, it is not surprising that our participants who held patriarchal beliefs and gendered stereotypes were the ones who helped the least with the household chores.

## 6.2. Masculine domesticity

Among our participants who performed household chores, some continued to rework the gendered representation where home remained as the women's space and they were only providing help. This was clearly evident in the following quote where our participant stated that his work within the home was only for providing help:

For example, I make the salad while she is cooking, and make the rice if she is late, but I would not help her clean up afterwards, I only help her prepare. (Sedat)

I do the grilling or when there is a meat dish. I make the salad. Because I love doing it, and because I love it, I do it! But of course, this is also a convenience for my wife. She collects the dishes after me, puts them in the dishwasher, this is her duty. (Kayhan)

We argue that in both of these instances male domestic expertise emerged as what Attwood (2005: 89) referred to as cultural intermediaries and figures of masculinity. For instance, the emphasis in both quotes of not providing help in cleaning up afterwards visibly sets the boundaries for male domesticity at home. This is also evident in the following quote in which help is provided, but the clear gendered categories were underlined and emphasised in the interview. For instance, in the following quote our participant states that cooking is "women's work" and having a paid job is "men's work":

My wife has worked for years. She comes home and cooks. I do the dishes so that she doesn't get exhausted. So, I take over 'women's work', and she takes over 'men's work' (Ozan).

Similarly, Atwood's analysis of Jamie Oliver reveals that in his shows and everyday life presentations on social media domestic work is re-created in relation to the home. Hence the home is not de-feminised, and housework is not de-gendered. This, he argues, is the "struggle between inside out, where perceived boundaries between the home and the public sphere and the categories of femininity and masculinities are constantly negotiated" (Attwood 2005: 90).

In other words, although the general conception is that the responsibility for housework belongs to women, it was not uncommon that these same men actually did participate in housework. One of our participants who took an active role not only in the kitchen, but also in cleaning the house said that he would not feel embarrassed to let his friends know that he participates in household chores. He stated that he even jokes to his best friend and says, "I am tired today, I vacuumed the whole house" (Hamza). This participant stated several times in the interviews, "I will do it, I will not avoid it", when asked about housework. This is in line with studies of the 'New Man' (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 371), where men are intimately involved with the responsibilities of the domestic labour. The New Man, according to Singleton and Maher (2004), is the ideal partner for the working woman. It is in fact the new form of hetero masculinity, "moulded through greater perceived participation in domestic activities and labour" (Gorman-Murray, 2008: 371). According to this view, as a result the home gets de-feminised and housework de-gendered. Although such de-feminisation or undoing gender was yet not apparent among the homes of our participants, what was significant was the silence of women within the households where men took more active domestic roles. "She would not mind" or "she would not speak up" were the common narratives that came up when talking about situations where men left the kitchen messy after cooking. In fact, when the opposite was the case, our participants stated they stopped helping because their wives were too critical and extremely meticulous "titiz":

I used to do housework, I vacuumed...I used to fill the dishwasher very well, but over the last two years I've quit because I was so criticised for the work that I did [by his wife]. I became unable to touch anything. (Cemal)

I used to do the housework, a lot. But she came [referring to his wife], did an inspection, and said, "This part is not done well" ... I was not able to make her like any of my work, so I stopped doing it! "That is not good", "this is not good" ... and now she says, "You don't do anything". Why should I if you don't give credit to the work I do. It does not make sense to do the work if it is not appreciated. (Orhan)

These quotes are very significant because they reflect two important things. First, they show how the housework is 'owned' by women and how they are reluctant to have men entering their territory. As put by Özbay ana Baliç (2004: 9) "we must bear in mind that within the metropolitan cities of Turkey, the hegemonic masculinity does not entail performing housework together with women, but in fact men spending time at home bares the risk of becoming feminine". Hence, it is not just men who do not want to be associated with the private domain and the housework, but also women would like to keep men out. This could be

due to what [Kandiyoti \(1988\)](#) refers to as patriarchal bargaining where women also exercise power by supporting the gendered system. Second, these quotes show how men expect their household performances to be valued and appreciated. As mentioned earlier in this paper, devaluing of housework and care work ([Leira & Saraceno, 2002](#)) is one of the signifiers of gender inequality where care-related tasks are not valued by the capitalist market economy. Whether the inclusion of men within the domestic sphere and performing house and care work will increase the value of the work is something that scholars working on house and care work need to take into consideration. We believe the current situation under the COVID-19 lock down, where men and women have started working from home and the closure of schools and day-care facilities has resulted in a sudden increase in childcare responsibilities, might help us understand this better. In the final section of this paper, we discuss these findings in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and ask whether or not the lock-down will change the way society sees how important house and care work is and how little women’s work at home is valued.

### 7. Conclusions

Gender studies as a discipline addresses questions of women and the construction of their roles, but only in the last decade or two has it started focusing on men’s perceptions and behaviours. We believe that the inclusion of men’s voices in the gender debate is essential if we want to fully understand society and find solutions to gender-related problems and structural inequalities. Masculinity is defined as a set of performances, beliefs, and customs that are produced and reproduced across time, space, and one’s life span ([Beynon, 2001](#)). By studying the domestic masculinity discourses among married men with children from Istanbul, this work further investigated their conceptions regarding gender roles. It was found that our participants who held traditional notions of gender roles were reluctant to perform any household duties. On the other hand, men who took part in the household chores and performed domestic masculinities were unwilling to reproduce masculinity performances and did not refrain from engaging in so-called womanly duties.

Our findings reveal the complex dynamics of gendered stereotypes, divisions of tasks, and persistent hegemonic masculinities. As illustrated in [Fig. 1](#), traditional stereotypes on embedded gender roles lead to unequal divisions of household tasks. We identified and analysed these mechanisms in light of our participants’ own interpretations as well as their dilemmas. Our research found evidence that male performances and perceptions of household chores emerged under two main themes. The first was the construction of gendered roles and how they defined being a man, and the second was their performances within the home. The latter is discussed in relation to masculine domesticity. Our findings reflected two types of masculinities – one that takes on traditional discourses and masculinity as a gender role and one that performs domestic masculinity by being emotionally and physically engaged in house and care work but nevertheless does not challenge the traditional gendered roles.

Our findings indicate that the men who held traditional gendered roles held a certain image of women and their roles within the family. We

discussed how these participants’ definition of paid work as real work and their devaluing of the house and care work in return reproduced gender inequalities. We also discussed our participants’ construction of womanhood as an essentialist category in relation to the populist discourses of the AKP government. On the other hand, when men perform such roles, we showed how they made sure that house and care work was visible or appreciated and valued. If this was not the case, our participants stopped performing these tasks. This is a striking finding as it highlights one of the major points of the domestic care literature and provides a suggestion for change: Will the inclusion of men within the domestic sphere and performing house and care work increase the value of the work?

#### 7.1. Remarks on the dynamics of gender inequalities at home and the possible effects of the COVID-19

Because masculinities are an on-going process that are produced and reproduced in social relations and with current events, exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lock-down has also had an impact on men’s perceived power within the household and notions of superiority over women. Social media timelines show that men across the globe have continued to perform masculinities, this time within the domestic realm. In other words, the domestic masculinities performed during pandemic times have reflected the dichotomies captured in this study. Similar to previous observations, men who uphold traditional gender roles either have not performed any domestic duties at home during the pandemic and expect their female partners to perform such tasks, or when they do conduct domestic masculinities it is for the show and within the borders of “man-of-action” and “hero framework” ([Moisio et al., 2013](#)). In other words, domestic masculinity is created not in relation to the so-called femininity of the private sphere, but as [Gelber \(1997: 73\)](#) argues through “a male sphere inside the house”. Hence, based on our previous findings we claim that the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up a forced home-based productivity space for men where they can perform what is seen as traditionally feminine virtues without failing in their hegemonic masculine identities. These domestic masculinities are performed not to nurture their families, but as a hobby, thus altering the dynamics of power at home. However, this being said, on a more positive note the unusual situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about with the blurred boundaries between housework and paid work, the challenges of the house and care work have become more visible ([Andersen et al., 2020](#)). Whether or not COVID-19 has exposed how much women do at home and how little this work is valued, and whether this might lead to valuing house and care work, is something to be seen in the future.

#### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The authors received a generous fund from the Scientific and Technological Research

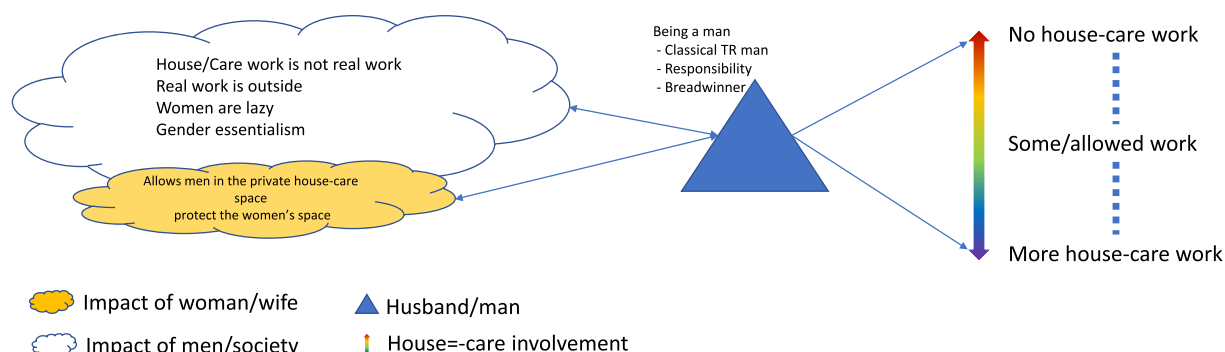


Fig. 1. Dynamics of house-care work.

Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for the larger project titled “The Social Construction and Developmental Trajectories of Masculinities in Turkey” that this article is based on.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent/licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) for their support in funding the “The Social Construction and Developmental Trajectories of Masculinities in Turkey” as well as the anonymous reviews we received on this paper. Finally, our gratitude to our interviewees who took the time to engage with our project, and kindly shared their experiences – this research would not be possible without their input. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Professor Hamit Fişek.

### References

- Andersen, J. P., Nielsen, M. W., Simone, N. L., Lewiss, R. E., & Jagsi, R. (2020). Meta-Research: COVID-19 medical papers have fewer women first authors than expected. *Elife*, 9, Article e58807.
- Attwood, F. (2005). Inside out: men on the “home front. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5, 87–107.
- Beşpınar, F. U., & Beşpınar, L. Z. (2018). Türkiye’de Orta üst Sınıf Laik ve Muhafazakar Kimliklerin Babalık Deneyimleri üzerinden İrdelenmesi: Benzerlikler, Farklılıklar, Önyargılar ve Mesafeler. *Toplum Ve Bilim*, 143, 5–43.
- Beynon, J. (2001). *Masculinities and culture*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Bhasin, K. (2003). *Toplumsal Cinsiyet: “Bize Yüklenen Roller”*. Ankara: Kadav Yayınları.
- Blackmore, J. (2014). ‘Wasting talent’? Gender and the problematics of academic disenchantment and disengagement with leadership. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 33(1), 86–99.
- Blunt, A. (2005). Cultural geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29, 505–515.
- Bolak, H. (1997). When wives are major providers: Culture, gender and family work. *Gender and Society*, 11, 409–443.
- Bolak-Boratav, H., Fişek, G., & Eslen-Ziya, H. (2017). *Erkekliğin Türkiye Halleri*. Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Boratav, H. B., Fişek, G. O., & Eslen-Ziya, H. (2014). Unpacking masculinities in the context of social change: Internal complexities of the identities of married men in Turkey. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(3), 299–324.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). Masculine domination revisited. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 41, 189–203.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Charmaz, Kathy (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London, UK: Sage.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Connell, R. W. (1992). A very Straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender. *American Sociological Review*, 57, 735–751.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Connell, C. (2010). Doing, undoing, or redoing gender? Learning from the workplace experiences of transpeople. *Gender & Society*, 24(1), 31–55.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859.
- Eslen-Ziya, H. (2020). Right-wing populism in New Turkey: Leading to all new grounds for troll science in gender theory. *HTS Theological Studies*, 76(3), 1–9.
- Eslen-Ziya, H., & Koç, Y. (2016). Being a gay man in Turkey: Internalised sexual prejudice as a function of prevalent hegemonic masculinity perceptions. *Culture, health & sexuality*, 18(7), 799–811.
- Gedik, E. (2020). The relationship between father and child in Daily life narratives of female academicians with children in pre-school period. *Kültür ve İletişim*, 23(45), 118–141.
- Gelber, S. M. (1997). Do-it-yourself: Constructing, repairing and maintaining domestic masculinity. *American Quarterly*, 49(1), 66–112.
- Goffman. (1976). “Gender display.” *studies in the anthropology of visual communication* (Vol. 3, pp. 69–77).
- Gorman-Murray, A. (2008). Masculinity and the home: A critical review and conceptual framework. *Australian Geographer*, 39, 367–379. September.
- Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin.
- Hollows, J. (2003). Oliver’s twist: Leisure, labour and domestic masculinity in the Naked Chef. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(2), 229–248.
- van Hoven, B., & Horschelmann, K. (2005). Introduction: From geographies of men to geographies of women and back again? In B. van Hoven, & K. Horschelmann (Eds.), *Spaces of masculinities* (pp. 1–16). London: Routledge.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
- Kimmel, M. S. (1987). Men’s responses to feminism at the turn of the Century. *Gender & Society*, 1, 261–283. September.
- Kimmel, Michael S., & Messner, Michael A. (2007). Introduction. In M. S. Kimmel, & M. A. Messner (Eds.), *Men’s Lives* (pp. 15–23). Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.
- Kocatepe, B., & Bilgi, S. (2018). *Toplumsal bir inşa olarak babalık: Annelerin yaşam öykülerinde baba imgesi*.
- Kogacioglu, D. (2004). The tradition effect: Framing honor crimes in Turkey. *differences*, 15, 118, 118 (2004).
- Korkman, Z. K. (2016). Politics of intimacy in Turkey: A Distraction from “real” politics? *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, 12(1), 112–121, 2016.
- Korkut, U., & Eslen Ziya, H. (2018). *Politics and Gender Identity in Turkey: Centralised Islam for Socio-Economic Control (Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics)*. Routledge Press.
- Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: a critical review of the literature. *The Sociological Review*, 52(1), 62–89.
- Leira, A., & Saraceno, C. (2002). Care: Actors, relationships and contexts. In B. Hobson, J. Lewis, & B. Siim (Eds.), *Contested concepts in gender and social politics* (pp. 55–83). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2002.
- McDowell, L. (2005). The men and the boys: Bankers, burger makers and barmen. In B. Van Hoven, & K. Horschelmann (Eds.), *Spaces of masculinities* (pp. 19–30). London: Routledge.
- Meah, A. (2014). Reconceptualizing power and gendered subjectivities in domestic cooking spaces. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38(5), 671–690.
- Moiso, R., Arnould, E. J., & Gentry, J. W. (2013). Productive consumption in the class-mediated construction of domestic masculinity: Do-it-yourself (DIY) home improvement in men’s identity work. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(2), 298–316.
- Mudde, C., & Cristóbal Rovira, K. (2013). *Exclusionary vs. inclusionary populism: Comparing contemporary Europe and Latin America* (Vol. 48, pp. 147–174). Government and Opposition. no. 2.
- Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2018). Studying populism in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13), 1667–1693.
- Pink, S. (2004). *Home truths: Gender, domestic objects and everyday life*. Oxford: Berg.
- Rezeanu, C. I. (2015). The relationship between domestic space and gender identity: Some signs of emergence of alternative domestic femininity and masculinity. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 6, 9–29, 02.
- Sakallı, N. (2001). *Sosyal etkiler: kim kimi nasıl etkiler?*. İmge Kitabevi.
- Sancar, S. (2009). *Erkeklik İmkansız İktidar: Ailede, Piyasada ve Sokakta Erkekler*. İstanbul: Turkey: Metis Yayınları.
- Singleton, A., & Maher, J. (2004). ‘The “New man” is in the house: Young men, social change, and housework’. *The Journal of Men’s Studies*, 12, 227\_40.
- Strauss, Anselm, & Corbin, Juliet (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sunar, D., & Fişek, O. G. (2005). Contemporary Turkish families. In J. L. Roopnarine, & U. Gielen (Eds.), *Families in global perspective*. Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 169–83.
- Sümer, S. (2009). *European gender regimes and policies: Comparative perspectives*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Swenson, R. (2009). Domestic Divo? Televised treatments of masculinity, femininity and Food. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26(1), 36–53.
- Tosh, J. (1999). *A Man’s place: Masculinity and the middle-class home in Victorian England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wærness, K. (1998). The changing ‘welfare Mix’ in childcare and care for the Frail elderly in Norway. In J. Lewis (Ed.), *Gender, social care and welfare state restructuring in europe* (pp. 207–228). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151.