

**POLISHING MASCULINITY: RECLAIMING MASCULINE
IDENTITY THROUGH CAR MODIFICATION**

by
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ABSTRACT

POLISHING MASCULINITY: RECLAIMING MASCULINE IDENTITY THROUGH CAR MODIFICATION

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Keywords: car modification, masculinities, masculine homosociality, leisure

The study focuses on the male-dominated context of car modification in Turkey, a popular leisure activity for car enthusiasts. The act of transforming standard-designed automobiles to improve driving performance or to personalize their appearance is called ‘automobile modification’, the re-designed and customized automobiles are called ‘modified cars’, and the owners, who modify their automobiles call themselves ‘modifiers’ (‘modifiyeci’ in Turkish). This group of car enthusiasts modify their cars, organize races or fairs, and arrange gatherings on local or national scales. Car modification provides a space for self-representation and identity reclamation. The act of modifying an automobile, whose technical knowledge, and skills are attributed to men, is a subject-making tool for men. Through the engagement of modifier groups, men reclaim their masculine selves. This thesis is based on semi-directed, in-depth interviews conducted in Istanbul and Konya, aimed at understanding processes of subject-making and reclaiming the masculine identity.

ÖZET

ERKEKLİĞİ CİLALAMAK: OTOMOBİL MODİFİYESİYLE ERKEKLİK KİMLİĞİNİN YENİDEN İNŞASI

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Anahtar Kelimeler: otomobil modifiyesi, erkeklikler, eril homososyallik, boş zaman aktivitesi

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de otomobil meraklıları için popüler bir boş zaman aktivitesi olan ve erkeklerin egemen şekilde dâhil oldukları otomobil modifikasyonu bağlamına odaklanmaktadır. Standart tasarımlı otomobilleri sürüş performansını geliştirmek veya görünümünü kişiselleştirmek için dönüştürme eylemi ‘otomobil modifikasyonu’, yeniden tasarlanan ve özelleştirilmiş otomobiller ‘modifiye araba’, otomobillerini modifiye eden kullanıcılar ise ‘modifiyeci’ olarak adlandırılır. Bu otomobil tutkunları grubu arabalarını modifiye ederken, yarışlar veya fuarlar düzenler, yerel veya ulusal ölçekte buluşmalar organize eder. Araba modifikasyonu modifiyeciler için bir öz-temsili ve kimliğin yeniden inşası için bir alan sağlar. Teknik bilgisi ve becerileri erkeklere atfedilen otomobili modifiye etme eylemi, erkekler için bir özne inşa aracı teşkil eder. Erkekler, modifiyeci gruplara katılarak, erkeksi kimliklerini geri kazanırlar. Bu tez, bu özne inşa ve geri alma süreçlerini anlamak için İstanbul ve Konya’da yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış, derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanarak hazırlanmıştır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the male-dominated leisure of car modification context in Turkey. Even if it does not necessarily exclude women, it dwells on male homosociality. Car modification constitutes a popular leisure activity for a group of men of all ages and all class backgrounds in nearly every city of Turkey. The act of transforming/changing standard-designed cars to improve the driving performance or to personalize their appearance is called *automobile modification*, the re-designed and customized automobiles are called *modified cars*, and the owners, who modify their automobiles are calling themselves *modifiers* ('*modifiyeci*' in Turkish). The context is known with some collective activities that are held on local and national scales, such as races, fairs, and gatherings.

Modified automobile stands as an unusual set to study masculinity. Not only because leisure is dominated mostly by men but also it offers a space that in every layer of the engagement of participants masculinity is playing a constitutive role: (1) the undeniable place of the car in the lives of men and especially modifiers (2) The influence of male role models in the participation of modifiers; (3) male homosociality that occurs around spaces like the *oto-sanayi* (auto-industrial sites, as the places where modification projects are implemented) and the racecourses and the highways where the cars and modifiers are making an appearance; (4) phenomena such as fraternity, and solidarity among modifiers which indicates transmission of masculinity through a shared passion.

Daniel Miller in the *Car Cultures* asserts that people are expressing themselves through their car (Miller 2001). For him, while looking at car subcultures, the car is carrying out so many meanings and it became a means of 'resisting alienation'; an instrument to stand out in the crowd through personalizing the possession. Likewise, in car modification context in Turkey, modifiers are trying to personalize their experience of possessing and using the car, in aspiring to be unique, to be authentic. I argue that the modified automobile as a personalized property forms an indispens-

able attachment between the car and the modifier; while being an important component of his/her extended self with its uniqueness, the modified car simultaneously forms a hybrid existence. The emphasis on the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘indispensability’ of the modified cars in users’ discourse brings along sexualization of the modified car, which is already sexualized as a material possession (Sheller 2004). Indeed, the highly personalized perception of the modified car constitutes an equivalence to the spouse, lover, partner, or children of the modifier.

Throughout the world, car modification is mostly analyzed through the frameworks of subcultures, deviance, or criminalization since the culture is vastly assigned with ethnic affinities, class, or youth juvenility (Balkmar 2018; Best 2006; Bright 1998; Lumsden 2010, 2015). However in Turkey, even if the car modification context is not essentially related to any ethnic or cultural identity groups, there have been some studies that approach the subject by considering it on the class basis and covering the context as a subculture (Yavuz 2015; Ülkebaş 2012, 2014, 2015). These two studies are examining the car modification context with a specific focus on the reasons why men modify their cars. Şahinde Yavuz has examined a specific group in Trabzon, and Selen Devrim Ülkebaş, for both her doctoral thesis and other articles studied a relatively more complex group of modifiers. Even if both studies presented considerable analysis on the reasons, and meanings of car modification for modifiers, they are restricted in presenting the multiplicity of modifiers’ aspirations and heterogeneity of the context.

Initial questions of my study are: What are the main aspirations of modifiers to participate in this leisure? How is the modifier making the meaning of this engagement with modification and how it is related to masculine identities of the modifiers? What are the key dimensions of their participation? How modification as a leisure becomes a constituent of masculinity in a modifier’s life? How codes of masculinity are negotiated, and reproduced in the processes of modification and engagement to the context? Based on these initial questions, I analyze the modified car context in Turkey, which constitutes popular leisure for car enthusiasts from all ages and all backgrounds, in order to have an understanding of how masculinity is re-negotiated, re-formed, or re-expressed in contemporary society. In doing so, I explore the relationship of men with the car and to see how being a car owner, being a driver, being technically competent are related to masculine identities.

My analysis has three axes, through which I discuss the re-negotiation of masculine identities in contemporary society. Firstly, I discuss what are the main aspirations that men seek in car modification and how their engagement to the context interacts with their masculine identity. As the context is defined as object-oriented leisure,

the aspirations of men in the car modification context are marked with what the car as a possession means for them. Indeed, for most of the modifiers, owning a car is a constitutive force in their lives. It is related to the social and cultural meanings of the car, which is evolved throughout the history of its use. Also, beyond an entity of consumption, the car is more than an object for men since it is loaded with gendered meanings. Therefore, a car is, both as an object and as a concept, has a salient place in the lives of modifiers, which reveals itself in their narratives.

The second axis is the social activities that arose around a modified car, particularly races. Races are events in which powerful feelings such as excitement, rivalry, fear, pride, enjoyment, accomplishment, defeat are experienced at the same time. Whether official or illegal, races are organizations where modifiers all over Turkey gather and show off their modification skills to each other. Before, during, and after races, superiority over others is what nurtures the feelings of excitement, and achieving this superiority is experienced as a catharsis.

On one hand, superiority is what racers are looking for. On the other hand, being in the race is as much important as being the winner. Here, we can argue that modifiers reach a reach satisfaction by having a seat amongst others, amongst fellow modifiers. Races became a regularity that define power relations between actors of the context. Participating in the races creates a division between racers and non-racers, which appears as a symbolic hierarchy amongst modifiers. Preparing for a race necessitates the mobilization of economic and social capitals. Therefore, races reproduce existing social and symbolic hierarchies amongst modifiers.

The third axis is the auto industry, which is a constitutive haunt that reveals relationships beyond its spatiality for the car modification context. Modifiers are dependent on the auto industry because of the technical aspects and craftsmanship that car modification projects require. But beyond the reasons for production, modifiers spend time in the auto industry voluntarily, to keep up with what is going on and to be at the place where the relations are knotted. Therefore, some repair shops, workshops, or garages in the auto-industrial site constitute homosocial spaces for modifiers.

Maral Erol, in her article *Power, Masculinity and Technology*, examines how the relationship between masculinity and technology is a power substitute by giving the example of the pleasure that engineers get from technology (Erol 2004). For masculinity, the power that comes with having this technical knowledge turns into a kind of “substitution” or consolation of being away from real social power. Based on her analysis, can we talk about a similar search of consolation for men who modify their cars? We can say that this activity, which is based on the personalization

and transformation of the automobile, whose use, technical knowledge, and skills are attributed to men, is a subject-making tool for men. This hobby, based on the car, can be considered a masculine self-making tool. I think it is important to look at the car modification context because it offers us an unusual scene to see men's strategies of identity construction. Through car modification, men are reclaiming their masculine identity, as they are opening themselves a room through transforming an object which is already attributed to men with its various aspects.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Mobility Theories

The 'mobility turn' in social sciences presupposes a new paradigm that connects the analysis of different forms of travel, transport, and communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces (Urry 2006). Mobility theories are exploring a plethora of phenomena around various ways and dimensions of mobilities.

In the scope of my analysis, I benefit from mobility theories in two ways. Firstly, I discuss how mobilities, as a new paradigm to understand contemporary society, are related to the analysis of class and gender, more specifically masculinity. It is important to study class and gender as crucial aspects of both spaces and mobility, and how changing the dynamics of these two. Secondly, I look at the centrality of automobiles, cultural significations of the use of the car, through a wide perspective. In Turkey, social scientists are also looking at phenomena through the mobilities paradigm. For example, Cenk Özbay looked at the globalization of Istanbul and its transformation to a 'global city' by locating mobilities to the center of discussion (Özbay 2014). Likewise, Berna Yazıcı put mobility in her focus through an ethnographic observation she depicted class encounters in traffic congestion (Yazıcı 2013). In both studies, the theoretical base and the focus of discussion is mobilities and they unfold their subject from various dimensions, but gender was not mentioned in detail. As Susan Hanson discusses while offering new approaches to sustainable

mobility, gender theories and mobility theories should not be operated in separate strands (Hanson 2010). Mobility and gender theories can be both discussed together.

In mobility theories, there is a particular attention to the use of a car which is seen as it has transformed the social, cultural, and economic imaginary of societies, both individual level, and collective levels. In such a way that today, everyday in urban and rural life is mainly bound to the automobile. On the one hand, the automobile gives people independence to the spatio-temporal schedules of collective mobility and gives freedom to be wherever and whenever they want; but on the other hand, the automobile keeps people dependent on auto-routes and all the pre-programmed system of automobility (Sheller and Urry 2000).

The double resonance of the prefix ‘auto’ refers to both a human aspect of automobility and the aspect of the machine (Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2006). While driving; the driver becomes a machine and the vehicle becomes human; the car-driver is the ‘hybrid’ existence of humans and machines, roads, buildings, signs, and entire cultures of mobility since they are ‘auto-mobile’ together (Thrift 1996 as cited in Sheller and Urry 2000). This quasi-existential hybridization of car-driver transformed many cultural meanings as the car is not just a possession but also a bodily part of the driver, an element of the extended self of the possessor. Hence, the car is not only a vehicle that helps people or carriage to move from point A to B but it gets loaded also with so many meanings throughout its history: Car refers to mobility, freedom, individuality, independence, and prestige (Paterson 2010; Sachs 1992; Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 1999).

The anticipation and the interaction with the automobile are influenced by structural determinants like age, class, gender, and ethnicity. On the other hand, individual use is determined by personal meanings of everyday risks, pressures, pleasures, and complexities of driving or not driving (Carrabin and Longhurst 2002). These differences of interactions should be considered within a framework of economic and symbolic exchange around the consumption of the car. Indeed, there have been many car-based cultures throughout the world, which have been analyzed through subcultural theories or consumption theories (Bright 1998; Carrabin and Longhurst 2002; Chappell 2010; Lumsden 2010).

Sociologist David Gartman argues that automobile production and consumption influence the emergence of the cultural logic of a particular “automotive age” (Gartman 2004). Reading through sociological consumption theories, Gartman sees three ages of the automobile in the 20th century that each characterized by “a unique cultural logic of meaning and identity”: the age of class distinction in the 19th century, the era of mass individualism between the 1920s and 1960s, and the era of

subcultural difference after 1960s.

The gender difference regime drives distinctions, hierarchy, inclusions, and exclusions in daily practice (Sancar 2016). The division of things, practices, and activities according to the opposition between masculine and feminine receives its objective and subjective necessity from its insertion into a system of homologous binary oppositions (Bourdieu 2001). This homology of binaries distributes what is feminine and masculine to two sides of the opposition, in which femininity is attributed to the private whereas masculinity is attributed to the public. Men are autonomous, independent, outside, mobile relying on this distinction of public and private. These qualities are the qualities that automobiles have, and correspondingly to the dichotomy of public and private car use and know-how is attributed to men. Since early childhood, boys are oriented towards a car, beginning with the choices of toys and plays. How to use a car, how to command it, and how to be outside is transmitted through socialization. So, the control over the steel body is part of the construction of masculinity. Yet, the car offers “a sense of technical mastery, a realm that is symbolically masculine, a forum for friendship and peer recognition, thrills, laughter, and a certain amount of danger” (Walker, Butland, and Connell 2000, 159). This constructed boundness between cars and men can be argued as an explanation to the questions of how the car is the playground of men and why homosocial male leisure can occur around the car.

As material entities, the mechanical structure of a car necessitates technical competence, either at the simple level of know-how or at a professional level. This technical competence is attributed to men. Also, automobile technologies constitute an area of domination that is constantly expanding and it can be argued that this ever-growing domination is led by a triangle relationship of power-masculinity-technology (Erol 2004). Hence both the technology and the technical competence of *automobile* should be examined through technology, mobilities, and gender perspectives.

Daniel Miller, in his chapter “Driven Societies” in *Car Cultures*, drafted five strands of trends in car-based studies in social sciences (Miller 2001). First, there are car histories examining cars as a story of production, and destruction. Second, there are car social histories which are followed by the studies looking at the car as a trope in generalization about modernity. As a fourth trend, he counts *externalities* that are more of an economics trend that looks at social costs of driving, and as fifth the *entailments* that try to define directly what car, and car culture (Miller 2001). Upon this review, he remarks about the need to put the car at the center of academic inquiry in studying material cultures.

Ron Eglash in the introduction of *Appropriating Technologies*, a collection of case studies for how people outside the centers of social power were able to use materials and knowledge from professional science for their own kinds of technological production, gives example of Low-Rider as an appropriated technology (Eglash 2004). For Eglash, in the axis of production and consumption, there is reinterpretation, adaptation, or reinvention of the product used and Low-Riders are combining adaptation and reinvention by altering the original structure of cars. Inspiring from his analysis, car modification practices can be approached as appropriated technology cases. Even if most of the conventional car modification practices in Turkey, cannot be categorized as reinvention or adaptation but they can be considered as appropriated user interventions to the pre-designed structures. In that sense, car modification as a material consumption practice can offer an outstanding case for current appropriated technology studies.

1.1.2 Class and Cultural Distinction Theories

The history of the popularization of car use in Turkey can be started by the 1960s. Even if accessibility to personal use of automobile has increased with the transfer of the automobile industry from Western European countries since the 1960s, Burcu Çingay, in her study of the history of automobility in Turkey, underlines that automobilization in Turkey is not a linear process since there were political and ideological controversies related to personal automobile production (Çingay 2009). Çingay analyzes the automobilization pathway of Turkey in three periods, regarding different political attitudes towards automobile and important developments: “The decision stage” that starts from 1960 until 1965, “the establishment of mass production” starting from 1965 until 1971, and “the developmental period” from 1971 to 1980. The typology is made upon differences in policies regarding automobile production and use (Çingay 2009). Based on this history, Çingay also reviews the changing popular perception of automobile consumption in Turkey. Automobiles, the luxurious, unnecessary vehicles of the 1930s, became part of everyday life starting from the 1950s and it gets reinforced with local automobile brands in the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s.

With domestic production, the mass consumption of automobiles started in the 1960s, and after the 1980s, the consumption is diffused widely (Çingay 2009). With neoliberal reforms after 1980, alongside with transnational-affecting events of the

era, resulted not just in macroeconomics but also micro-level. The neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and integration to globalization resulted in changes in culture with the adaptation of transnational tastes and values (Özbay et al. 2016). The cultural domain is changed with the ever-growing influence of consumerism. The liberalization of importation in the Özal era made it possible to reach all kinds of foodstuffs, consumer goods, and luxury consumer goods. With this liberalization, imported cars, mostly Japanese, began to be found on the streets, and the interest in luxury cars gradually increased (Bali 2002). Rifat Bali, in his book *Tarz-i Hayat'tan Life Style'a*, reviews the transformation of lifestyle in Turkey based on a survey on print media and he examines how representations of lifestyle have changed with consumerism that arose with the liberalization of the economy. In the Özal era, the representations of womanhood, manhood, youth are reconfigured on the focus of consumption, and especially consumption of luxurious goods, under influence of globalization (Bali 2002). As Bali maps out, by the 2000s, the cultural representations are changed by the emergence of new types of business people, intellectuals, shopping centers, gated communities, and consumption of technological goods. In the *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*¹ edited by Deniz Kandiyoti and Ayşe Saktanber, these changes and transformations of the representations are examined in detail with a juxtaposition of ethnographies and analysis of different fragments of everyday life in Turkey (Kandiyoti and Saktanber 2003). This edition reveals the new axis of social differentiations and the changing image of cultural production through consumption and lifestyles.

Based on this socio-economic background, automobilization in Turkey is diffused and popularized beginning with the 1980s. With the increasing luxurious consumption, especially imported cars have begun to be part of everyday life in Turkey. In the context of consumption-based lifestyle, we can argue that automobile, as it holds with many cultural meanings of differentiation, is started to be used as an object of a hobby. In that sense, looking at the use of the car from the perspective of class can provide us an understanding of what could use and consumption of a vehicle mean for different groups of people.

Class is closely related to any gender analysis since it is indispensable for subjectivity construction. As sociologist Julie Bettie underlined, while examining the relationship between the symbolic economy of class and the formation of class subjectivity, gender is related to the construction of class subjectivity in complex and contradictory ways (Bettie 2003). Given the central place of the practices of consumption

¹The book is originally printed in English in 2002. The Turkish translation by Zeynep Yelçe, is entitled as “Kültür Fragmanları: Türkiye’de Gündelik Hayat” printed by Metis Yayıncılık in 2003. I have read the book in Turkish version, the reference is made to the translated volume.

as a way of expression in today's capitalist societies, the class can be considered as a cultural identity, rather than a political consciousness (Bettie 2003)). One might further develop a link between the conceptualization of class as "a cultural identity" with the cultural distinction that Pierre Bourdieu discusses, which emerges as symbolic differences between classes (Bourdieu 1984).

Cultural dispositions that individuals have are closely linked to the analysis of class. Bourdieu defined *habitus* as the productive principle of objectively classifiable practices (Bourdieu 1984). As a "structuring structure", habitus organizes practices, and the logic of practices and reproduces a system of differences (Bourdieu 1984). In this study, habitus will help me in tracing how habitus of modifiers from different cities influence their engagement to the context and how modifiers are attracted to the interest in modified cars. Moreover, as I took inspiration from Matthew Desmond's study on firefighters, I look at how modifiers acquire a *specific habitus* of being a participant in the modified car context. Desmond traces how rural-masculine, working-class upbringings of firefighters create gravitation towards wildland firefighting and how they acquire specific habitus of the organization (Desmond 2016). Likewise, in the car modification context, personal trajectories and their habitus are related to their engagement to the context as well as their class affiliations.

Another class aspect that may be relevant to the study is the construction of identity. In a neoliberal context, identity formation emerges as a reflexive project that the individual is responsible (Best 2006). The individual project the self-expression that is realized through consumption. In that sense, the motivations of the men who modify their cars and participate in the context can be considered a struggle for individuality and reclaiming manhood. The modified car is the "mobile canvas" that the modifier reflects himself, his character, his style (Bright 1998). Moreover, it is possible to admit that this tendency to transform materials is an attempt of ostentation or compensation, or as one could see in the work of Brenda Bright, it rises as a mechanism of resistance at the center of existing social problems. Bill Osgerby, in his book *Playboys in Paradise* follows "the development of a masculine realm of youthful pleasure, recreation and narcissistic desire," based on an excessive review and history of masculine leisure style in America, begins with the early nineteenth century (Osgerby 2001). Throughout the book, he examines the development of models of masculine leisure style in six periods, which are defined by changes in the realm of manhood and masculine style regarding the socio-economic changes. Osgerby argues that the changing socio-economic dynamics lead to transformations and reconfigurations of cultural identities of the middle class. The values articulated to masculinity, such as youthful hedonism, heterosexual pleasure, ethics of fun, became prominent values of middle-class cultural codes. Osgerby underlines that while

these masculine codes were dominating the cultural realm, power relations based on race, class, and gender stayed still. What Osgerby's study on American masculine leisure style is pointing out corresponding to the current discussions on 'masculine crisis'. Reconfiguration of new or altered cultural representations and styles for masculine identities are, as Osgerby refers to Michael Kimmel, "occur at a specific historical junctures when structural changes transform the institutions of personal life" (Kimmel 2018, as cited in Osgerby 2001). Therefore, it is important to look at cultural identities because it can offer us to understand the changes of identities through an intersectional view. Leisure is highly political and politicized and gender plays a central role in leisure choices, experiences, access, and constraints (Aitchison 1999; Henderson and Bailescheki 1989; Shaw 2001, as cited in Crowhurst and Eldridge 2018). Looking at car modification context as popular leisure, engagement experiences of modifiers are influenced by their positions in the power relations of gender and class. So, while examining the car modification experiences of men, not just why they are into this activity but also the processes of their entrance and the level of their participation are crucial to understanding how distinctions related to class are reproduced in leisure spaces.

1.1.3 Masculinities

Men and masculinity studies are basically in search of the questions of what and how men are making meaning of what they do and of who they are (or who they are not). In doing so, men and masculinity studies are not just simply defining or describing as "a state of being" but also examining the identities, performances, power, privileges, relations, styles, and structures that men are related to (Pascoe and Bridges 2016). Because masculinities studies are mostly relying on the premise that men are gendered since masculinity is socially constructed, as women are.

Masculinities are, as Raewyn Connell has underlined, not universal, stable, or essential; but are plural, contextual, situated in different spots of power hierarchies concerning structural determinants (Connell 2005). Moreover, masculinities are changeable since there are oscillations within different positions of power according to relations amongst men or with women. Hence, masculinities can be understood as a "configuration of practices structured by gender relations" (Connell 2005). In my study, masculinities theories will be central to the analysis of field data. The central place of the car in the life of men, the influence of male role models in attracting

men to car modification will be the starting point that I will look at how men have gravitated towards the interest in this context.

For the last 10 years, men and masculinities studies are looking for an explanation for the disruptions, changes, or new negotiations that men are making in ways of their engagement to the conventional roles and forms of masculinity. These changes and renegotiations are questioned mostly in the discussion of a possible crisis, a “crisis of masculinity” that emerges as an experience of endangerment or insecurity in the face of changing economic and cultural norms. Manifestations of new configurations of masculinities -keeping in mind that each concept may have different inquiries- are discussed as “hybrid masculinities,” (Messner 2007) “inclusive masculinities,” (Anderson 2005, 2008) “positive masculinities,” (Messerschmidt 2016) “neoliberal masculinities,” (Özbay 2013) or “cosmopolitan masculinity” (Özbay and Soybaşı 2020). Based on the horizon that these concepts opened up, I will examine how men in the car modification context re-negotiate their engagement to masculinity and how car modification has a role in this renegotiation if there is.

The discussion of how masculinity is transmitted and reproduced is related to the space; its organization, and the interaction both at a level between space and people and interpersonal levels. Because masculinity is crystallized in a given spatial boundary since it can appear as a set of codes that manage the relations. The questions that we can raise about the relationship between space and gender can be traced through two axes (Özbay 2013). The first is through looking at the spaces where women are excluded or accepted as “guests” i.e. when their presences are exceptional. The second axis is the spatial division of labor where women and men can together be present. In the case of the modified automobile context, the spatial relations on the *oto-sanayi* and garages can be examined in consideration to the first axis, since these spaces are marked with male presence and indeed women-exclusive places. Also, we can examine the spatial relations on the roads and racecourses where encounters and interactions with males and females are observable.

Masculine homosociality can be seen through the togetherness between-group(s) of men where many practices of masculinity are “learned, taught and revised” (Sancar 2016). It can appear as a set of practices that are bound to a certain gendered place and its essence is the sharing amongst men. Male homosocial activities “are not only enjoyed predominantly by men, but their execution depends upon or can lead to, men bonding at the expense, exclusion or negation of women and ‘others’” (Crowhurst and Eldridge 2018). On the one hand, the codes of masculine sociality are constructed and transmitted through shared activities, on the other hand, homosociality is based on codes like the prohibition of homosexuality, expectation of

integrity to fraternal contract, and exclusion of female presence. Therefore, masculine homosociality is answering questions of where, when, and how hegemonic masculinity is reproduced. The roads that modifiers show their cars, racecourses that modifiers compete, and *oto-sanayi* that modifiers frequent for the realization of modification projects are sets that we can trace spatial manifestations of male homosociality.

The studies focused on men in Turkey are mostly narrating the men as a monolithic category, without looking into in-group distinctions and power relations amongst men. Erol and Özbay have remarked the lack of attention given to the intra-group distinctions within men in Turkey, and to the positions of men in the axis of social hierarchies which are differentiated according to their age, ethnicity, body, sexuality, class, or location (Erol and Özbay 2013). This way, the multiplicity of masculinities, individual differences of performing masculinity, and changing aspects of masculine identities are not portrayed in these studies. In this study, I tried to include the differentiation and hierarchies amongst modifiers in the context. Within the car modification context, there are different groups of modifiers with varying scales, that are formed according to differences of taste, ways of engagements, and location. These differentiations are related to the positions of modifiers in the social set of power dynamics; therefore, make this aspect considerable in a study of consumption-based masculine leisure.

1.2 Methodology

I started to work on car modification context for my BA graduation dissertation. The research that I have for this dissertation was based on semi-structured interviews that I have conducted in Konya and Istanbul. At that time, my primary question was “Can we consider the car modification context as a subculture?” As I interviewed and reflected upon the elements of the context, I began to realize that it is not a subculture, which was already an outdated theoretical tool to understand contemporary cultural forms. Even if my hypothesis was falsified, there were so many questions that arose about the context, and particularly about the relationship between men and cars.

The relationship that men have with the car has marked my childhood. I was

living in Konya, in an area so close to the auto-industrial area which was known as *Eski Sanayi*. In the neighborhood where we lived, some so many people worked in the auto industry sector; hence I was hearing out what kind of a workplace it is or what happens there is more than car repairing. But more importantly, in my close circle, male members of my family, close relatives, our neighbors, and some of my male friends, were so much interested in cars. The car was always a topic of conversation, there was always someone who was trying to change his car, who was trying to sell his car, who was trying to buy one, who was trying to compare one brand to another, who was complaining about the roads, who was searching for a new repairman, who was showing off with his new car-toy... The car and everything possible about cars was always the topic. For me, it was a source of wonder why men are so much into cars, and why they are in love with the car. Besides, I grew up in a low-income family, I was also witnessing what possession and non-possession of a car might mean, and what it takes to have and maintain a car. In brief, I was always wondering the private and public reasons behind *araba sevdası* (the car affair) that men have.²

As I grew up, I always encountered men who modify their cars and *joy-riding* at the city center in Konya. While I was seeing colorful and loud modified cars on roads, my elder brother and cousins were deeply obsessed with some modified cars. Since they were working in auto industry during summer vacations as *çırak*, they managed to somehow meet some of them and follow them in person. As years went by, they started to get more integrated into the context, they were participating in the races in other cities as an audience. Witnessing their passion and ever-growing interest in car modification raised more questions on my side: Why these men are modifying their cars instead of buying an equivalent that they could reach by modifying? Why a group of men, even if they do not modify their car are interested in so much passion with others' cars?

Following the curiosity that is grown on my personal trajectory, I bring the car modification context to the focus of my scientific curiosity. What are the main aspirations of modifiers to participate in this leisure? How is the modifier making the meaning of this engagement with modification and how it is related to masculine identities of modifiers? What are the key dimensions of participation? How modification as leisure becomes a constituent of masculinity in a modifier's life? How codes of masculinity are negotiated, and reproduced in processes of modification

²I used the term "araba sevdası", by referencing to the book *Araba Sevdası* (The Carriage Affair) written by Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem. The book is one of the first Western-type novels of Turkish literature, published in 1898. *Araba Sevdası* is narrating story of young Bihruz Bey in Istanbul, who admires Western culture, specifically French culture. Car stands as a symbol of Westernization in the book. Jale Parla, in her article 'Car Narratives: A Subgenre in Turkish Novel Writing' analyzes how Ekrem uses car as a symbol of ineffectiveness of Westernization (Parla 2003).

and engagement to the context? Based on these initial questions, I wanted to look into the modified car context in Turkey, which constitutes popular leisure for car enthusiasts from all ages and all backgrounds, to have an understanding of how masculinity is re-negotiated, re-formed, or re-expressed in contemporary society. In doing so, I wanted to explore the relationship of men with the car and to see how does being a car owner, being a driver, being technically competent are related to masculine identities.

In this framework, I conducted semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth interviews with men who modify their cars in Konya and Istanbul. I have reached out to modifiers through the snow-ball model: The first person I have reached out to in Istanbul was my former interviewee, then I saw 5 more modifiers by asking them to give me the contact information of a fellow modifier who could be interested in to have an interview with me. As for the interviews in Konya, the first person I have reached was again a former interviewee of mine. But instead of him, this time I had an interview with his brother. Then again, through his interlocution, I have reached out to 6 more people in Konya. Alongside the interviews, I follow 2 Facebook groups and 2 Instagram accounts that my interviewees are members or followers, since August 2019.

My intention was to conduct comparative fieldwork and to observe and understand differences between the context in Konya and İstanbul, aiming to reach out how living in a small city and big city affects participation and meaning-making of modifiers. So, I split my fieldwork into two, to see modifiers in two cities. Except for them who is an old friend of a friend of mine, I reached 7 interviewees in Konya and 5 interviewees in Istanbul, through a snowball sampling model. As it can be seen in Appendix A, 7 of them were working in their own business or the business they own with family members and the rest are working in paid jobs. Amongst the ones who are working in their job, 5 of them are occupied with automotive related jobs that they are modifying not just their own cars but also others'. Amongst my interviewees, except two of them, 10 of them were racers at the same time; they were participating in the races organized on local and national scales. With the youngest being 25 years old, the ages of my interviewees ranges between 25-38. 7 of them were married of which 6 of them have children, 2 of them were single and 2 of them were engaged.

For the fieldwork, my initial aim was to participate in gatherings, and races that modifiers come together and to observe the interactions and the flow of the events. Unfortunately, since I was working as a full-time worker on weekdays during my fieldwork in 2019, it was hard for me to follow and attend the races and fairs. As

my daily job is in Istanbul, unfortunately, my visit to Konya was very restricted, so I had to complete all my interviews there at a time. The busyness of my work was unprecedented, that's why, unfortunately, I faced a planning problem of my fieldwork even if I aimed to both engage in the field with participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

My interaction with modifiers was initiated by a modifier close to me or someone who I have already known. These interlocutors provided me an easy access to the field; I could directly call a modifier via their personal phone and arrange a meeting. On the other hand, the interlocutor preset my position in the interaction with the modifier. Since I was a cousin of a modifier, or a friend of a fellow modifier, who are always male participant, I treated in the context as a "bacı" (sister) or an "öğrenci kardeşimiz" who need to complete a "homework" about the car modification. Even if I always introduced myself as a graduate student who is researching for her masters' thesis, I was not seen as a researcher. My 'sympathized' position during the fieldwork both facilitated and complicated my presence and my work. The trust was easily established before and during the interviews, but I experienced my position as a researcher is fractured. Being female in this field dominated by men was also marked my research. I conducted some of my interviews in the workplace of interviewees, which are repair shops or garages in auto-industry. The rest of my interviews took place in cafés, in which we had a cup of tea or coffee with the interviewees. Even if I resisted strongly, since I am a woman, the check is paid by my male interviewees. In every single interview. Most of the time, interviewees offered me a ride since I did not go to the interview with my own car. These were offered for the sake of politeness but in both of the cases, it was due to my gender.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter aims to explain the purpose, methodology, and main theoretical approaches of this study, contextualizing it within the existing literature on mobilities, masculinities, and class. To shed light on my research question with the abovementioned theoretical approaches, I organize my thesis into three body chapters.

In the second chapter, I discuss and cover the relationship of car modification and

masculine identities of modifiers. For the men in the car modification context, interest in car modification (or the modified car itself) is both the medium and the end of the quest of creating a space for ‘himself’ and only for himself. This quest is related to everyday vulnerabilities, disenchantments, stresses, and pleasures. Under the title of “A room of his own: Car Modification as a Leisure of Men”, I explore and discuss in detail the aspirations behind men’s interest in car modification, and what are the meanings and experiences that car modification brings about. Through this exploration, I discuss how men are claiming new spaces and intermediaries of expression.

In the third chapter, I explain the milieu of the modified car context, by looking at it through the intersection of how class and gender are(inter)related to the experiences of modifiers. Firstly, I explain the social milieu of the car modification context by drafting out the common activities of the context in which modifiers participate and enjoy collectively. Then I unfold the meanings of car modification for my interviewees.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss the internal hierarchies and differentiations experienced within the context. Car modification as leisure is a politicized and gendered space, where existing power relations can be reproduced. Based on my interviews, there are symbolic hierarchies based on age, driving practices and modification style, technical competence, and economic competence. These hierarchies create boundaries that influence experiences and the participation of modifiers.

Lastly, the thesis lasts with a conclusion chapter where I summarize my analysis and through a self-reflective criticism, I portray the limits of my study and draft out what could be studying car modification context in Turkey can offer more for social sciences.

2. A ROOM OF HIS OWN: CAR MODIFICATION AS A LEISURE OF MEN

Arjun Appadurai says commodities have social lives and criticizes the truth that things do not have meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with since only this does not explain the historical circulation of things. For that, he says, “we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories” (Appadurai 2013). As he underlined, objects have social trajectories from design to their appropriated use. However, neither the object itself nor the trajectory can explain the whole story. Hence, to better understand the meanings attributed to the commodities, both the social, economic, and political processes around the object, the trajectory of an object, and the object itself should be traced.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, car use is approached as a set of social practices, embodied dispositions, and physical affordances which refers to personal and social patterns of automobility (Sheller and Urry 2000). Mimi Sheller examines the car cultures from a standpoint that looked at car use with its affective dimensions. She argues that car consumption generates not just a rational economic activity but also a sum of aesthetic, kinesthetic, and emotional dispositions towards driving (Sheller 2004). “Feeling of being in the car, for the car, and with the car,” says she, are produced through movement and being moved. Therefore, automobility theorists argue that the automobile invokes a socio-technical hybrid of humans and cars that while using a car, drivers do not only feel about the car but about themselves.

Sociologist John Urry goes over the word ‘automobility’ and underlines the fact that the ‘double resonance’ of the prefix auto refers to both a human aspect of automobility and the aspect of the machine (Sheller and Urry 2000). While driving; the driver becomes a machine, and the vehicle becomes human; the car-driver is the ‘hybrid’ existence of humans and of machines, roads, buildings, signs, and entire cultures of mobility (Thrift 1996, as cited in Sheller and Urry 2000) since they are

“auto-mobile” together. This quasi-existential hybridization of car-driver brought and/or transformed many cultural meanings since the car is not just a possession but also a bodily part of the driver, an element of the extended self of the owner. Hence, the car is not only a vehicle that helps people or carriage to move from point A to B but it gets loaded also with so many meanings throughout the history of its use: Car refers to mobility, freedom, individuality, independence, and prestige (Paterson 2010; Sachs 1992; Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 1999, 2006). These significations of the car explain anticipations of possession of it, whilst anticipation and the interaction with the vehicle are influenced by structural determinants like age, class, gender, and ethnicity. On the other hand, individual use is determined by personal meanings of everyday risks, pressures, pleasures, and complexities of driving or not driving (Carrabin and Longhurst 2002).

“The pleasure of driving ... I mean, men’s toys are always cars, you know it, don’t you? Men never run out of toys; they just get expensive. That’s it. The car was 5 liras when I was little my car is 50 thousand liras as I grew up. It’s a toy for me. It was a toy for me that I bought when I was little. Men’s toys are always cars. They can’t do anything different. Their debauchery is always cars. For example, I have only one debauchery, I don’t drink (alcohol), I don’t smoke, I have no nightlife, I don’t gamble... My only debauchery is the car. And nobody can interfere in that anyway. This is the pleasure; this is the debauchery ... The car is for us, I mean, the debauchery.”

This excerpt is from the interview with Ahmet, who is the owner of a *garage*¹ in Istanbul, married, and father of two. It was his response when I asked, “Can you explain the pleasure of driving, being in a car.” The quotation above, in a way, is summarizing both the content of this chapter and the scope of the relationship between the modifier and his modified car. For these men, the car is not a simple vehicle that transports them from point A to B. From a very young boyhood, the car is seen as something more than a machine. Car modification is a passion, enthusiasm, and dedication. So much so that, modifiers organize their life around it, according to it, or at least, considering it.

In this chapter, I try to unfold the relationship between car and driver, through three aspects. Firstly, the car as an object refers to possession and consumption. Car fundamentally resonates with an economic choice for one who wants to provide

¹*garage*: Garage is a place owned by a mechanic who does modify people’s cars, or a modifier who is respected and known, or a particular group of fellow-modifiers who are close friends. With varying functions, garages are crucial spots for modification context in Turkey.

herself/himself a vehicle to displace and circulate. The second aspect is the use of it but more specifically driving. Driving invokes control over the steel body of an automobile and control over the topography of autoroutes. Third, highly related to the second, is that car generates mobility which brings feelings of freedom, visibility, and belonging to the outer world. Based on what I collected in the field, I argue that car modification indicates a need for self-expression, refers to peer interaction, provides a belonging in a certain context. For the men in this context car modification is both the medium and the end of the quest of creating a space for ‘himself’. The quest is related to personal trajectories, everyday vulnerabilities, disenchantments, stresses, and pleasures. In this chapter, through narrating men’s aspirations in modifying cars, I explore and discuss how men are searching for new intermediaries of expression and how they find new spaces to reaffirm their masculine identity.

2.1 “Men’s Toys Are Always Cars”

The process of “becoming a man” and “becoming a woman” starts at home and continues in nursery, kindergarten, school, sports, private relations, social institutions, organizations, and business (Onur and Koyuncu 2004). These socialization areas are key spaces and processes in the creation and reproduction of gender, as the differences of roles and gender are ensured within and through these institutions. Therefore, considering the narratives of socialization is key to understand how gender identity and ways of ‘doing gender’ are constructed. For this reason, to better understand men’s relationship with the car, and to put the aspirations of men in modifying their car in a broader frame, I looked at the very first contacts of modifiers with cars throughout my interviews with modifiers in Konya and Istanbul.

Maral Erol argues that the pleasure of technical knowledge and interest begins to develop in early childhood (Erol 2004). While boys are helping their fathers with repairs, they start to acquire technical knowledge and learn that it is part of masculine identity. Similarly, for the men I interviewed in the car modification context, beginning with the choices of toys and plays, the interest in the car is inculcated during first socializations. Like Ahmet says, “The car was 5 liras when I was little my car is 50 thousand liras as I grew up. It’s a toy for me”, “Men’s toys are always cars”, my interviews reveal that since early childhood, modifiers were always interested in cars. Indeed, during interviews, it is narrated that modifiers get interested in cars since early childhood, the parents and close relatives were orienting and encouraging them

to play with cars. Many of my interviewees claimed that they started to drive when they were 11-14 years old. They learned it through informal education that they had from the people around or by watching people while they are driving. Young boys memorized their moves and maneuvers and imitated them at the driving seat whenever they can. That is to say when they are allowed but here the allowance is a process that is initiated mutually. The parents, or the one who teaches how to drive, encourages and facilitates the apprenticeship. For example, in our interview, while answering the question “Since when do you drive,” Nedim told how he was pushing the limits for driving and how he has assisted in doing so:

Nedim: “Although it is not ethical, I have been trying to drive since I knew myself, I mean. I’ve been driving since my feet can reach the pedal. I have a lot of memories of it. Since my father was a salesman, we had to have a big car, big and old. I couldn’t afford to turn the steering wheel, we used to put a mallet (*tokmak*) on the steering wheel. There is such a thing called ‘a mallet’, I don’t know if you ever come across it. We used to put a mallet, I would turn the steering wheel with both hands, I wasn’t able to do it, but I would still use it.”

What Nedim was telling that he used an intermediary tool to drive. By asserting “Although it is not ethical,” he was accepting the ‘unacceptable’ circumstances related to his age when he learned to drive. Therefore, we can say that parents, namely fathers, can be not the only provider of opportunities to apprenticeship and facilitators, but at the same time can be ‘partners in crime’. As the excerpt from the interview with Demir also indicates:

Demir: “I started riding a motorcycle at the age of 7, I had a cross motorcycle. I was also driving. I was stealing my father’s car. At the age of 11, my father sat me behind the wheel. When I was 13 and I could use it alone, without someone’s support. . . . Of course, I had an accident back then. For example, I hit my mother’s car mirror, I put the car back. My mother said, ‘What happened to it’. My father said, ‘I must have done that’.”

These two interviews show us how young boys found the support of their father in their enthusiasm about the car. But this support is not just an encouragement of what the boy is enjoying. The apprenticeship of driving is part of a greater process of the transition of masculinity, from father to son. Through teaching how to drive and command the automobile, I argue that being on the road, on the outside, on the

control is taught. Not just for personal capacity building but also learning about car culture is capital for socializing within masculine environments. Hence getting interested in cars and car culture is part of masculine identity formation and fathers are constituting role models. Likewise, other than fathers, the person that modifiers learned driving from is always male. An uncle, a neighbor, an older brother. These persons are also “male role models”.

In some cases, enthusiasts need to seek or to create their own opportunities for learning to drive. While Ahmet told me how he started to drive, he stated that in his family no one had a car because of the economic conditions of the family, however, he found a way to learn how to drive. In our interview with Ahmet and Hakan, both emphasized their “love” for the car which made them go beyond the opportunities that they were given:

Ahmet: “I’m not kidding, when I was 11, I was distributing (bottled) water in a Dogan L branded car. It is such a love that I sat behind the wheel at the age of 9. I remember that I was driving a car even while standing because my feet didn’t reach (to the gas pedal). When I was 11, I was distributing water in Koşuyolu, at Barbaros neighborhood.”

Hakan: “Me too, abi, I was stealing my uncle’s J9 when I was 11.”

Ahmet: “As I say, there is something different about this love. Nobody in our family had a car. With the neighbor’s car, (by asking them) "let me run it", "let me give gas break", "let me move forward" "let me move back" "let me turn the steering wheel" ... I learned how to drive a car like this.”

Hakan: “For the sake of driving, there were days we worked without pay.”

Ahmet: “Car is such a passion. . . .”

During my interviews with car modifiers, I try to catch multidimensional attachment with the car and to understand what drives these groups of men to invest in the car. Here, we see sentimental and kinesthetic attachment that modifiers develop with their car. This attachment is first related to the use of the car, in a wider sense what the use of automobile brings to the user. Nedim describes how driving makes him feel as: “Feeling of freedom, feeling of relaxation, confidence, passion, adrenaline in a way that I can’t tell either. Whatever can be written, I can write it all. Driving rests me, heals me, treats me, makes me happy, gives me adrenaline. I started to prefer to drive rather than go to a doctor, I am so obsessed with it.” Secondly, in most of my interviews, the car is mentioned as an over-valorized entity

in their lives, and modifiers are putting the car in front of everything and connecting it as it is not an object but a person or an accompanist. In our interview with Hakan and Ahmet, while they are talking about their commitment to cars in their lives, Ahmet made a comparison between women and cars, and through this comparison he underlined that he prefers cars:

Hakan: “For instance, I know that I left my girlfriend because of the car.”

Ahmet: “It happens a lot... it happened to me, too. “Is it a car or me?” she said. I said, “The car, there is nothing to do, I’m sorry”. It has no mouth, it does not say words, it does not get offended (trip atmaz). If it breaks down, it breaks down, that’s it. I told my wife that I am married now, I told her, I said, “I have an auto industry life, I have a car life”. She said no problem for me.”

2.2 “I Wanted to Show That the Car Is Ours”: Aspirations in Car Modification

Sociologist Amy Best, in her book “Fast Cars Cool Rides”, which is based on her study on San Jose youth, depicts in detail the landscape and frequencies of car cruising scene and Low-Rider culture that youth groups were constituting at the time. Throughout the book, she underlined how the use of car defines the daily life of San Jose’s youth, with varying degrees and meanings according to gender, ethnic affiliation, and class. Best unpacks daily meanings and pleasures of car use and the social setting arouse around cars and underlines that the car carried significance for America’s youth even when they do not have one their own. Car is an instrument that provides a way to engage a public world beyond home and family, as it constitutes important sites for cultural production, self-representation, socializing, and peer interaction for young adults (Best 2006). Possession and use of cars bring about individualism, freedom, and the formation of modern selfhood, consumption, mobility, visibility, status, and changing meanings of public life (Best 2006). Therefore, cars can play an important role in the construction of subjectivity for modern individuals. In line with what Amy Best sees, for the men I interviewed in the car modification context, interest in car modification (or the modified car itself) is both

the medium and the end of the quest of creating a space for ‘himself’. Modifiers, who are deeply connected to and interested in cars since childhood, are getting rooted in car culture as a consequence of a process of seeking consolation in life.

The act of transforming standard-designed cars to improve the driving performance or to personalize their appearance is called *automobile modification*. People who modify their cars have two main objectives: One, is to alter the performance and the strength of the engine for races, and two is to personalize the driving and possessing experience by transforming the body or electronic systems of the automobile. So, regarding the ‘maximizing the pleasure’ principle, car modification is transforming the car to be ‘one’ or to be ‘faster’. In the interviews, responses to the question “Why do you modify your car” are varying, but mostly indicating that through modification modifiers seek to be faster, to be unique, and to be better in comparison to similar ones. Therefore, we can say that while endeavoring for being faster and distinguishable, there is a search for the feeling of satisfaction by being better, stronger than the others. The competition can be triggering for modifiers to go beyond.

The pleasure and the success of doing car modification is something experienced through various senses. Feeling the speed, hearing the gear, watching the flow of the road are the feelings that come with the experience of the car. These sentiments appeared on a bodily level but also defining the overall satisfaction that one gets from the modified car. When I asked Demir “Why do you prefer to modify your car”, he explained that he is doing it because he loves to be in a speed car, he loves to hear the voice of that speed engine:

Demir: “My previous car, Golf, was 450 hp. So, taking that horsepower from that car in Turkey, forget Turkey, there is no man ever took off so much horsepower from that car in the world. But I took out that horsepower, like this, if you ask what your difference is: I didn’t care. I said if it breaks, it will. If it is going to be, it will, I said. I pushed it all the way.” . . . “I get annoyed when I don’t hear the sound of that car. So first, you are driving fast, and there is the sound of that car. There is a noise of the engine revving. I get stupid when I don’t hear that voice. I cannot drive. I can miss gears or something. Because as long as I don’t hear the car, it feels empty no matter how fast it is. I went to Greece with that voice. But when I returned to Istanbul, I got on Megan, I said "peace". But a stupid peace, there is no sound. Hearing that sound, feeling that acceleration is something else. For me, the difference between a fast and a normal car is actually the sound.”

When I asked Nedim, how did you started to interest in car modification, he replied: “It started by touching the car which my father used in the market/*pazar* before I got my license. At the simplest level, (it started with) stickers that I put on the car, a label attached to it, anyway. It started by wanting to show that the car is ours. That’s the most basic like that.” Before this question, Nedim has already talked about how he was interested ‘obsessively’ in the cars and how he was so happy being in a car even when he was a baby. As he stated in the quote, he aspired to personalize the car they owned, to underline their possession over car through a personal touch, through a signature that makes it unique. Likewise, what he was seeking while he is transforming his own car is in the same vein. He is reflecting himself on the car body and personalizing it:

Nedim: “Why modification, very good question. I am a very fancy person, a really fancy person. This ornament was reflected in the car. Then, when it started professionalism, it went to the customization effort rather than this ornament. My accessories in the car are the one and only in Turkey, no one else has them. Very personal, but the basis is personalization.”

“I painted the car completely and painted it a special color. In Turkey, no one has that special color which Renault has received a patent, the ‘Renault Clio red’, ‘fire red’ as it is known. I painted my Honda Civic car in Renault fire red. I accomplished a first in Turkey: I painted an unpainted car.”

The accomplishment that Nedim has done is not just painting the car with a unique color but also painting it without even it is necessary. In Turkey, a painted car is considered flawed since there is a common market prejudice that it is done to cover a problem on the car body. Nevertheless, as he underlined, Nedim took the risk and paint it for the sake of being unique. For Nedim, “being the first and the one” is a great source of satisfaction in car modification. Through the changes he made on the body and the motor of the car, he fulfills his need for self-representation and the car is the object that the modifier seeks consolation in. For modifiers, the steel body of the car is a “mobile canvas” to reflect their identity (Bright 1998). Car, with its inherent qualities, is constituting the ‘perfect’ space for this group of men to reflect themselves. The car is mobile, visible, and personal, whatever one does on his car is his self-reflection.

Even if the main principles in the modification in terms of style is self-reflection and uniqueness, modifiers can transform their cars to receive the appreciation and admiration of fellow modifiers. The entourage that modifiers get into is riveting

the enthusiasm. So much that, car modification is defined as a collective act; the friendship and peer interaction are enhancing the engagement. In our interview with Ahmet and Hakan, Ahmet defined car modification context as a space of friendship and stated that it is one of the crucial components of the culture:

Ahmet: “Modification is actually a friendship. It should not be attached only to the car. Why? Now, can a man with a Renault Clio get into the circle of Honda guys or not? Non. Oh, but if you have a Honda, (you can ask the peers), how do we build this car? In other words, curiosity, pleasure, illness ... So if we explain the modification, these are listed: The list starts from curiosity, from pleasure, from illness, from friendship. This is what modification stands for. Modification is for me; modification is a pleasure, modification is a disease, I think modification does not have one expansion. But modification is friendship; modification is the friendship.”

Şeyma: “Is that why you call it a lifestyle?”

Ahmet: “Sure, it’s a lifestyle. I mean, if there are not my friends, I have built a car, I did it myself, I looked it myself. There is no such thing. Ali will like the car I made; I will like the car I made. Ahmet will like it, you will like it, Mehmet will like it. This is modification.”

For the men I interviewed in the car modification context, interest in car modification (or the modified car itself) is both the medium and the end of the quest of creating a space for ‘himself’. This quest is related to everyday vulnerabilities, disenchantments, stresses, and pleasures of each modifier, hence the satisfaction that modifiers seek has personal aspects. Nevertheless, there are many patterns of the reason that we can see outline the aspirations behind car modification. I have seen that, through car modification, these men claim themselves a space to construct or maintain masculine identity. At a personal level, modifiers are reflecting their style and pleasures over the body of the car. But with car modification, modifiers are making an entrance to a group consisting of persons who are enjoying a shared enthusiasm. The mastery over the automobile, technical competence, peer interaction and competition, self-representation through customizing the car... All these elements constitute a space and an entourage that is defined by a shared pleasure that these group of men gets from car modification.

2.3 “It Was My Child, My Son”: Overvaluation of the Modified Car

The relationship between the person and her/his possession is beyond a simple bond; it is the extended adhesion that remains a part of the self which is called as an ‘extension of the self’. Russel Belk, consumer behavior researcher, who examines the relationship between possessions and self-perception, pointed out that the relationship between sense of self and possession is an important side for the analysis of consumer behavior because this examination not only shows the importance of this relationship but at the same time promised the understanding of how consumer behavior contributes to the extended existence of human being (Belk 1988). Possessions are considered to be parts of oneself, whether intentionally or not, since the sense of self needs support which is provided by possessing. This idea of self-extending from possessions includes a wide variety of material and non-material possessions. As Belk quoted from William James: “A man’s self is the sum of all that he can call his own, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and his jobs, his land, and yacht and bank account. This whole thing gives him the same emotions. If they bow down and prosper, it feels triumphant, if they decrease and disappear, people throw themselves - not necessarily in the same degree for everything, but in the same way for all.”

The notion of self-extension is a masculine and Western metaphor comprising not only what is perceived as ‘me’ (the self), but also what is considered ‘mine’ (Belk 1988). The studies on ‘extended self’ consider a person’s house, car, pets, land, spouse, and children as an extension of his self. Hence, like the idea that ‘property’, one’s extension of the self is a masculine concept. The example of modified car ownership and the relationship that modifiers have with their car can be examined through the concept. Since the modified car is a property that is personalized and with its unicity, the possession over is underlined, modifiers and their cars are highly interlinked. In the discourse of modifiers, the car is an indispensable part of their lives, their identity. So much so that they do not see it as a vehicle that they use to facilitate in life. In our interview, as Hakan said: “My friend, your car is a car for you, but not a car for me. I don’t see it as a point-to-point vehicle. I have put it in a corner of my life.” His statement was a reprehension to the people who do not understand the relationship with his car. The emphasis on the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘indispensability’ of the modified cars in users’ discourse brings along sexualization of the modified car, which is already sexualized as a material possession (Sheller 2004). The highly personalized perception of the modified car can constitute an equivalence to the spouse, lover, partner, or children of the modifier. For modifiers,

the value of the car is so salient that they do compare the place of the car with their precious relationships. In the following two excerpts we see how Orhan and Demir prioritize and care about their modified cars:

Şeyma: “How would you express the value of the car?”

Orhan: “Son.”

Şeyma: “Why especially son?”

Orhan: “I have a daughter, that is a son.”

Demir: “I describe the car in two ways. One, I describe it as my child. I had two cars. One was Mini. Mini was my child, my son, that every day its polish should shine. It was my baby that I did not miss the oil and water, that I changed its diaper, that I gave the food exactly. I also had one Megan, that I drove in fields and everything, I didn't even care when I bumped into things with it. The car has two meanings to me, one that gets me from point A to point B, and also the car that I avoid from my eyes (*gözümde sakındığım*)”

With the emotional investment, an extension of the self hinges on a person's identity. So much so that, it holds an essential place in the maintenance of identity. The importance of an extended part of the self can be asserted in the case of its loss. The involuntary loss of possession could lead to a decrease in the sense of self. Belk reminds from Georg Simmel “Material property is, so to speak, an extension of the ego, and any interference with our property is, for this reason, considered a violation of the person” (Belk 1988). Indeed, when the interviewees were asked to answer the question in case of loss of the car, how they would feel, they affirmed the most possible bad feelings they would have. As we could see in the following conversation that I have with İlker, Mustafa, and Kemal, loss of the modified car, and even physical distancing with the car, can trigger self- shrinking. The importance of the car is so recognized that every modifier would empathize with the situation:

İlker: “You are falling into the void. Sometimes your car gets stuck in the industry, for example, if there is no spare vehicle, there are times when there is no, for example, you fall into the gap. Today, for example, you will go somewhere in a friend environment, you are looking for your friend, this time you will be bad. This time you say "take me". Nobody will do anything to that, (they will understand), I will take Mustafa, Gökhan, but I will also take Tahsin. You do not ignore it, but you are giving yourself trouble”.

Mustafa: “You give yourself trouble”.

Kemal: “Inevitably, there are things like that, but ... When you have such a friendly environment, you still drive. For example, I use Halis’s car while racing, for example. When we do not have a car, you have a friend environment that will satisfy this feeling”.

2.4 Masculine Homosociality Around Car Modification

Masculine homosociality can be seen through the boundness between a group(s) of man where many practices of masculinity are “learned, taught and revised” (Sancar 2016). It can appear as a set of practices that are bound to a certain gendered place and its essence is the sharing between men. Male homosocial activities “are not only enjoyed predominantly by men, but their execution depends upon or can lead to, men bonding at the expense, exclusion or negation of women and ‘others’” (Crowhurst and Eldridge 2018, 5). On one hand, the codes of masculine sociality are constructed and transmitted through shared activities. On the other hand, homosociality is based on codes like the prohibition of homosexuality, an expectation of integrity to fraternal contract, and exclusion of female presence. Therefore, homosociality is very much related to the questions of where, when, and how masculinity is reproduced.

The discussion of how masculinity is transmitted and reproduced can lead in its relation to space; its organization, and the interaction both at a level between space and people and interpersonal levels. The relationship between space and gender can be traced through the spaces where women are excluded or accepted as only ‘guests’ i.e. when their presences are exceptional (Özbay 2013). In the case of the modified automobile scene, we can look at some spaces where the place is defined with male presence, like auto-industrial sites or garages. Also, we can examine the spatial relations on the roads, racecourses.

On the roads, where modifiers can come across and where they “show-off” their cars to the public, the encounters are instantaneous; therefore, the spatial relationships can be ephemeral, relying on the length and intensity of the encounter. On the other hand, roads may be the only spatial setting that modifiers can encounter and engage in an inter-gender relation since the rest of the places are homosocial spaces where all-male modifiers are present. On the roads, modifiers may be cruising in front of a female audience or they may come side by side with a female driver. In such cases, reactions are changing person to person. In our interview with Nedim, when I asked

him about women in the context and we have talked about how women get related to the context and modifiers:

Şeyma: “Well, do you know any women in the modified automobile scene?”

Nedim: “Yes, I know. There were one or two successful people, yes there are.”

Şeyma: “How often do you encounter it? I can imagine it is not much.”

Nedim: “I try not to meet so that they are not disturbed, I try to support them from social media. When we come across, I try to say hi and not to exaggerate too much. Because there are people who try to meet them a lot, even if they have good or bad intentions. I stay away to avoid them, but I follow them from afar.”

Şeyma: “Do you know anybody who is racing?”

Nedim: “No women are competing, but I come across a woman who crosses a lot illegally in the traffic and acts like a bum. There is something unavoidable, there are conversations such as “(*bana salça oldu*)”, a little street jargon. There are a lot of women like this. There are especially women who come to me and cut off my road. Then there are women smiling and saying “Follow me”. Especially in Caddebostan. So there were women I competed with, but of course, I don’t know them. If it were someone else, he could stop and continue with the conversation or something. I do not prefer to meet people this way.”

What Nedim underlined is that there is a moral frame that he endorsed that regulates his attitudes towards women in the context. Also, based on this morality he positions other modifier’s attitudes and women’s attitudes based on their intentions. Here, it is seen that Nedim created a narrative of morality, based on the intergender interactions, that makes him a moral subject.

As for the racecourses, interpersonal relationships are accorded to a competitive setting of race norms. A ‘fair-play’ competition is aimed according to fraternal terms. Races, whether ‘illegal’ on highways or ‘legal’ in racecourses are both strictly organized activities. There are certain rules of play that every racer has agreed upon; for example, the rivalry is limited in order not to cause any fight. Here, borrowing the term “fraternal contract” from Carole Pateman (Pateman 1988), I argue that the fraternity amongst modifiers which occurs with homosocial bonding regulates the relationships within the context.

Amongst the audience or the racers, we cannot talk about the considerable presence

of women. Even if as a public space the racecourse is open to the participation of every individual, the remarkable absence of women points out the fact that women are not welcomed in the context. Throughout the interviews, I have encountered divergent arguments about the women in the context. During our conversations, Nedim and Demir told that there are women racing both in legal and illegal races, and they have stated that they were welcoming the increasing presence of women in the context. However, in our interview with İlker, Mustafa, and Kemal, they stated that women's participation is not an ordinary and acceptable thing in the context. As detailed in the following excerpt from the interview, they do not want to bring women to the races because of "their belief." Here, belief is referred more than religion; it is referred to a gender regime that does not approve women's participation in spaces that marked with male dominance:

Şeyma: "Are your spouse coming (to the races)?"

İlker: "She's not coming, my wife doesn't like it anyway, and we don't go over it because she doesn't like it."

Mustafa: "It is not an environment to bring them."

İlker: "Yeah... Now, sometimes there are 300 people, 400 people, and nobody brings their spouse to that environment. There are women who come, but we don't know if she is someone's wife or lover of course."

Şeyma: "Why?"

Kemal: "Because of our belief ..."

İlker: "As a matter of belief. We come across these things in Konya, so we come across in drag racing, one comes with his wife while passing, she hears from him or she says "I will come, too". People can look at them from a different perspective, so if they go with us, for example, if they sit in the stands, there will be 500 acquaintances. So they are a bit odd. "Oh, look at that, he went with his wife".

Mustafa: "Everyone knows each other there. Inevitably, you have a reputation/popularity. Because of the car, your name is heard. But when you get there, when you sit in the stands with your wife and the man next to you think differently."

Kemal: "It's entirely out of faith. Because we think it's not true."

İlker: "I mean, it is like she can't get between that many men."

Throughout the interviews, I learned that they are in an organic relationship with the auto industry to which they are affiliated to realize their projects for customizing

their cars. They said that although they are not directly working in this field, they are in the social networks gathered in the auto industry and the most frequent place in their daily lives (perhaps as much as their workplaces and homes) is the auto industry. So much so that the auto industry is a constitutive haunt that revealed relationships beyond its spatiality (Genç 2018).

Amongst modifiers, there are many participants whose occupation is the related auto industry and most of them are craftsmen, repairmen. Auto-industrial sites, auto industry, where modification projects are made and where modifiers come together, space is actually organized as a workplace. Hence the relationship that modifiers have with auto industry has two layers: first is that auto industry is the foyer of modification second is that auto industry is the meeting point. The fact that auto industry has these two functions for modifiers at the same time, it is frequented by modifiers, even their occupation is not related to here. Most of the modifiers that I have spoken to said specific shops in auto industry are like their “private club”. They reported that they come over to these clubs daily, even when they have no particular reason. As Nedim, who is a cameraman, told his frequency in auto industry is nearly every day:

Nedim: “I am in auto industry every day. I go separately in the morning; I would go to a different job and go back to the auto industry after work. Even if I won’t take care of my vehicle, I will go. I am not an automobile master, not an engine mechanic or body mechanic. In the worst case, I go there, and I do even brew tea, I go there, even to sweep the floors”.

Likewise, Hakan who is working as a production coordinator, mentions about a garage they visit constantly, saying, “It’s a meeting area, it’s like our club. When it is weekend or in the evenings, we go and gather there”. These two interviews clearly show that the auto industry and the distal auto industry related places are socializing places where there is no need for a reason to stop by. These spots are beyond a repair-restoration center that is visited when needed.

Male homosociality refers to the common practices of male values that are experienced within groups of men. The concept signifies the experience of masculinity which is realized within the communities of men and which contains the leisure activities participated by precisely the men, the places of the company such as clubs, *kahvehane*, etc (Sancar 2016). Men’s homosocial spaces are places where several masculine codes are acquired, involved, and revised (Sancar 2016). As for auto industry and its place in the culture of modification. the modification of the auto-

mobile leads to a male homosocial space considering its strong correspondence with *otosanayi* the culture of the modification itself is dominated by the vast presence of men. Even if the culture is not strictly closed to women, I still argue that modification culture is exclusive since all the social practices are not welcoming women.

This homosociality is not only carried out in the auto industry. Many practices of the modified automobile scene take place outside of the auto industry and are continued in virtual channels. This unity, which continues in social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, forum sites; highways, racetracks, fairgrounds, meals, picnics, and holidays, for these men united around a shared passion, principles such as loyalty, solidarity, and respect to this community they are a part of. It creates a brotherhood framed by social codes.

This leisure activity, constructed around a masculine object, is experienced only by men, and only men united around this passion. The modifiers are opening up a new field of masculinity for themselves in this space, which they establish through an object for men. “For example, I have only one debauchery, I don’t drink alcohol, I don’t smoke, I have no nightlife, I don’t gamble... My only debauchery is the car. And nobody can interfere in that anyway”. Ahmet who says those words, his relationship with the modified car is unquestionable even if it seems as “debauchery” or “bad habit” for others. It’s his sphere, untouchable.

Nearly all the interviewees I have spoken to, have expressed an acceptance of the roles they are entitled to, as being a “man”. They admit that they are carrying out “duties” they are affiliated with: Being breadwinner, being a husband, being a father. Meantime, they are using “good execution” of their roles as a justifying point to the passion they have. Like Ahmet says: “Of course, I take care of my children, it’s a different thing... Everybody has a separate place (in his life). The car has whole another place, kids have different, my wife has different, the dog has different.” He can spare time for his leisure. But on the other hand, this means that unless he doesn’t refrain himself from paying the price of his masculinity, he could reserve this leisure space for himself. This is the negotiation that modifiers make for the sake of masculinity.

As in the case of cars, the auto industry is not only a job site but also a recreation area for men, I think that modifiers reinforce their masculinity through a male-only engagement in this male-only place. For modifiers who obviously need a new field of expression in the face of life, the modified automobile offers a tool for the re-declaration of masculinity, while the auto industry offers a reconstructed space.

3. MODIFIED CAR CONTEXT IN TURKEY AT THE INTERSECTION OF CLASS AND MASCULINITY

Automobile modification contains the practice of transforming the existing design and setting of the automobile, either the engine, the body, or the electrical parts. Throughout the world, there have been various meanings and attitudes attributed to the modification and even there have been many mod styles differing depending on the mod content and of the context that they have appeared in *Lowrider*, *Hot Rod*, *Boso-zoku*, *German Style*, *JDM*, *Old Skool*, and others (Best 2006; Bright 1998; Lumsden 2015; Ülkebaş 2015). Car modification culture goes back to the history of car since any intervention on the standard design of an automobile is accepted as modification.

Even the activities that contain the automobile have historicity since the 1910s, with the underground activities such as illegal races, and joy-riding the beginning of the modification, as popular culture, could be started around the 1950s in the USA (Moorhouse 1991). As ownership was distributed among the population, especially young people from the working classes showed a tendency to transform automobiles. The modification emerged as a popular class youth leisure in the southern United States. It is possible to admit that this tendency to transform existing materials is a pecuniary attitude, an attempt at ostentation or compensation, or as one could see in the work of Brenda Bright, it rises as a mechanism of resistance at the center of existing social problems (Bright 1998).

Cultural and economic changes affect the popularization of car modification. Especially examples of some popular films such as *Fast and Furious*, or TV shows such as *Pimp my Ride*, *American Hot Rods* (Best 2006; Ülkebaş 2012), and TV series based on craftsmanship like *Gas Monkey Garage* or *Wheeler Dealers*, have a worldwide influence on the widespread popularity of car cultures.

3.1 The Social Milieu of Car Modification context: Races, Social Media, *oto-sanayi*

The milieu of car modification is defined by some social activities: gatherings, both in national and local scales, fairs and *tuning shows*, and official and illegal races are spaces and frequencies where modifiers interact with each other. As based on these activities, car modification constitutes leisure for men. With varying degrees of engagement to the context, modifiers dedicated their spare time and/or personally routinize car modification on a daily/weekly/monthly basis. In the context of car modification in Turkey, we can talk about spatial regularities. A sense of belonging to a group of shared delight is prominent in engagements of modifiers to the context. Hence I argue that car modification can be considered as leisure which moves beyond the boundaries between spare time and everyday routines, in a way that it provides a space of emancipation for modifiers.

In Turkey, car modification is viewed as a popular car culture since the early 2000s. Through communication provided by tuning magazines and forum websites, modification enthusiasts came together, and the early elements of the culture were set. *TR Tuning*, *Tuning Türkiye*, *Evo* were popular and best-selling magazines within the context. The magazines were holding a special place for modifiers at the time since it was the medium that modifiers all over Turkey can find a platform to appear and display their cars. Likewise, according to interviewees' accounts, forum websites were the hub where modifiers meet, present their work and car, share information and experience, organize for races and gatherings. Some of the forum websites were closed networks but members were registered with references, and sometimes with national identity numbers, to ensure a secure common ground. In these communication channels, modifiers from different cities met and communicated.

With the emergence of widespread social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, digital socialization shifted from forum websites to these platforms. In the pages of these platforms, modifiers come together, get to know each other, organize, and display their cars and enthusiasm. In Facebook, there are group pages of small scales, such as groups of a particular city or enthusiasts of a particular brand, and national scales. Many of these groups are 'closed' groups that are led by admin(s). In Instagram, the accounts are mostly personal, however, some accounts are run by groups of friends or accounts of garages. During my fieldwork, I started to collect names of groups and pages that my interviewees were members or followers, and I am following two groups on Facebook and two accounts on Instagram since the summer of 2019. On Instagram, the posts are usually picturesque, and stories are

more instantaneous, but both are taken from races, gatherings, or other social events like picnics, barbeque parties, or dinners. However, on Facebook, group pages are more of a space for the personal display. The interactions on pages are based on conversations held on comments of posts. In the posts, nearly everything is shared: A personal opinion, caricatures, memes, photos of cars, news items, racing challenges, and even in-group relations with every aspect (disappointments, longings, apologies, etc.).

One of the pillars of the context is race. *Drift*, *drag*, and *roll* are the most common organizations where racers compete with each other to be superior in terms of speed or maneuver. *Drifts* are races in which the driver oversteers and slips the car, mostly in a turning road. *Drags* are the races in which racers compete with each other in a short-range course, starting from a standstill. Usually, in drags, two racers are racing to be superior on the departure and to be speeder in all. As for the *roll races*, racers are starting from a rolling start and trying to reach the finish line first. In Turkey, all these types of races are organized both officially and illegally. These racecourses are made for drag races, upon demand and initiation of enthusiasts in different cities like İzmit, Manisa, Konya, Ankara. Official races are organized in these racecourses with the surveillance of provincial directorates affiliated to the Association of Motorsports and Youth and Sports Ministry in every city, on-demand of modifier groups in cities. Alongside the drag courses, races are organized in Istanbul Park, the Formula 1 racecourse of Turkey. The races organized in Istanbul Park are open track days, that people enter by paying a fee, speed, or race freely.

All the official races are organizations that one should pay entrance fees for being a racer. This fee is not always affordable for every speed enthusiast. Also, race calendars are not always satisfying the speed passion of racers. Non-official races can be spontaneous or based upon a “challenge” made on social media. Spontaneous races are mostly made with less motivation to “compete” but rather to try and compare the performances of the cars, which modifiers calls “trials”. However, in the races made upon a call of “challenge” that one modifier made, there is a strong atmosphere of competition. When I was conducting my interviews in Konya, in September 2019, one week before my interviews, there was a racer from Afyonkarahisar, who dared to Konya for a race. As my interviewees told, the person who dared for a race, came to Konya on a weekend, they raced one night on the highway and he was defeated by the cars of Konya. Nearly every interviewee told this story while explaining the excitement of races or the good relationships among the modifiers. For this specific memory, many of my interviewees in Konya mentioned that they have negotiated beforehand about sharing the videos of the race on social media, and both sides

were agreed upon it. In our interview, Bülent has narrated the competition between racers through this particular example:

Şeyma: “How does it go in these illegal races?”

Bülent: “For example, that friend, when he was in Konya, he saw the trials of the cars, he said that there is no one to race in Afyon, he did ask “If I could come can we try with mine?” He made a connection. Then we said okay, we determined one day. Then here he came, brought his car, raced here. Things went smoothly without an accident.”

Şeyma: “Who won?”

Bülent: “We won, but he congratulated us, and he left.”

Şeyma: “Well, is it a sweet competition or can it get ugly?”

Bülent: “Sometimes such ugly things can happen, of course, we said to him, if we are to remain friends, come, otherwise don't, we don't want fights and so on, we said we do not want to race like that. And, we said ‘We have groups, race groups, we'll share videos there.’ He also accepted that. Here, we prepared our vehicle, within three days, it was missing for the competition. We prepared them when our car was ready, we raced. That way, he said, you can shoot videos too. We took the videos, all the things are seen as Turkey. For example, what I call a group is a general group, there is a group where all the racers gather, the Facebook group.”

As Bülent emphasized, the races take place in a negotiable competition. While superiority in races is the only goal in-group welfare and friendship are the tools of negotiation within this competition as values that should be protected. Although there is no financial gain or claim, the only thing that keeps the 'fair play' spirit in races is perhaps the peer and brotherhood contract.

Another pillar of the car modification context is auto-industrial site. For modifiers, the auto industry is the place where socialization and practices built around the modified car are concentrated and spatialized. Modifiers, who want to customize their cars, often spend time in the auto industry not only to mature modification projects and implement their plans but also not to stay out of interaction with other modifiers. What changes should be made in the car and how? Which parts and loads are suitable for which cars? Who is the best master to do these things? The answers to these questions can only be taken in a continuous flow of knowledge, skills, and experience. But the relationship with the auto industry is more than an obligation. Some repair shops, workshops, or garages in the auto-industrial site constitute a

chamber or an association space where modifiers are spending time together. These places are mostly garages that a mechanic or a group of a friend owns or a repair shop that a known *usta* owns. The garages are not always categorically mechanic or repair shops, but it is used as an umbrella term to refer frequently to visit and spend time. Some of the interviewees stated that they make an effort to visit these spots every day, even if they work in another business field, saying that they spend their time there even for “brewing tea, making mop, help the repairman.”

When we look at the relationships carried out in the races, social media, and auto industry, we see that every modifier is involved in small and large groups of fellow modifiers. When I asked my interviewees how they started to know other modifiers, the responses reveal that the acquaintanceship emerges as part of the flow of life. Gökhan, who is a mechanic, and modifies for himself and his customers, told he met with other modifiers while he was already altered his car:

Gökhan: “How we met, it was a complete coincidence... We met in these traffic lights. I was normally going home, one Opel Corsa stopped next to me, when my car was turbocharged, on the front of there was interpol. . . And there were 3-4 young friends in that car, they were racing fellows already, they were racing before. They said "Let's try it", I said, "OK, let's try." I passed them once on departure, the guys said "Bro, let's try it again", we tried it once or twice, and then they called me to the region where we compete. Here they said, "Come on bro, we have nice cars there too, let's try it with you", I met different friends like that. I met them, I met Kemal, İlker, and those friends. Later, my circle of friends also changed, friends were driving modified vehicles. Of course, besides that, I started to meet with modified particles, I started to learn which product is what and how, then I started to improve myself.”

The particular story of Gökhan may be a “coincidence”, however, car modification is a collective action where one who wants to modify his car needs to get in contact with others, at least to develop the project and to implement it. Beyond the theoretical and logistical dependence on each other, modification is a passion that emerges and rivets by collective enjoyment. A collectiveness that modifiers in local and national scales know each other. In our interview with Fatih, while we were talking about the social circles he was into, he said that modifiers know each other somehow, and this is not an unexpected thing for him. He explained this by making an analogy between the habits of people:

Fatih: “Where a person who drinks alcohol goes? One goes to the casino,

goes to the bar, goes to the pavyon. True, isn't it? A person who loves nightlife goes to these places. People there definitely know the people there. A person who performs prayers goes to the mosque, they definitely know the person in the mosque, they know each other. I mean, at least there is eye familiarity”.

3.2 Modifying the Pre-designed: The Meanings of Engagement to the Car Modification Context

“In fact, this is our hobby.” This is the sentence that I heard most in the interviews. The statement emerged sometimes as an effort of justifying or normalizing the interest by underlining the opinion that “It is our hobby just like others have hobbies”. Sometimes it was uttered as a pride motto, against all the opposition of people, they were claiming their hobby. What this statement also underlines is that it is a spare time activity, they categorized it as leisure. Indeed, the context can be defined as a leisure space for men, which is open to every car enthusiast.

The question of “Who modifies the car” has not a single, well-defined answer. The first thing comes to mind is that men do modify their car. The relationship that men have with modified cars and how masculinity is definitive for the context is discussed in detail in the former chapter. In this chapter I aimed to do is to narrow the circle, as far as it can be, and try to define the group and the context by underlining the similarities between modifiers.

For the modifiers that I interviewed, men, mostly young men, from the various class background and ages are into car modification context. Both the diversity in my interviewees’ own demographic determinants, and what I observed on social media groups and accounts confirming the statements about the heterogeneity of the groups of modifiers in terms of class, age, and city. This heterogeneity is showing the popularity of leisure and the openness of the milieu. On the other hand, I didn’t come across any proof that can be show diversity regarding ethnic or religious affiliations. Only in our interview with Nedim, there was an emphasis on the diversity of ethnic and religious identities:

Nedim: “I meet with the core staff more than my relatives, we come together with our families. They know my whole family; I know all their families. I go to all their important days, they come to all my important

days. Even if we have differences, I have friends who say they are our wealth and who are different in religion, language, sect, profession, and even race, but our common taste is cars. I don't care what they are, we accepted their political, professional, and religious differences as our wealth, and we formed a nuclear group.”

However Nedim drafted a silhouette of ‘coexistence’, when I ask him about the details of these differences he named political preferences and religious sects. But in most of the interviews, the ‘demographic’ diversity was explained through professions:

İlker: “In fact, in Turkey, there is a mod love in every man. As a visual or performance or something. Some have nothing to do with the performance, they may be into the music system, or changing the appearance, others do it for performance. For example, we also have a group on social media as Motorsport Konya, we have friends there up to the age of 45, that we spend time together. Plus, there are people also from every profession: Dentist, surgeon, accountant, fiber-cable engineer and so on.”

As the excerpt from our interview with İlker shows, the fact that modifiers occupied with different professions are presented as part of the diverse universe of the modification context. I argue that naming the professional differences refers to class differences. Professions and jobs are one of the elements of the structural determinants that define one's class status, in fact not just the class status but the position of a certain person in the power relations axis. Hence, referring to diversity with a crowded inventory of professions may be an attempt at normalizing leisure but on the other hand, it re-drafts a fragment of class differences.

According to what I collected in the field, I argue that men are modifying their cars in the hope of standing out in the crowd, being unique, recognized, and known. The assumed uniqueness and self-reflection that come with car alteration, boosts the sense of identity. Trough transforming what is already designed and given, the modifier initiates a new way of representation. In this regard, one might first argue that modifiers are resisting what is pre-designed for mass consumption and searching for authenticity. However, given that today car modification has become a sector of trade and craftsmanship, we cannot talk about a stand of resistance in the modifiers' aspirations.

Alongside trying to get out of the script that men have been engaged, we can say

that modifiers try to seek consolation in the car. As I discussed in the first chapter, car with its inherent qualities provides men a tool to reclaim or complete masculine identity. But at the same time, the mobile-visible body of the car provides a public representation that can be customized. In Turkey, though the context of a class-based identification cannot be made directly due to the heterogeneity, we can say that the car modification sector reproduces the class relations. The economic and social capital required by modification projects, and social activities in the context of modification, can produce new hierarchies amongst the modifiers. It is in this context that a powerful, swift, and robust car provides a symbolic capital (Best 2006), so other capitals must be mobilized to achieve this symbolic capital and the reputation of holding it. These rifts created by class affiliations crystallize in in-group and out-group encounters. In our interview with Demir, who is a senior manager in the business that his family owns, has told me a dialogue of him with a friend:

Demir: “The aim is actually to watch cars. So our chance is that we can also build our cars because of our means. Apart from watching from the side, we can also be involved in it. We have a friend, he is a photographer, I asked him once ‘Why photograph?’. ‘Yeah,’ he said, ‘I can’t reach that stage. But I take pictures and keep them as a memory.’ We are the opposite, we can reach, we can do it. Today, if I can, I will drive. If I can make a car, I will.”

Within the context of the modified car, there are groups with different styles and usage practices. Many of these groups are referred to, by wider social groups, with a stereotype for their public visibility and driving practices. I came across the stereotype of ‘serseri modifyeci’, ‘trafik magandası’ or referring to a specific brand of car ‘Doğancı’-‘Şahinci’ in the reactions and questions that people ask me when they heard the object of this study. The persons who gave me these reactions were mostly witnessed some modified cars on roads driving fast, loud, or dangerously. One might argue that dangerous and ostentatious use of the car is marked by the idea of car modification in social imagery. Indeed, in all of the interviews, both I did for this study and I did on my final dissertation in BA degree, this stigma referred to as one style of car modification. But every time the type is referred, a double-edged disclaimer is given to clarify that “not all the modifiers are in that type”: The first edge is that the interviewee distinguished himself from the ‘serseri’. The second is that how the stigma that is attributed to the car modification enthusiasts hardens their everyday life. In our interview with Nedim, he mentioned that he “had been despised” by his colleagues since he used a modified car:

Nedim: “But people think the tuning is just the punks out there. I try very hard to break this perception, I spend money out of my pocket, I do social responsibility projects at work, I participate. Mod is not vagrancy; I have been working hard to instill this in people and because of this I have been unemployed for a while. I am unemployed because of the car, I go to the set with my own modified car, people started to despise me on the set, ‘What kind of car is this’, ‘Why is it close to the ground’, ‘Why is the color of it’, they started to marginalize me in this way.”

Şeyma: “Do you experience this as really despising?”

Nedim: “Absolutely, they absolutely despise. Because they don’t know what tuning is. Here, when I looked at the vehicles of those who despised me, I saw that they bought some pieces according to their needs. The pieces they bought were actually a modification piece, but they couldn’t accept themselves. For example, they bought a jeep to go off-road, they bought some kits for lighting the jeep, etc. These are the tuning parts. People ... Well, the modifiers also have a lot of blame, the tuners are generally in the tendency of being vagrants.”

What Nedim has underlined by saying that “They absolutely despise because they don’t know what tuning is,” raises the question of what people think about the aspirations or objectives in car modification. The despise that Nedim has experienced can be considered as stigmatization. As Erving Goffman defines, stigma is an attribution that discredits the person and disqualifies her/him during interpersonal interactions (Goffman 1963). For Goffman, stigma can be based on bodily appearances, it can be linked to certain character flaws, or group affiliations, which he details as affiliations to ethnic, religious, or social groups. Whatever the reason of a stigma is based on, it can be brought about a social distance, and emotion of disgust. The stigma that modifiers face, like Nedim narrated, is also brought a feeling of being marginalized, which is class-based.

The stigma appears on the roads and with the authorities. In Turkey, car modification is legal and considered as “*tadilat*” (alteration/modification) in related regulations. However, some modifications are against traffic regulations. Hence, the police controls are big deals in modifiers’ everyday life. In our interview with Ahmet and Hakan, while they were talking about their memories with polices, they told how the attitude of police can change according to the car one use:

Ahmet: “I bought a BMW right now, I am very comfortable in BMW.”

Hakan: “Abi, it’s a stock car.”

Ahmet: “When I was exiting Kayseri police did this as follows: ‘Sir’ he

said, ‘You look very tired.’ I said, ‘Wow... *Ye kürküm ye*. I hit the steering wheel like this, he said ‘What happened? I said ‘I’m fine, can I continue on my way’ I said, ‘Sure’ he said. If you were with Honda, he would say ‘Get down!’”

Hakan: “The cops have something like this with Honda... Because they stop at every turn, I asked ‘what is this, you are always turning?’ Honda has this thing, the *profiled* car.”

Ahmet: “The wanted car...”

Hakan: “He said, ‘You’re always trouble in the tendency of being vagrants.’”

Leisure is a space that is highly political and politicized and gender plays a central role in leisure choices, experiences, access, and constraints (Aitchison 1999; Henderson and Bailescheki 1989; Shaw 2001, as cited in Crowhurst and Eldridge 2018). Studying leisure and gender can reach out to so many avenues that might help us to understand gender and class relations. Car modification generates practices in which men do transform their ways of representation. The engagement to the car modification leisure has two facets: It is open and accessible for every car enthusiast who wanted to enjoy car-based activities and friendship, whereas it also reproduces existing consumption-based class representations since leisure necessitates mobilization of social and economic capital.

3.3 The Way Women are Represented in the Car Modification Context

İlker: “As a matter of belief. We come across these things in Konya, so we come across in drag racing, one comes with his wife while passing, she hears from him or she says ‘I will come, too.’ People can look at them from a different perspective, so if they go with us, for example, if they sit in the stands, there will be 500 acquaintances. So they are a bit odd. ‘Oh, look at that, he went with his wife.’”

Mustafa: “Everyone knows each other there. Inevitably, you have a reputation/popularity. Because of the car, your name is heard. But when you get there, when you sit in the stands with your wife and the man next to you will think differently.”

Kemal: “It’s entirely out of faith. Because we think it’s not true.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, women are rarely participating in the car modification context. The excerpt above is from the interview with İlker, Mustafa, and Kemal, who shows multi-layered reasons of women's absence in the racecourse, as an audience. İlker stated that "Sometimes there are 300 people, 400 people, and nobody brings their spouse to that environment" which was indicating that there might be a 'potential threat' for women in races. Secondly, the 'belief', which was referring to religion, was presented as a legitimizing reason for not welcoming women's presence. Finally, even if it is not clearly stated, participating a race with a female partner, considered as a situation that would cast a shadow upon one's reputation, as Mustafa said, "when you get there, when you sit in the stands with your wife and the man next to you will think differently."

As for the participation of women into the context, directly as a modifier, reacted with contradictory discourses. When I asked interviewees, if there is any women modifier that he knows, the answers were varying. Some of my interviewees stated that they knew a few women modifiers, and the number of women who are interested in the modification is increasing, and they reacted to this positively. But on the other hand, almost every interviewee remarked that women are not much interested in automobiles, and if they want to get into car modification, as Ahmet said, "Their hands need to get dirty." In our interview with Demir, he said that he knew many women in the context. During the dialogue, he referred to prejudices against women's driving and made a general evaluation of women's presence in the context through examples of some female racers he knew. The bulk excerpt from the interview is actually summarizing the general attitude towards women's engagement in the context. On the one hand, they welcome the inclusion of women in the context positively. On the other hand, they find the presence of women in the context of car modification controversial, mentioning the potential dangers that women may be exposed to in this male-dominated environment and the limitation of women's relations with cars:

Demir: "I know, for example, there is a girl who drifts, Ayşe. Then, there is a girl named Merve, who comes out on the track, and then there is another girl. I have a girlfriend who rallies. I was also organizing track days. There, when we saw a girl, we were saying 'Halal, come on' to those who came to the race. We have something like this in Turkey, not in Turkey, there is such a thing in the world: 'Women cannot use the car,' my mother, my sister, and my girlfriend are driving very well. So I sleep rarely when someone is driving, it should be someone I trust. I sleep while they're riding. I evaluate evlike that."

Şeyma: "Do you think because of the opinion 'Women cannot drive,'

that women are not welcoming in the community in Turkey? how do you make the connection?”

Demir: “Well, I don’t think many women like car things either. I do not know why. We are happy when we see them. The girl, Ayşe, is driving a car that most men cannot drive today. A seriously fast car. And that girl is using it and going out on the track with that car. I look at her stories (on Instagram), he puts his hand in the engine, and she gets oiled. So, you say it’s ‘*Helal olsun,*’ ‘I wish there were more girls like you.’ In the mornings, she comes, meets the repairman in the industry. Thank God, a repairman is a family man, he is a decent guy. He’s not a swearsy man. And people like it, and a lot of people like it. The girl who drifts may not be very skillful, maybe she is improving herself, but her name is known as, I call her Ayşe, but everyone calls her ‘Drift Queen’. Because she is one in Turkey. But go to Cyprus, go to America, go here and there, there are many out there.”

Şeyma: “Do you think they are not successful on the track?”

Demir: “Success. . . It should be looked into according to a criterion. If I try to use the car the girl uses today, I will, of course, have an adaptation problem. Don’t get me wrong, girls are a little more scared. Men are more fearless. The girls may be saying ‘Let nothing happen’ Let’s not say that girls are ‘*çitkırıldım,*’ girls are little more anxious, I think this prevents them. But I saw her driving, she doesn’t drive badly. Maybe she can’t come in, but it’s separate. For example, Ayşe, who drifts, may not be in the Top 5, but she goes to every race with determination. She might not be good, I don’t know, but she is standing there with determination. This is more important to me than success. After all, I was not born professional either.”

During my fieldwork, I saw that the reactions of modifiers to the presence of women are changing in different cities. Nedim and Demir were my interviewees living in İstanbul, they stated that they are encountering women in the context and their attitude was rather welcoming, as Demir was saying “*Helal olsun*” (Well done). But in our interview with İlker, Mustafa, and Kemal, who are living in Konya, underlined that women are not accepted by male actors of the context. Here, big cities and provinces differ in women’s participation in the scene. Bülent, a mechanic in Konya, underlined this difference while talking about women in the context:

Şeyma: “Well, do you know any women in the modified automobile scene? Have you ever encountered it?”

Bülent: “There is not in Konya. Of course, there are enthusiasts in Ankara, for example, we have a friend, a software developer, has a customer, she is very curious. She even has videos on Youtube. That lady is working very hard. She spends money and time. For example, some

ladies are traveling, going to cafes, but she's going to auto industry and spend time there. There are those kinds of people, women too, but in Konya, no."

Şeyma: "Why do you think it is not in Konya?"

Bülent: "I guess Konya sees a little bit more like this, like "There is no job for women here," "She cannot go to auto industry". For example, in Ankara, women can go to industry, a little more entrepreneurs. I see it that way."

Şeyma: "You are saying about the city not associating women here."

Bülent: "Of course, I guess there will be a rumor in Konya like 'what is a woman doing in industry' or 'would she be engaged in this job?' I see it that way. But it may happen later on, why not? Now women want speed, love, we hear like that. You know, even if the fast car will buy a new car, they request that the engine be big and powerful. In other words, in Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, there are some more original modified vehicles, they buy them for example. But in Konya there is no such thing, there are no women who buy that kind of vehicle."

4. INTERNAL HIERARCHIES AND DIFFERENTIATIONS AMONGST THE CAR MODIFIERS

Car modification context is reigned by some group values. As I see in the fieldwork, both in interviews and during my observation on social media, friendship, solidarity, fraternity, and respect are the core values that modifiers endorsed. Peer interaction is maintained through the commitment and reproduction of these values. As the interviewees stated, there is a constant and solid exchange of information even at the national level as much present as within the small groups. This exchange contains a sharing of know-how and experience and it takes place in meetings, races, through social media and telephone. This generous exchange they speak of takes place on a material level as well. During the making of the modification projects on the car, the necessary mechanical parts, if they are not supplied, are obtained with the help of other modifiers. Moreover, it is pointed out that most of the parts that are required for the transformation processes, were obtained from abroad, especially from the USA, Japan, or Europe. Therefore, supplies are provided by active solidarity among modifiers. The ones who are in transnational networks or who can go abroad are helping fellow modifiers to accomplish their projects.

The car modification context is a social milieu that survives through the transmission of certain values and traditions. Based on the narratives of interviewees, I see that there is a community culture that is established on social and artisanal solidarity and the community requires a reliable commitment to the core values of the context as much as solidarity. Another aspect about the social codes of car modification context is that, in this crowded community, there is also rivalry and competition amongst modifiers. Some modifiers pointed out that this is a “sweet rivalry” between the participants. Since the reason why men do modify their car is mostly being unique and superior, and a setting as the races are one of the defining elements of the modification context, it is not unexpected to see a sense of rivalry to occur among modifiers. Having the most powerful car, making the most original customization,

etc. are the motivations at the bottom of sweet rivalry. However, an advanced rivalry is not acceptable. As the milieu of the modified automobile is marked by solidarity, it does not offer a place for competitive behavior and jealous attitudes. Hence, the social environment is protected by eliminating behaviors that can have weakening effects on the solidarity and sociability of groups. In our interview with Demir, he told us how rivalry and friendship are balanced within the group. According to him, the rivalry that occurs in the track is left in the track, friendship continues no matter what the consequence of race is:

Demir: “Years ago, when there were Rolling races, a fight broke out there. . . ‘Did I pass you or you passed me?’ Video records revealed. It was a very big deal. It would be looked at. Abusive fights. He made punches. It happens when he gets very crazy. But when the race was over, we would return to Ataşehir, we would eat together at Mc Donalds on Boulevard. There would be a war of nerves, but within 10 minutes everyone would be my dear, my buddy, my brother. I mean, there are some people in this community, but what we say ‘It is OK if we don’t talk with them unnecessarily.’ But there are some people, no matter how much you fight, you talk somehow because you are doing the same things in the same community.”

In our interview with Bülent, he told me about the race that they had with the modifier from Afyonkarahisar. While he was telling the race, he insisted on the agreement they have made to not cause any fight or trouble. As I mentioned in the second chapter, this race is told in all of my interviews in Konya, and in every interview, a different aspect of the milieu of car modification context has been revealed alongside the races. In our interview with İlker and Kemal, this race is referred to explain the solidarity amongst modifiers:

Kemal: “Also, a friendly atmosphere is formed among us. Now if there is any trouble, there is an environment that consisting of friends from many professions. And anywhere in Turkey, not only for Konya, but we can also call. For example, let’s say you went to Antalya and you can call friends to help if your vehicle has any trouble. Maybe we have never met face-to-face, but on social platforms, there are always friends who are in constant conversation and help. In this sense, let’s say a nice family, a “family of modification” is formed.”

İlker: “So for example, when they came here from Afyon to compete. . . As we have said there were separate groups, but for the race, all Konya mobilized. I mean, if there is a national match, everyone is one, it was

like that. Who has what problems, who lacks what. . . If there is no fuel, it was brought; tools and equipment were brought if needed. I mean, even people who didn't speak inside started talking to each other."

What this excerpt tells us, alongside the intercity solidarity, is that there is a sense of community and solidarity in the city scale, which emerged when modifiers from different cities interact. What İlker said with "All Konya mobilized" and "Even people who didn't speak inside started talking to each other", is that Konya supported a racer from the city when he was confronting a racer of another city. Likewise, as Şahinde Yavuz underlines in her study on car modification enthusiast youth in Trabzon, there is the same strong belonging of modifiers to the city they are living, so much so that most of them preferring to paint the car in colors of the city's football team (Yavuz 2015). However, as for Istanbul, there wasn't an emphasis on the feeling of belonging to the city that is observed in other cities.

4.1 "We Are Not Like Them": Defense Strategies of Anti-stigmatization

As the respect within group, respect to the outside group is important for the modifiers. Modified cars can be robust, loud, and remarkable automobiles for driving in the city. The modifiers I have interviewed were stating that there are modifiers who are driving 'inappropriately' and causing 'social discomfort' for other drivers and residents. For most of them, the stigmatization which modifiers face is caused by these particular modifiers.

Şeyma: "Do you listen to music while driving?"

Gökhan: "Of course, I have a sound system in my car, I love it. I have an engine modified and a sound system."

İlker: "He loves sound system, but you won't turn up the sound when driving at high speeds because you have to listen to the engine's noise."

Gökhan: "We will turn off the exhaust of the car in daily use, in order not to disturb people around."

Mustafa: "In order not to disturb people in the city."

İlker: "But some people do this."

Gökhan: "Yeah, we do not like them for example, we condemn them. I

don't like it, we turn off the exhaust at night. We do mods but I don't like when they do noise at nights.”

İlker: “Places where there is no house, we are opening the exhaust, too. But on the country road or the intercity roads.”

Gökhan: “By proper manners (we drive).”

İlker: “Yeah, by good manners, so that we don't disturb anyone.”

According to the interviewees, driving practices of these modifiers are seen as the source of stigmatization. Like Nedim said “People think the tuning is just the punks out there,” modifiers drawing a line of defense between themselves and “the punks out there” as a self-differentiation, and exculpation strategy. Not just the driving practices but also taste in car modification creates a cultural distinction between groups. During my interviews, while interviewees were talking about the stigmatization they were exposed to, they were referring to a certain group, or groups, of modifiers. These modifiers were identified as “vagrants,” “apaches,” (apaçiler) “Doğancı-Şahinci”. All these adjectives were based on the style of modification, and the fact that these are low budget cars. Therefore, we can say that the distinction has also a class-based layer through which the stigmatization gets strengthened even within the context.

On the other hand, what does exist is that the modifiers show a considerable effort to create a counter-narrative to break down rigid prejudices. By self-distinguishing among the different groups of modifiers, they try to figure out a line of defense by disclaiming the meaning attributed to the car modification, and by explaining the “real” meanings and aspirations that drive them to modify cars. In line with this self-distinction, many modifiers remarked a political demand of creations of accessible spaces for the car enthusiast to satisfy their need for speed. According to my interviewees, most of the modifiers cannot easily get access to the safe spaces for racing, and the reason behind the dangerous driving occurred in the roads and city centers is the unsatisfied urge to speed and drive. In this political demand, I also see that they were sympathizing with the groups that they were self-distinguishing and justifying their driving attitudes.

4.2 Mastering the Steel Body: A Hierarchy Based on Technical Competence

Craftsmanship is key to car modification; competences of craftsmanship defines modifier's competence. In the car modification context, there are people whose profession is not related to automotive craftsmanship. These people modify their cars by working with a craftsman, a repairman, an *usta*. Their cars are prepared by this paid service. Also, some modifiers and racers are craftsmen themselves and do their modifications on cars. In recent years, another vein of professionalism also added to the sector: software implementers or appliers. With the improvements in the automotive technologies, now car engines are altered through software. At first glance, this automation supply may cause craftsmanship to lose its weight in car modification. Yet, it does not. Without mechanic laboring, a car modification project cannot be completed. In this context where technical competence is the fundamental determinant, craftsmanship emerges as the main criteria of accomplishment. Both theoretical development of a modification project and its implementation requires mastery of information, experience, and craft. Therefore, what defines a successful modification is the craftsmanship of people that labored on the car.

Given the importance of craftsmanship and technical competence, throughout my fieldwork, I observe that there is a hierarchy that is largely based on technical competence. Within the context, some mechanics and repairmen are known as *usta* or *abi* by other modifiers. These *ustas* are respected through their knowledge, experience, craft, and their success of know-how of the car modification. On the other hand, this is a source of pride for craftsmen. Gökhan, who is an engine repairman said that the main enjoyment that he gets is modifying: "It is a great pleasure to modify. It is about being able to make it stable after altered it more and more than its normal situation. Other than that, (the pleasure) is not driving or doing other things." Bülent, who owns a repair garage with his brother and who is a well-known engine repairman in Konya, stated that they were the first garage that has done modification of a car in Konya. And he added, "We did not have the formation, we educate ourselves". Bülent went on with explaining how making a good modification provides reputation:

Bülent: "When you make a car good, a car well, when you obtain something good, people hear it. 'We want to have our car built, can you?' and so on ... They buy the parts, they buy the materials, they bring the car with the tow truck, they leave it. 15-20 days later, they take them after the vehicle is finished. The people who use those vehicles are now

satisfied.”

Amy Best, referring to Pierre Bourdieu, identifies the status that modifiers get by having a fast, loud, or big car or a car with hog power as “symbolic capital” which produce social distinctions and symbolic boundaries (Best 2006). Likewise, making faster and stronger cars is a source of symbolic capital that provides superiority over others.

Amongst the modifiers, economical incompetence causes a huge crowd of ‘audience’ who cannot get into the ‘game’ but can only enjoy a bystander role. Particularly in the races. A racing car is prepared after a long process of repair and modification. To reach the speed and power to get into races, modifiers are in preparation and trials that can last for months. This long and labor-intensive process is possible with the mobilization of economic and social capital. Possessing a car that can be altered to its peak, getting the mechanical parts and accessories require economic investment. Hence, there is another difference between racers and non-racers. In this regard, car modification, as a hobby that necessitates economic and social capital, constitutes a scene where class differences are crystallized.

In our interview with Nedim, he mentioned that he could not attend races as a racer because of his economic conditions. But he also mentioned that he wanted to race when the conditions will be in his favor, and he was investing in that:

Şeyma: “Are you racing?”

Nedim: “No, I am not racing, but I really want to be. I am not ready for this financially, I have not had a fast car. How to say it, it is financial, I am a low-income person, so I could not compete yet. But I’ve been in the side seat a lot and I understand both the mechanics and chemistry of this work, I know the mathematics. But if God wills, I will of course race, too. Everything is in that direction.”

Şeyma: “You said I did not compete personally, but how do the races make you feel in general?”

Nedim: “Adrenalin. For example, I have a rhythm disorder, heart rhythm. It gives me great pleasure, it gives me pleasure, I release adrenaline. It gives passion. I can say the most enjoyable part of my life. It is more important to me.”

Şeyma: “Well, about that competition, that envy that takes place there ...”

Nedim: “I envy it more, I admire it, but competition does not the thing

that gets my blood up. If I'll race and I'll be defeated, I will not lose anything from my happiness. For me, racing. . . Actually, being in that environment is more important than racing. So, I'm not on the track right now, but I'm the guy at the side of the track or the host over there. I mean, even that is enough for me. There is no competition or escalation. But I will taste them too, *inşallah* if God bless me, I'm investing in it."

Throughout this chapter, I try to explain and discuss internal hierarchies and differentiations that emerged within the context of car modification. As a leisure space that is based on material possession and investments in it, the differentiation is mostly seen through economic capital that is mobilized. Brand of car, modification project that is implemented, parts and accessories that are put, races and other scenes that car make appearance. . . These elements are all crystallizing existing economic demarcations. Alongside the economic differentiation, technical competence and mastery over the steel body is creating a symbolic hierarchy. Although these differentiations are affecting the participation of modifiers, at least I felt and observed that it does, the differentiations are not perceived as insurmountable demarcations. Throughout the fieldwork, as I strive for getting more insights on vulnerabilities and disenchantments that modifiers experience within the context, I could not reach that easily. Now, looking back from now, although I think that maybe this may be related to my methodological incompetence or my interview questions, I think that the narratives of fraternity, solidarity, and passion for automobiles that dominate the discourse of the modifiers may shadow the experiences of these differentiations, which also may have made it difficult for me to reach to observe that.

I saw that my interviewees made an ethical judgment of the modifiers' attitudes and behaviors that they enacted while driving their cars, or whether they respect the people around them. A "decent modifier" is respectful in traffic, does not drive his car with movements that pose a danger to himself and others, does not disturb women around, etc. While discourses such as being a part of an anti-stigmatization strategy, they also provide legitimacy to being a modifier. These moral concerns encompass not only out-group interactions but also in-group interactions and attitudes. There are concerns such as showing respect to other modifiers and especially "masters", not acting with the intentions of making money, being included in the networks of solidarity by contributing to it, etc. These morality narratives are making him a moral actor, helps modifier to construct a moral masculine self.

5. CONCLUSION

In this study, I explore the car modification context in Turkey, by unfolding it through its relation to masculinities. Car modification as popular leisure for car enthusiasts in Turkey is a male-dominated context that serves as a space of self-representation and reclamation of identity. The act of modifying an automobile, whose technical knowledge, and skills are attributed to men, is a subject-making tool for men. Through the engagement of modifier groups, men are their reclaiming masculine-self. The car modification context offers an unusual scene to study how men are creating identity construction strategies.

My analysis has three axes, through which I discuss the re-negotiation of masculine identities in contemporary society. First, I discussed what are the main aspirations that men seek in car modification and how their engagement to the context interacts with their masculine identity. As object-oriented leisure, the aspirations of men in car modification are marked with what car as a possession means for them. As a consumer good and a vehicle, the car is loaded with so many cultural meanings, therefore the possession of a car, dispossession of it, driving it, getting more knowledge of it, talking about it, reflecting on it are important matters in modifiers life. Car as a concept and modified car as a possession holds a salient place in modifiers life that in case of its loss, they fall into a feeling of powerlessness, nonability, a decrease on the sense of identity. In sum, it is evident that the car is not any object that constitutes the base of masculine leisure.

The second axis is the races, in which powerful feelings of excitement, rivalry, fear, pride, enjoyment, accomplishment, defeat have been experienced at the same time. Whether official or illegal, races are organizations where modifiers all over Turkey gather. Before, during, and after races, superiority over others is what nurtures the feelings of excitement and catharsis. Nevertheless, being in the race is as important as being the winner; racers are feeling that they have a seat among the bests. In that sense, participating in the races are so much important that it creates a division

between racers and non-racers, which appears as a symbolic hierarchy amongst modifiers.

The third axis is the auto industry, which is a constitutive haunt that reveals relationships beyond its spatiality for the car modification context. Some repair shops, workshops, or garages in the auto-industrial site constitute masculine homosocial space for modifiers.

Car modification, as leisure, provides us an unusual context of consumption and use practices in which men do transform their ways of representation. The engagement to the car modification leisure has two facets: It is open and accessible for every car enthusiast who wanted to enjoy car-based activities and friendship, whereas it also reproduces existing consumption-based class representations since participation in leisure requires social and economic capital to be mobilized.

Making the car an object of the hobby is a subject-making tool for men. Through transforming automobiles, men are showing their competence to fellow modifiers, that they have the necessary insight, knowledge, and ability of automobile. This way, masculine self-making is completed. Being a modifier, a good, decent modifier, necessitates endorsement to a moral frame. Showing moral concerns about in-group and out-group interactions, modifiers claim to be a moral actor.

In this study, I see that men in car modification context tend to be justifying their interest and passion for cars by underlining their “good execution of breadwinner role” and normalizing their car enthusiasms as it is not categorized as “a bad habit,” by comparing them to alcoholism, gambling, or “debauchery.” The two justification strategies are articulated with a strategy of reclaiming masculinity. This group of men is negotiating with masculinity codes and roles that they are attributing: They are performing the roles they are assigned, and the need to self-reflect is realized through an object that is already dedicated to them. They open up space within the “circle of masculinity” where they cleansed perhaps the burdens of masculinity, and other identity components, express their daily vulnerabilities, pleasures, and disenchantments. Moreover, through the unique representation, they achieve by modifying the car, they hold an individual seat amongst other men.

My analysis has been restricted in some ways and mostly related to fieldwork. First of all, the study lacks participant observation which can be conducted during races and gatherings of modifiers. Such an aspect would bring to the analysis many things that cannot be spoken in interviews. Even if my interviewees were generously open to speak and to discuss, the framework that I directed my interviews was inevitably restricted. For example, I could not directly ask questions to orient the conversation

in a way that I can understand their commitment to masculinity. This is also related to the fact that I am a female researcher, who is in the field and try to open them about their experiences and insights. Me, being a female researcher in a male-dominated field, is the second restriction and maybe by far the most probable negative effector in my fieldwork. My gender identity brought along a distance between me and the interviewees.

A third restriction, which should be better to call “a probable inconvenience”, is that I was too much into the field, in terms of my long-lasting curiosity about the context and the fact that I have already entered the field as a researcher years ago. Even if I was a double-time outsider both as a woman and as a researcher, the fact that I have acquaintance with people from the field since my childhood may cause blindness to some specificities of the context. Also, since I have a lot of information about many details of the context, I experience a feeling of loss and directionlessness derived from caring too much about many things at the same time.

Considering the dimensions of what my research is showing, or failing to demonstrate, I think there are still some opportunities for social science to put modified car culture in scientific inquiry. First of all, women modifiers and racers can be the focus of study to see how the challenges and pleasures differ for women in the context. Second, a quantitative study may provide a wider image of the context in terms of class, age, cities, and ethnicity, and this way a wider and deeper outline of the aspirations of modifiers can be drafted. According to me, this would be an important contribution because a wider consideration might offer us how changing social dynamics are influencing consumption, and leisure practices, and maybe more importantly how material culture is reconfigured in contemporary consumerism. Third, the emergence of car modification as a production and commerce sector may open new avenues of reflection about technology, mobilities, leisure, and consumption studies. Particularly developments of software application on car modification may raise discussion on how technology is appropriated. Last but not least, during my research, I realized that leisure practices are saliently important for understanding gender and class relations, in a sense that both of them are defining one’s not only routines and everyday practices. Leisure and hobbies are still intact fields in social sciences, which may offer to see social changes from intersectional perspectives.

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APPENDIX A

Table of interviewees' demographics

ISTANBUL				
pseudonym	age	occupation	education	civil status
Nedim	30	photographer/ cameraman	BA in Radio- TV	engaged
Demir	30	international trade man- ager	BA in tourism management	engaged
Hakan	30	TV series pro- duction coor- dinator	BA in finance	single
Ahmet	38	mechanic and garage owner	vocational high school	married
Cüneyt	36	software applier	BA in archi- tecture	married
KONYA				
Bülent	37	mechanic	primary school	married
Fatih	38	auto spare parts seller and software applier	engineering faculty drop out	married
Orhan	34	cafe manager and owns a mobile phone shop	vocational school of higher educa- tion	married
Gökhan	32	mechanic	primary school	single
İlker	34	fiber optic- cable expert	vocational high school	married
Kemal	30	salesman	<i>unstated</i>	married
Mustafa	26	accountant	<i>unstated</i>	married