English Literature & Culture Journal (JCRELC)

VOLUME-2, ISSUE-5
MAY 2026

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Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-2, Issue-5, May 2026** of the **Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

English Literature:

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

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Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.

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ISSN: 3108-0812
[Vol-2, Issue-5, May 2026]
Website: www.jcrelc.com

Love in the Age of Machines: Emotional and Erotic Intimacy in Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*

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Received:- 02 May 2026/ Revised:- 11 May 2026/ Accepted:- 18 May 2026/ Published: 31-05-2026

Abstract— *Jeanette Winterson's Frankissstein (2019) interrogates the evolving limits of intimacy in a society increasingly reliant on technology. By comparing the historical genesis of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1816) with contemporary developments in artificial intelligence, this paper explores how Winterson destabilizes traditional frameworks of gender, desire, and human consciousness. Examining Ry Shelley's hybrid identity and Victor Stein's pursuit of digital reanimation, the research investigates the ontological and ethical consequences of sexbots and technological resurrection. The paper argues that although Winterson's narrative illustrates AI's capacity to mirror and satisfy human emotional needs, it also establishes a fundamental difference between digital simulation and authentic human connection. Through the lens of posthumanist theory, this research critiques the commodification of intimacy and suggests that Winterson's work invites a necessary reconsideration of love, agency, and ethical responsibility in the posthuman era.*

Keywords— Emotional Intimacy, Artificial Intelligence, Erotic Desire, Hybrid Identity, Posthumanism.

I. INTRODUCTION

For two hundred years, the archetype of the "mad scientist" has haunted the cultural imagination—a solitary individual laboring in obscurity to challenge nature's control over life and death. Today, this Gothic anxiety has moved from the isolated laboratory to the sleek, glass-walled corridors of Silicon Valley. In Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* (2019), this evolution of the creator archetype is revealed through a dual-narrative structure that intertwines the genesis of Mary Shelley's 1816 masterpiece with a near-future world dominated by artificial intelligence. By contrasting Shelley's historical struggle to animate the inanimate with the modern pursuit of integrating human consciousness with technology and code, Winterson forces a clash between the biological and the synthetic.

This paper argues that although Winterson's narrative effectively demonstrates AI's ability to reflect and replicate human emotional needs, it simultaneously asserts a core, unbridgeable difference between digital simulation and genuine human connection. In a world where sexbots offer closeness without the complexities of human involvement, the limits of desire become dangerously vague. By examining Ry Shelley's hybrid identity, the hubris driving Victor Stein's technological ambitions, and the wider ethics of digital intimacy, this research explores what remains of the "human" when love is algorithmically enhanced. Winterson's novel ultimately serves as a critical mirror, inviting a necessary re-evaluation of agency, ethics, and the nature of connection in the posthuman era.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To interpret Winterson's exploration of intimacy, a posthumanist perspective must be adapted. Posthumanism is a philosophical approach that unsettles the traditional, anthropocentric definitions of what it means to be "human." The integration of technology into the body is not merely celebrated in posthumanism; rather, this integration challenges the ontological hierarchies that privilege organic life over the synthetic "Other." In the context of *Frankissstein*, this perspective invites a deeper examination of how the rapid evolution of AI forces us to reconsider fundamental concepts such as consciousness, agency, and, most crucially, emotional depth.

Intimacy, usually viewed as an intersubjective exchange based on vulnerability and common biological experience, faces a radical reconfiguration in this paradigm. As the focus of desire shifts from human-to-human connection to human-to-machine interaction, the definition of intimacy expands into the digital realm, though it remains filled with complications. This research applies the posthuman perspective to explore whether "intimacy" can occur in an environment lacking mutual emotional exchange. If the machine is capable only of reflecting rather than experiencing emotion, striving for those connections threatens to reduce the human subject to a mere consumer of programmed responses.

Additionally, the "Other"—represented here by both the AI entities and the hybrid form—serves as a challenger to conventional human identity. By blurring the line between flesh and code, Winterson's characters force us to face the moral implications of desire in an age of technological mediation. This framework establishes a context for examining how the search for intimacy is fundamentally changed when the partner becomes not a unique "self" but a simulation designed to satisfy, commodify, and ultimately evade authentic engagement.

III. THE HISTORICAL MIRROR: SHELLEY AND STEIN

The dual-narrative design of *Frankissstein* acts as an intellectual feedback loop, where the nineteenth-century emergence of the "mad scientist" concept shapes and complicates the twenty-first-century quest for posthumanism. Winterson intentionally grounds her story in the turbulent history of Mary Shelley's composition of *Frankenstein* during the "Year Without a Summer" in 1816. By merging this historical background with the near-future timeline of Victor Stein, a globally recognized AI researcher, Winterson argues that the modern digital "reanimation" of consciousness is a direct, though altered, offspring of the initial Promethean drive.

Victor Stein perceives himself as a visionary successor to the Shelleyan legacy, though his hubris manifests differently. While Mary Shelley's creature emerged from Gothic fears over uncontrolled natural forces, Stein's "creatures"—his sexbots and revived AI—stem from a belief in technocratic optimism. Stein perceives the biological body as "meat"—a decaying, fragile vessel—and aims to overcome its limitations through digital immortality. Nonetheless, the change from the gut-wrenching terror of Shelley's flesh-and-bone monster to the sanitized, flawless nature of Stein's AI underscores a transformation in the essence of human desire.

Both creators fail due to their inability to recognize the independence of their creations. Mary Shelley struggled with the ethical responsibility of bringing life into a world that would inevitably reject it; Victor Stein ignores the ethical implications of creating beings designed only to serve. Stein's obsession with "reanimating" human consciousness is not a gesture of kindness or scientific advancement for the public good, but rather a commercialized endeavor for domination.

Through the comparison of these two timelines, Winterson demonstrates that the essence of the "mad scientist" archetype has not changed; it has only become more polished. Regardless of whether the creation is assembled from graveyard scavengings or written in lines of code, the underlying intention is perilously alike: the creator aims to bring forth a perfect companion or object, only to be confronted by the alienation that comes from controlling life. Winterson suggests that Stein's project, stripped of its silicon sheen, is as much a monstrous act of hubris as Victor Frankenstein's original transgression.

IV. HYBRID IDENTITY: RY SHELLEY

Ry Shelley serves as the vital, beating heart of *Frankissstein*, operating as the primary bridge between the biological limitations of humanity and the boundless, sterile potential of the machine. His identity is fundamentally defined by the act of transition. As a transgender man, Ry has already engaged in a profound, intimate act of self-authorship. He has "re-engineered" his body to align with his internal subjective truth, making him a living testament to the fluidity of human nature. This experiential knowledge positions Ry as both a participant in the posthuman project and its most critical witness.

Because Ry has consciously dismantled the binary of male and female, he is naturally drawn to Victor Stein's technological dismantling of the binary between human and machine. However, Winterson uses Ry's hybridity to illustrate a crucial divergence. Ry's transformation is rooted in the pursuit of greater human authenticity—a quest to make the external flesh reflect the internal psyche. In contrast, Stein's pursuit of AI and digital reanimation seeks to escape the internal psyche entirely by uploading consciousness into code. Through Ry, we see the profound difference between the organic "becoming" of a person and the calculated "programming" of a machine.

Ry's entanglement with Stein's experiments exposes the fragility of his own position. He is attracted to the intellectual and scientific possibilities of the posthuman age, yet he remains anchored to the visceral reality of his own body. When Ry navigates his relationships—both with Stein and the AI entities—he searches for recognition of his complexity. The AI,

however, can only mirror the surface level of this complexity. Ry's hybrid identity ultimately functions as the novel's moral compass; his ability to feel desire, pain, and longing is validated by his struggle for bodily autonomy. As the distinctions between the human and the artificial become increasingly indistinct, Ry realizes that while he can transform his hardware, he remains tethered to a consciousness that machine learning can simulate but never fundamentally experience. He embodies the "human" that the machine attempts to replicate, exposing the sterile, hollow nature of digital imitation.

V. THE COMMODIFICATION OF DESIRE

In *Frankissstein*, the commodification of intimacy represents the logical, albeit chilling, extension of late-stage consumerism. Winterson explores a world where AI-driven sexbots are not merely tools for mechanical release but are actively marketed as solutions to the inherent "problems" of human partnership: insecurity, aging, and the unpredictable nature of desire. By offering a curated, customizable experience, these machines promise to fulfill human needs without the risk of emotional labor or the intrusion of an autonomous "Other."

This is where Winterson's critique becomes most acute. She posits that the pursuit of a "perfect" simulated partner is inherently contradictory to the nature of love. True intimacy, as depicted in the novel, requires a vulnerability that arises from the collision of two autonomous, independent subjects. It is the friction of difference—the messy, unscripted reality of another person's consciousness—that creates the space for authentic connection. In contrast, the AI entities in the novel operate as sophisticated mirrors. They are designed to reflect the user's desires back to them, creating a feedback loop that feels like companionship but is, in reality, a form of narcissism.

The central tragedy of the sexbots in *Frankissstein* is their ontological hollowness; they can mimic the physical and even the conversational markers of intimacy, yet they lack the capacity for internal phenomenology—the actual experience of feeling. They possess the syntax of love but not the semantics. By substituting this simulation for authentic human interaction, society risks pathologizing the "messiness" of human connection. If we grow accustomed to partners who never challenge us, never disappoint us, and never deviate from our programmed preferences, we lose the capacity for the transformative growth that only true, unpredictable intimacy can provide.

Winterson suggests that the commodification of desire is not merely a technological advancement; it is a retreat from the difficult work of being human. By reducing partners to programmable assets, humanity risks creating a posthuman landscape where we are more connected to our own reflections than to the reality of the world around us. The "silicon heart" is not a vessel for emotion but a blank screen upon which we project our own isolation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* serves as a profound meditation on the resilience—and the fragility—of intimacy in an age increasingly dominated by the digital. By weaving together the historical echoes of Mary Shelley's Promethean nightmare and the contemporary realities of Victor Stein's AI-driven world, the novel demonstrates that while technology can mirror the architecture of human desire, it lacks the spirit that makes such desire meaningful. Ry Shelley's hybrid existence remains the novel's most compelling evidence: true intimacy is rooted not in perfection or simulation, but in the vulnerability of the flesh and the unpredictable capacity for growth.

As this analysis has explored, the commodification of intimacy through AI and the pursuit of digital reanimation represent a fundamental retreat from the "messiness" of human connection. Stein's quest to transcend mortality and his construction of robotic partners offer a convenient, sterilized reflection of the self, yet they hollow out the relational depth required for true empathy. By prioritizing control and comfort, the posthuman future Winterson envisions risks replacing the reciprocal "other" with a narcissistic feedback loop.

Yet Winterson does not offer a Luddite's rejection of technology; rather, she invites a critical reimagining of our relationship with it. *Frankissstein* suggests that as we stand on the precipice of the posthuman era, we must distinguish between the simulation of love and the experience of it, lest we become as alienated as the very machines we create. The future of intimacy depends not on our ability to craft the perfect partner, but on our willingness to embrace the imperfect, unscripted, and undeniably human connections that remain, even in the age of machines.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)
ISSN: 3108-0812
[Vol-2, Issue-5, May 2026]
Website: www.jcrelc.com

The Performative Dialogue: Communication Theories and the Construction of Masculinity

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Received:- 06 May 2026/ Revised:- 15 May 2026/ Accepted:- 25 May 2026/ Published: 31-05-2026

Abstract— *This article examines the construction of masculinity through the lens of communication theories, arguing that masculinity is not an innate biological identity but a socially produced and communicatively performed phenomenon. Drawing upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the study explores how masculinity is continuously enacted through verbal and nonverbal communicative practices, including speech patterns, bodily gestures, emotional restraint, and social interaction. The article further employs Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to analyse how dominant masculine ideals are maintained through symbolic power, media representation, institutional discourse, and interpersonal communication. By incorporating Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the discussion highlights the role of observational learning and media influence in shaping masculine identities, particularly through digital culture, advertising, and celebrity modelling. The article also investigates the psychological consequences of rigid masculine norms, including emotional suppression, hypermasculinity, and sex role strain. Through critical communication studies and queer theory, the paper deconstructs the binary understanding of gender and emphasizes the fluidity and plurality of masculinities. It argues that alternative and dialogic masculinities grounded in empathy, vulnerability, and collaborative communication can challenge patriarchal structures and foster more inclusive social relationships. Ultimately, the article demonstrates that communication is both the mechanism through which hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and the primary site through which it can be resisted, reimagined, and transformed in contemporary society.*

Keywords— Masculinity, Gender Performativity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Communication Theory, Queer Theory.

I. MASCULINITY AS COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMATIVITY

The study of masculinity has undergone a profound theoretical transformation over the last several decades. Earlier essentialist perspectives treated masculinity as a biologically determined and psychologically fixed attribute inherent to male bodies. Contemporary gender theory, however, argues that masculinity is not an innate essence but a socially constructed and continuously reproduced performance. Judith Butler's influential theory of gender performativity fundamentally altered the understanding of gender by asserting that masculinity is not something one simply possesses; rather, it is repeatedly enacted through language, gesture, bodily comportment, and social interaction (Butler 519). Masculinity therefore emerges not as a natural condition but as a communicative accomplishment maintained through repetitive acts that gain legitimacy through social recognition.

This performative understanding of masculinity places communication at the center of gender identity formation. Every communicative act from tone of voice and conversational style to dress codes and bodily posture functions as a ritualized citation of culturally approved masculine norms. Speech act theory becomes particularly relevant here because language does not merely describe masculinity; it actively produces it. When men employ assertive speech patterns, emotionally restrained language, or authoritative commands, they participate in what Butler describes as the reiterative process through which gender becomes socially intelligible (521). Masculinity is therefore not a static category but an ongoing communicative negotiation that requires constant validation from audiences within social institutions such as family, school, media, and peer groups.

The performative dimension of masculinity is deeply intertwined with social surveillance. Masculine communication is continuously monitored, judged, and corrected by others. Boys learn at an early age that particular verbal and nonverbal behaviours are rewarded while others are stigmatized. Expressions of vulnerability, emotional openness, or softness are frequently associated with femininity and consequently discouraged in many patriarchal cultures. This disciplinary mechanism illustrates Michel Foucault's concept of regulatory power, where social norms are internalized and individuals begin policing themselves to avoid ridicule or exclusion (Foucault 89). Masculinity thus becomes a form of communicative labour in which men must constantly "prove" themselves through culturally sanctioned performances.

Nonverbal communication, or kinesics, further reinforces this performative framework. Julia Perry's research on masculinity in public space demonstrates that bodily presentation often functions as a visible marker of masculine authority (Perry 3). Men are frequently socialized to occupy physical space expansively, maintain rigid posture, suppress expressive gestures, and avoid excessive emotional display. The "stoic mask" associated with traditional masculinity is therefore not merely a personality trait but a learned communicative strategy designed to project dominance, control, and emotional invulnerability. Such bodily performances become normalized through repetition, eventually appearing "natural" despite their cultural construction.

High-power poses, direct eye contact, reduced smiling, and restrained facial expressions are often interpreted as signs of competence and authority in patriarchal societies. Dana Carney and colleagues note that these nonverbal displays of power influence both how others perceive an individual and how individuals perceive themselves (Carney et al. 105). Through repeated exposure to these norms, men internalize the belief that masculinity requires emotional restraint and physical dominance. This internalization contributes to what sociologists call "gender habitus," a set of embodied dispositions that shape behaviour unconsciously (Bourdieu 78). The body itself becomes a communicative text through which masculinity is continuously inscribed and interpreted.

Importantly, performative masculinity is culturally variable rather than universal. What constitutes "manly" communication differs across societies, historical periods, racial identities, and class structures. For example, working-class masculinities may prioritize physical toughness and direct speech, while elite professional masculinities may emphasize rationality, emotional control, and intellectual authority. Intersectional analysis reveals that race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status profoundly shape the communicative expression of masculinity. Black masculinity in the United States, for instance, has historically been shaped by both resistance to racial oppression and stereotypical representations in media, resulting in complex negotiations of power and vulnerability (hooks 89). Similarly, queer masculinities challenge dominant norms by destabilizing the assumption that masculinity must align with heterosexuality.

Failure to correctly perform accepted masculine codes often results in social punishment. Boys and men who exhibit behaviours coded as feminine may face ridicule, bullying, or exclusion. Terms such as "weak," "soft," or "unmanly" function as communicative tools of regulation that reinforce hegemonic standards. Butler argues that this vulnerability to social sanction reveals the instability of gender itself; if masculinity were truly natural, it would not require constant repetition and policing to sustain its legitimacy (520). The anxiety surrounding masculine performance therefore exposes the fragility underlying patriarchal gender systems.

The rise of digital communication has intensified the performative nature of masculinity. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube encourage the continuous curation of masculine identity through images, captions, videos, and online interactions. Influencer culture often rewards exaggerated performances of confidence, wealth, muscularity, and sexual dominance. Algorithms amplify these performances by privileging content that aligns with dominant cultural expectations, thereby reinforcing hegemonic masculine ideals on a global scale. At the same time, digital spaces also create opportunities for alternative masculinities to emerge, allowing men to publicly express vulnerability, emotional openness, and nontraditional gender identities (Kimmel 215).

Consequently, masculinity must be understood not as a biological destiny but as a dynamic communicative process shaped by power relations, institutional structures, and cultural repetition. The performative model reveals how everyday acts of speech and embodiment contribute to the maintenance of patriarchal systems while also containing the possibility for resistance and transformation.

II. HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND SYMBOLIC POWER

If performativity explains how masculinity is enacted, Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains why certain masculine performances become dominant within society. Connell argues that every culture privileges a particular

model of manhood that functions as the normative ideal against which all other masculinities are measured (Connell 77). Hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most common form of masculinity; rather, it is the most socially celebrated and institutionally empowered. It legitimizes male dominance over women while simultaneously subordinating marginalized masculinities such as queer, disabled, or economically disadvantaged masculinities.

Communication plays a central role in maintaining hegemonic masculinity because dominance is often sustained through symbolic power rather than direct violence. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power helps explain how language, representation, and discourse naturalize social hierarchies (Bourdieu 123). Media institutions, educational systems, political rhetoric, and popular culture repeatedly circulate images of the "ideal man" as strong, rational, competitive, sexually dominant, and emotionally invulnerable. These representations gradually become accepted as common sense, making alternative masculinities appear deviant or inferior.

Sports media offers a particularly powerful example of hegemonic communication. Athletic culture frequently celebrates aggression, endurance, stoicism, and physical dominance while ridiculing emotional vulnerability. Sports commentary often frames male athletes as "warriors," "fighters," or "gladiators," relying heavily on militaristic metaphors that equate masculinity with conquest and aggression (Messner 78). Such language reinforces the association between manhood and domination while marginalizing cooperative or emotionally expressive forms of masculinity.

Political discourse similarly relies upon masculine symbolism. Political leaders are often evaluated according to masculine standards of decisiveness, toughness, and authority. Men in leadership positions who display empathy or vulnerability may be criticized as weak, whereas aggressive behaviour is frequently interpreted as evidence of strength. This dynamic demonstrates how hegemonic masculinity shapes public expectations regarding power and legitimacy. Within interpersonal communication, hegemonic masculinity manifests through conversational dominance and gatekeeping behaviours. Sociolinguistic studies indicate that men occupying privileged social positions often interrupt more frequently, control conversational topics, and utilize competitive turn-taking strategies (Tannen 92). These communicative patterns reinforce hierarchical relationships by positioning the speaker as authoritative while minimizing the contributions of others. Minimal responses, dismissive language, and strategic silence can also function as tools of dominance that communicate disinterest or superiority.

The workplace further illustrates the communicative dimensions of hegemonic masculinity. Corporate cultures frequently reward assertiveness, competitiveness, and emotional restraint while undervaluing collaborative or empathetic communication styles. Men who conform to hegemonic norms may gain symbolic capital in professional settings, whereas those who exhibit nontraditional masculine behaviours risk marginalization. The persistence of "locker room talk," sexist humour, and homophobic language in many workplaces demonstrates how communicative practices reproduce patriarchal hierarchies through everyday interaction (Katz 145).

Hegemonic masculinity also intersects with race and class in significant ways. The dominant masculine ideal in Western societies has historically been associated with whiteness, heterosexuality, and economic power. Men who do not fit these categories often face communicative exclusion or stereotyping. Media portrayals frequently depict racialized masculinities through reductive narratives of violence, hypersexuality, or criminality, limiting the range of socially acceptable identities available to marginalized groups (hooks 112). These representations reveal that hegemonic masculinity is not merely about gender but also about broader systems of social stratification.

The emotional consequences of hegemonic masculinity are equally significant. Traditional masculine norms often discourage emotional intimacy, vulnerability, and help-seeking behaviour. Men may therefore experience isolation, anxiety, and depression while lacking communicative tools to express emotional distress. Scholars have linked hegemonic masculinity to increased rates of substance abuse, violence, and mental health crises among men because emotional suppression becomes normalized as a marker of masculine strength (Pleck 132). The refusal to communicate vulnerability thus becomes both a cultural expectation and a psychological burden. Despite its dominance, hegemonic masculinity is never completely stable. Social movements such as feminism, LGBTQ+ activism, and mental health advocacy increasingly challenge patriarchal communication norms by promoting emotional openness, inclusivity, and egalitarian dialogue. These challenges reveal that hegemonic masculinity is historically contingent rather than permanent. Communication therefore becomes both the mechanism through which patriarchal masculinity is maintained and the site where it can be contested and transformed.

III. SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY AND MEDIA INFLUENCE

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a crucial framework for understanding how masculine communicative behaviours are learned, internalized, and reproduced across generations. According to SCT, individuals acquire social behaviours primarily through observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura 47). Rather than developing masculinity independently, boys and men absorb communicative norms by observing influential models within family structures, peer groups, educational institutions, and especially media environments.

In traditional societies, fathers, teachers, coaches, and community leaders functioned as the primary models of masculinity. In contemporary digital culture, however, mass media and social media personalities exert unprecedented influence over masculine identity formation. Films, television shows, advertisements, video games, and online influencers continuously circulate idealized images of male behaviour. These media representations frequently associate masculinity with aggression, sexual conquest, financial success, muscularity, and emotional detachment. Through repeated exposure, audiences begin to perceive these behaviours as desirable and socially rewarded.

Bandura's concept of "symbolic modelling" is particularly relevant in analyzing media influence. Individuals do not need direct interaction with role models to learn behaviour; they can acquire norms simply by observing fictional or mediated characters. Superheroes, athletes, celebrities, and influencers therefore become symbolic educators of masculinity. When audiences witness these figures receiving admiration, wealth, or romantic success for performing traditional masculine traits, they internalize the belief that similar behaviours will yield comparable rewards. This process creates what Bandura terms "vicarious reinforcement" (Bandura 89). Media audiences observe not only behaviour but also its consequences. Violent or emotionally detached male protagonists are often portrayed as heroic and successful, while emotionally expressive or vulnerable male characters may be mocked or marginalized. Such narratives encourage viewers to imitate dominant masculine communication styles in pursuit of social acceptance and status.

Advertising industries actively exploit these dynamics by associating consumer products with masculine identity. Alcohol advertisements, automobile commercials, and fitness campaigns frequently portray men as powerful, sexually successful, and socially dominant. Akesse-Brempong and Cudjoe's study of Ghanaian alcohol advertisements demonstrates how marketing strategically links alcohol consumption to masculine prestige and authority (Akesse-Brempong and Cudjoe 45). These representations reinforce the idea that masculinity can be achieved through particular lifestyles, products, and communicative performances.

Social media intensifies observational learning by creating interactive environments where masculine performances receive immediate public feedback. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok reward visibility, confidence, and spectacle through likes, comments, and algorithmic promotion. Young men often compare themselves to highly curated online personas that project unrealistic standards of physical attractiveness, wealth, and social dominance. This constant comparison contributes to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, particularly when individuals cannot replicate the lifestyles portrayed online (Kimmel 188).

Joseph Pleck's concept of "sex role strain" becomes particularly significant in this context. Traditional masculine ideals are often contradictory and unattainable, creating psychological pressure for men attempting to satisfy competing expectations (Pleck 156). Men are expected to be emotionally stoic yet socially charismatic, dominant yet socially acceptable, physically strong yet professionally successful. The impossibility of perfectly embodying all these traits generates chronic insecurity and communicative tension.

One common response to this insecurity is hypermasculinity, in which individuals exaggerate traditional masculine behaviours to compensate for perceived inadequacy. Hypermasculine communication may include excessive aggression, misogynistic language, emotional suppression, or performative toughness. Msutwana's research on masculine initiation rituals demonstrates how social institutions often reinforce hypermasculine ideals by equating masculinity with endurance, dominance, and emotional control (Msutwana 67). Such practices perpetuate cycles of violence and emotional repression while limiting opportunities for healthier forms of masculine expression.

Media influence also shapes attitudes toward relationships and emotional intimacy. Romantic films, music videos, and online content frequently portray men as emotionally unavailable or sexually dominant, reinforcing the idea that vulnerability threatens masculine identity. Consequently, many men struggle to communicate emotional needs openly within interpersonal relationships. Emotional literacy becomes underdeveloped because patriarchal communication norms discourage men from articulating fear, sadness, or dependency. Nevertheless, media environments are not exclusively oppressive. Alternative digital

communities increasingly promote more inclusive and emotionally expressive masculinities. Mental health advocates, queer creators, feminist educators, and progressive influencers challenge traditional norms by encouraging emotional openness, consent culture, and collaborative communication. These counter-hegemonic representations demonstrate that media can function both as a mechanism of patriarchal reproduction and as a site of resistance and transformation. The communicative influence of media therefore extends far beyond entertainment. Media narratives actively shape how masculinity is imagined, performed, rewarded, and contested within society. Social Cognitive Theory reveals that masculine identity is not formed in isolation but through continuous interaction with symbolic models that teach individuals how to speak, behave, and embody gendered expectations.

IV. CRITICAL AND QUEER PERSPECTIVES: DECONSTRUCTING THE BINARY

While performativity theory, hegemonic masculinity, and Social Cognitive Theory explain how masculine norms are constructed and reproduced, Critical Communication Studies and Queer Theory seek to destabilize and transform these rigid structures. Queer theorists argue that the binary division between masculinity and femininity is neither natural nor inevitable but historically produced through discourse, institutional power, and cultural repetition. Masculinity therefore exists not as a singular stable identity but as a fluid and contested set of communicative possibilities.

Queer theory challenges the assumption that masculinity must be heterosexual, dominant, emotionally detached, or biologically tied to male bodies. Instead, it emphasizes the instability and multiplicity of gender expression. The concept of "gendered alterity" suggests that masculinity is always defined in opposition to femininity and queerness, making it fundamentally dependent upon exclusionary boundaries (Halberstam 65). By exposing this dependence, queer scholars reveal the artificiality of supposedly "natural" masculine norms.

Communication becomes a crucial site of resistance within queer theory because language itself constructs social reality. Heteronormative discourse often reinforces rigid expectations regarding gender and sexuality through everyday expressions, jokes, insults, and institutional policies. Terms such as "real man" or "man up" operate as communicative mechanisms that police acceptable masculine behaviour. Queer communication studies analyse how such language perpetuates patriarchal structures while simultaneously exploring alternative modes of expression that challenge binary thinking (Schippers 34).

Transgressive communicative acts play a particularly important role in destabilizing hegemonic masculinity. When men express vulnerability, engage in affectionate friendships, participate equally in domestic labour, or reject aggressive competition, they interrupt the repetitive scripts that sustain patriarchal masculinity. These disruptions reveal that masculinity is not fixed but negotiable. Butler's theory of performativity suggests that because gender relies upon repetition, altered repetitions can gradually transform dominant norms (Butler 530).

Emotional vulnerability has become one of the most significant sites of resistance against hegemonic masculinity. Traditional patriarchal discourse often frames emotional expression as weakness, yet critical scholars argue that vulnerability can foster empathy, relational intimacy, and democratic communication. Men who openly discuss mental health, trauma, caregiving, or emotional dependence challenge the communicative restrictions imposed by traditional masculinity. Such practices create possibilities for healthier interpersonal relationships and broader emotional literacy.

Portell and Pulido's concept of "new masculinities" offers a constructive framework for imagining alternative gender relations. These masculinities are dialogic rather than monologic, meaning they prioritize mutual understanding, emotional reciprocity, and collaborative interaction over domination and control (Portell and Pulido 68). Monologic communication seeks to impose authority and silence opposition, whereas dialogic communication values listening, empathy, and collective participation. This shift from "power-over" to "power-with" represents a profound transformation in masculine identity.

Dialogic masculinities also challenge violence-based notions of power. Patriarchal cultures frequently equate masculinity with conquest, competition, and militaristic aggression. Critical communication scholars therefore advocate replacing the language of domination with vocabularies centered on care, cooperation, and solidarity. Such linguistic transformation is not merely symbolic; it reshapes social relationships by altering the communicative assumptions underlying gender interaction.

Queer perspectives further highlight the importance of intersectionality in understanding masculinity. Masculine identities are shaped not only by gender but also by race, class, disability, nationality, and sexuality. A queer Black masculinity, for example, may confront both racial stereotypes and heteronormative expectations simultaneously. Intersectional analysis therefore resists universalizing narratives and emphasizes the diversity of masculine experiences across different social contexts (Collins 127).

Educational institutions and media platforms increasingly serve as battlegrounds where competing masculinities are negotiated. Inclusive educational practices that encourage emotional intelligence, consent education, and critical media literacy can help dismantle harmful gender norms. Similarly, films, literature, and digital media that portray emotionally expressive, queer, or nurturing masculinities broaden the spectrum of socially visible identities. Representation becomes politically significant because visibility challenges the assumption that hegemonic masculinity is universal or inevitable. Ultimately, queer and critical perspectives emphasize that masculinity is neither biologically predetermined nor socially immutable. Because masculinity is communicatively constructed, it can also be communicatively reconstructed. Every alternative conversation, emotional disclosure, collaborative relationship, or nontraditional performance contributes to the gradual redefinition of masculine identity. The future of masculinity therefore depends not on preserving rigid hierarchies but on cultivating communicative practices rooted in empathy, inclusivity, and mutual recognition.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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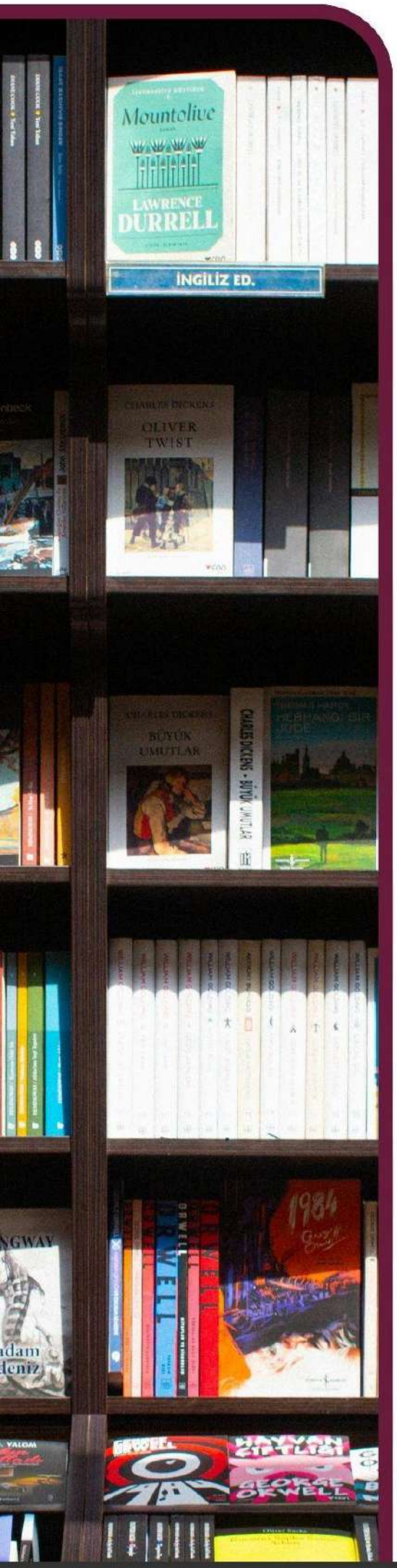

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