



ASOS JOURNAL

The Journal of Academic Social Science

Akademik Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi, Yıl: 14, Sayı: 179, Ağustos 2026, s. 26-34

ISSN: 2148-2489 Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/ASOS.94956>

Yayın Geliř Tarihi / Article Arrival Date
16.06.2026

Yayımlanma Tarihi / The Publication Date
29.08.2026

Doç. Dr. Şebnem GÜRSOY ULUSOY

İstanbul Geliřim Üniversitesi
sgursoy@gelisim.edu.tr

Orcid: 0000-0003-3288-6857

Doç. Dr. Özge GÜRSOY ATAR

İstanbul Beykent Üniversitesi
ozgeatar@beykent.edu.tr

Orcid: 0000-0003-4376-269X.

SEMIOTIC NARRATIVES OF AMERICAN TV SERIES CULTURE: THE CASE OF MY LIFE WITH WALTER MEN

Abstract

Culture can sometimes be constructive and sometimes destructive. Culture presents itself as a whole of inclusive and questioning elements that encompass the people who enter it. In order to make sense of culture, it is important to examine content that represents examples within society. The concept of semiotics first appeared in John Locke's book *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*. When examined in a modern sense, the works of many scientists related to semiotics are important. However, Ferdinand De Saussure's work, *Course in General Linguistics*, is a particularly important source on this subject. The works of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco in this field are also significant. In the research section of this study, the cultural signs in the series *My Life with Walter Boys*, available on the Netflix digital content platform, were analyzed through the concepts and signs they symbolize. In the process of conducting this analysis, the series was examined from beginning to end, and elements that could be considered signs were identified. The

purpose for which these signs were used was examined based on the content of the series. Within the theoretical framework of the research, a broad theoretical framework was first established based on the concepts of semiotics and culture. A linguistic analysis method was used to examine which signs societies organize their cultures around, which cultural codes American culture contains, and how these codes are reflected in the Turkish translation.

Keywords: Culture, Family Communication, Post Modernism, Urban Life, Digital Film Platforms.

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics

"The foundations of contemporary semiotics were laid at the beginning of the 20th century by American Charles Sanders Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure" (Bircan, 2015, 18).

Conceptually, a sign is both an alphabetic sequence and a visual element.

Saussure examined linguistic signs and, as a result, approached the concept of linguistic signs through sound images and concepts. According to him, the signifier and the signified are independent of any external object, and both the sound image and the concept are collective, based on social agreements. According to Saussure, the sign "horse" consists of both the sound image signifier "a-t" and the concept signified "horse," and these two together form the sign (Bircan, 2015, 18).

Seventeen thousand years ago, humanity used pictograms and pictorial writing as a means of communication. The oldest form of producing a written language and passing it on to other generations is visual communication. Humanity's first attempts to communicate with other cultures around the world were made through shapes and symbols. These images and visuals are as old as culture itself and are an important element in the formation of culture. The fundamental perspective of this visuality, an ancient and important means of communication, consists of a system of signs and meanings (Karaman, 2017, 26-27). When communicating, it is not only the process of verbal communication that is at the forefront; visual elements also come into play. The objects indicated and the space that supports communication through implications are also an integral part of the communication process.

People possess systems consisting of holistic and varied images, such as language, body movements, facial expressions, and written elements, to communicate with each other. These systems are called signs. In its most understandable form, a sign is an element that can indicate an object, phenomenon, or entity outside itself because it carries characteristics that contain other meanings (Karaman, 2017, 26-27).

Images and pictures have established their place within society. In films and series, these visuals and images are used to describe and characterize certain concepts.

At the very core of semiotics lies understanding and interpreting the element that is the sign. When examined in a broader sense, the concept of a sign represents the meaningful whole formed by elements and systems such as languages, alphabets, traffic signs, advertising posters, pictures, and music used by people in their communication processes within a particular community or culture (Karaman, 2017, 26-27).

"For example, a color element or a figure in a painting can be evaluated as a sign, just as the purpose or behavior of a character in a literary work or a blouse in terms of fashion can be evaluated as a sign in relation to other elements around it" (Karaman, 2017, 27).

Semiotics brings with it the process of interpreting the image patterns created by concepts embedded within society. Roland Barthes focused on literature and theater in his early works, but later shifted his focus to mass consumer culture and continued his work in this direction (Pezzini, 2017, 351-352).

Barthes states that society is composed of signs. These signs represent an effect produced and constructed by the ideology of mass culture. Barthes views this ideology as a vulgarized form of traditional bourgeois ideology and energetically sets out to dismantle it. Bourgeois ideology has become anonymous over time and has therefore become more effective. In this case, a bourgeois culture based solely on consumption emerges as part of culture through signs in newspapers and magazines, cinema and theater, popular literature, the figure of the writer, ceremonial events, and the clothes worn at weddings (Pezzini, 2017, 351-352). When viewed as part of culture, semiotic analysis is also used in the sense of defining culture and identifying elements belonging to different cultures.

"Semiotics is a branch of science in which signs are analyzed and all factors are systematically interpreted. Roland Barthes' theory, a follower of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory, has included many works, from random elements to high art, in the field of semiotics. Barthes' theory has given rise to interpretation, deciphering the structure of functioning, and sign analysis methods" (Kum, 2022, 2041).

"Signs function to stimulate people sensually. The image that a sign evokes in the mind leads to the image of another stimulus in our brain. In this process, different signs form a whole, creating the message in the communication process. The scientific discipline that studies the forms of use of signs is called semiotics. Indeed, signs are also at the core of semiotics" (Çakı, 2018, 75). These signs differ in every culture and language. In literary texts, different signs in different languages can be seen within the text and on screens. Roland Barthes discusses the concept of critical discourse in the critical analysis of these images (). He discusses the process of revealing the components within the text together with the signs (Champagne, 1979, 282).

"Language is a system of signs that denote concepts. It can therefore be compared to writing, sign language, sacred rituals of a symbolic nature, forms of behavior considered to be signs of refinement, and the expressions of soldiers. However, language is the most important of these systems (Saussure, 1985, 18).

Pierre Bourdieu, the Reproduction of Culture; Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation; and Ferdinand De Saussure, Course in General Linguistics

In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard discusses the concept of hyperreality. He states that a map is no longer just a map. The map may disappear over the years, but the land remains.

Baudrillard begins his book with a reference to Jorge Luis Borges' allegory. "The cartographers of the empire made a map that covered the empire's territory exactly." Baudrillard interprets this story as an allegory of simulation. He speaks of the existence of objects that produce reality before reality itself. Baudrillard, who speaks of a simulation universe that produces reality, states that signs are effective in the production of reality (Baudrillard, 2010, 1-2).

When examining Bourdieu's concepts of class and cultural capital, it is evident that he emphasizes a connection between the concepts of education and social class. Bourdieu draws attention to the fact that the process he describes as social stratification can create a situation that affects the success of the masses in educational institutions (Yanıklar, 2010, 121).

"According to Bourdieu, class and status groups do not correspond to separate dimensions of stratification; they actually coexist, and the distinction between the two is merely an analytical one. The key point here is that class analysis cannot be reduced to the analysis of economic relations alone; it must also include the analysis of symbolic relations. Therefore, Bourdieu's argument is based on the idea that economic inequalities are reinforced by cultural inequalities, and that culture itself (ideas, symbols, living conditions) plays an important role in the reproduction of class inequalities" (Yanıklar, 2010, 123).

The habitus acquired within the family forms the basis for the formation and reception of messages within the class. As a result of the education received within the family, children acquire cultural capital starting from preschool. If the family is interested in art, reads books and newspapers, goes on vacation, watches documentaries or educational programs, they build strong language and cultural skills in their children (Yanıklar, 2010, 125).

"Thus, they acquire a cultural knowledge base, attitudes, and speech styles that will facilitate their adaptation to school culture and, consequently, enable them to succeed at different stages of educational institutions; in the broadest sense, they acquire a permanent predisposition that reveals the trajectory of their lives; that is, a habitus" (Yanıklar, 2010, 125).

Linguistics encompasses all forms of human speech: regardless of whether the society is "primitive" or "civilized," regardless of whether the language is "classical," "archaic," or "decaying," regardless of whether the usage is "correct" or "incorrect", regardless of whether it is spoken or written. In other words, linguistics examines not only "literary" or "beautiful" language, but all linguistic expressions (Saussure, 1950, 7-8).

The signs offered by linguistics make it possible to explain society and culture within each culture and within society in general. The research detailed below was designed and planned based on the approaches to culture, society, linguistics, and semiotics of Saussure, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu.

Research

Within the scope of the research, a semiotic analysis of the foreign series "My Life with Walter Boys," which aired for two seasons on the Netflix digital film platform, was conducted. The identified signs were tabulated.

In the research conducted via ChatGPT on signs according to Saussure and Baudrillard, two objects and the meanings loaded into these objects were asked as examples.

"A Rolex watch:

It represents not only the time but also wealth, prestige, and the "luxury lifestyle" signifier.

→ The object now becomes a sign.

→ It is more than just a "watch"; it is a "status symbol."

- A branded t-shirt (e.g., Nike):

Its function as fabric is the same as that of an ordinary T-shirt. However, the logo on it carries symbolic values such as "athlete identity" and "being cool" (Chatgpt: 30.10.2025-10:12)

The status symbol watch is no longer just a watch; it has become a prestige item. The same applies to brands and many other objects.

Semiotic Analysis of the Series "My Life with the Walter Men" Table of Signs in the Series

1. Season

Table 1.

Commonly used symbols in the first season

Cardigan	Buckle	Shed	Kitchen	Clothing (Design)	Rodeo	Farm
School	Painting	Artistic activities	Sports	Counseling unit	Teachers' communication with each other	Father's responsibility for the family
Cowboy Hat	Home	Teapot	Pancake	American Football	Horse	Family

2. Season

Table 2.

Commonly used symbols in the second season

Fundraiser	University fair	Neighborhood	Dancing girls	Cafe	Motherhood
Household items and objects	New York	City	Rural		
Baseball	Veterinary	Football team	Theater club	Cookies	Fatherhood

The concepts listed above appear as indicators that are frequently shown throughout two seasons of the series and are used in a way that attracts the viewers' attention. It is necessary to determine the purpose for which these indicators are used in the series.

The concepts featured in the first season of the series also appear in the second season. However, some of the concepts featured in the second season are not present in the first season.

Cardigan, Clothing, and Teapot Indicators

Jackie, the main character who comes from New York, represents an elite class with her clothing. Her behavior and clothing are very different from her new family, and she is a character who makes this difference felt by those around her. An important indicator is the scene where she mentions that she and her deceased sister used to give each other English porcelain teapots as gifts on special occasions, and she takes out her beloved teapot to use it. However, there is no place for such a porcelain teapot in rural life, and the teapot breaks. In the first season of the series, we see the more eccentric character named Cole trying to repair the teapot. In the subtext of the series, Cole represents a young man from the countryside, while

Jackie represents a young man who is actually broken, having lost his family in the city. The broken teapot and the process of repairing it appear as a metaphor used to convey the two young people's desire to support and repair each other. In fact, Cole and Jackie are two young people who have suffered similar emotional wounds. While Cole was on the baseball team, he was injured in an accident and had to leave the team. Although Cole and Jackie grew up in different cities and different class environments, they represent two young people who actually have similar emotional wounds.

Art, Sports, and Education Indicators

In the education system, the concept of education is often equated solely with mathematics. However, in a high school in a rural area of the United States, activities such as art, music, and sports, which affect the non-physical, spiritual structure, are not just hobbies; the emphasis is on students gaining the right to enter university based on their success in these activities. In the series *My Life with the Walters*, all the young people attending high school have hobbies that will determine their future. The show emphasizes how important these hobbies are for getting into college. Their families are concerned about their children's safety, but at the same time, they continue to support Alex from a distance without intruding on his personal space by allowing him to participate in rodeo.

The series presents a highly positive image of family values. However, it also depicts a modern family structure where same-sex relationships are accepted by the family.

The series highlights the questions and inner voices that young people occasionally question;

"Is it always possible to do the right thing? Sometimes you wonder for so long. When it comes to rules, in our efforts to make sense of life, how close or far away can happiness be? Especially in our youth, life seems like a constant test."

After a while, you get used to people, difficulties, and life, but then your feelings seem to change, to dull...

Is it possible to be happy and always do the right thing when you're young? Or can we live a life without making mistakes? The mistakes we don't make may come back to haunt us one day, turning into a gnawing question inside us: why didn't you do it, why didn't you do it?

Perhaps to avoid living with these wolves, we must live life to the fullest, laughing every day as if we were bursting with joy...

But is it possible to laugh without upsetting or hurting anyone?

If society does not produce happy people from within, a future with more and more unhappy and hopeless people may emerge. In this sense, the fact that young people are constantly engaged in sports, art, and organizing events within the series shows an important point that prepares them for life at a young age and connects them to life.

The image of children growing up in happy families, starting life with confidence and solid steps, is constantly portrayed visually throughout the series: "Changing society starts from the bottom up; making children happy is making the future happy."

Making children happy should not mean giving them hundreds of questions they cannot handle and expecting them to solve them.

A child who sees life as nothing but math and science problems cannot solve real-life problems when faced with them...

Because in real life, concepts like jealousy, not being liked, or rejection don't have a mathematical equation...

The development of social skills is emphasized within the series.

Guidance services often focus on non-existent problems... A child who cannot solve five math questions in 10 minutes is diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.

If a primary school child is being put to bed by their family, they are diagnosed with attachment issues...

It rarely occurs to anyone that this is just a little child...

The child grows up, leaving behind an un-lived childhood... The child grows up in a system where time passes without play or laughter, where the successful child is loved and the other is labeled as naughty or lazy...

As an adult, every time they fail to meet expectations, they become unhappy and filled with sorrow...

Then, in university classrooms, you see eyes filled with sadness and anxiety about the future... So many faces in their early 20s with no dreams left about life...

Can we prevent this? Absolutely, we can... We can achieve this by instilling feelings of hope, optimism, and excitement in our children, encouraging them to dream. It's not difficult, actually. By working together with the education system and families, they can easily achieve this result. Just make sure you want it and never stop supporting your children...

Indicators Related to Family, Marital Relationships, Home, and Parenthood

In another part of the series, we see that the mother and father characters are devoted to each other, consult each other about everything, and have been married for a long time. Their first child is about 24 years old, so we estimate that they have been married for at least 25 years...

How many people today are unable to continue the journey they started together? How many relationships end in shouting and fighting? Marriages, family relationships, parent-child relationships, friendships—so many people bound by love give up on that first love...

What could be the reason for this? When statistics in Türkiye are examined, it is seen that divorce rates are increasing every day. Although the most fundamental reason for this increase is thought to be the deterioration and corruption of society, the real problem is not social deterioration and corruption. The fundamental problem is the anger that grows within people every day. A society made up of men and women who cannot control their anger first begins to be intolerant of those closest to them. Seeing themselves as justified, they judge those around them and those closest to them.

Unhappy parents raise unhappy children. While their own unhappiness continues, their unhappiness, combined with the unhappiness of those closest to them, spreads like an avalanche to future generations. It becomes an unchanging wave of unhappiness.

Is the American family structure really like the one depicted in the series *My Life with Walter Boys*, or is this just an imagined family? This could be a topic for future research. However, it is

evident that American-produced content creates very clear-cut narratives with the aim of preserving the family structure and defining the roles of the mother, father, and children within the family. These series actually depict a family structure consisting of characters who are free, happy, and confident, which is referred to as the typical American dream. It is a family of young people who, no matter what, gather their confidence after experiencing sadness and start over from scratch. In fact, American series are almost like the modern version of the family structure depicted in the Neşeli Günler (Happy Days) movies filmed in Türkiye in the 1970s. However, there are many additions that align with modernism.

The Barn, Horses, Rodeo, and the Father Taking Charge of Financial Matters Are Indicators

Although the character Alex appears to be a romantic character in the series, which also includes an underlying theme of patriarchy, he is more of a character who has adopted the American cowboy style associated with the countryside.

"Brown is culturally associated with concepts such as naturalness, earthiness, realism, and hard work. Therefore, a brown cowboy hat symbolizes a more neutral but realistic character compared to the "innocence" of white or the "evil" of black.

Examples of secondary meanings:

"Earth person," farmer, laborer, character close to nature Realistic, simple, unpretentious, but honest and strong image

In Western films, it is sometimes given to the "ordinary but honorable hero" type.

For example: Heroes who wear gray or brown tones, like Clint Eastwood's character in "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly," represent heroes who stand between good and evil, the "moral gray area" heroes. (Chatgpt: What are the cultural indicators of the hat according to Sauusure and Baudrillard? Answer, 10/30/2025, 10:15).

Signifiers manifest themselves in society through objects. An object is no longer just an object but an important element representing a human character.

A sweater is a symbol of culture and quality. It reinforces the image of a college-aged young woman.

CONCLUSION

Signifiers are part of human life and are shaped by culture. Signifiers, which are shaped and changed along with culture, are part of the process of society's self-realization. Series contain cultural images and play a role in the process of reproducing future society. This process, which continues to exist within the relationship between the part and the whole, recreates itself every day. In his theory of cultural reproduction, Bourdieu states that culture is reproduced through people and places. Today, series on digital content platforms enter the lives of audiences as cultural indicators. Processes are shaped within the framework of the objects, places, and relationships depicted. They contribute to a process that sometimes slows down and sometimes accelerates the change in society. The series My Life with Walter Boys, which tells the story of an American family, also supports the process of reproduction of American society within itself with the cultural indicators it contains.

REFERENCES

- Baudrillard, J. (2010). *Simulacra and Simulation*, The University of Michigan Press. Bircan, U. (2015). Roland Barthes and Semiotics, *SBARD*, 13(26), 17-41.
- Champagne, R.A. (1979). The Dialectics of Style: Insights From The Semiology of Roland Barthes, *Pen State University Press*, 279-291. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42945251>
- Çakı, C. (2018). Roland Barthes' Semiological Analysis of Disabled People in Nazi Propaganda, *SDÜ İfade*, 1(2), 66-91.
- Karaman, E. (2017). A Comparison of Roland Barthes and Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiological Approaches, *Istanbul Aydın University*, 34, 25-36.
- Kum, Ö. (2022). An Analysis of Geray Gençer's Book Cover Designs Using Barthes' Semiotic Method, *International Social Sciences Studies Journal*, 8(99), 2041-2048. <https://doi.org/10.29228/sssj.62749>
- Pezzini, I. (2017). Semiotics as a critical discourse: Roland Barthes' Mythologies, Semiotics and its masters, ed. Kristian Bankov, Paul Copley, *De Gruyter Bill: Berlin*, 351-360. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501503825-017>
- Saussure, F.D. (1985). *General Course on Linguistics*, Birey ve Toplum Yayınları, Remka LTD ŞTİ.
- Saussure, F.D. (1950). *Course in General Linguistics*, Philosophical Library New York.
- Yanıklar, C. (2010). Cultural Capital, Education, and Social Stratification: A Critical Look at Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Reproduction, *Journal of Sociology*, 22, 121-138. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/sosder/article/495319?utm>