

POWER DYNAMICS: GENDER ROLES AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY  
IN *FAMILY GUY*

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**Abstract**

In the realm of film and media studies, the portrayal of power dynamics by media discourse offers a rich tapestry for analyzing societal norms, humor, and the complexities of modern society. *Family Guy* by Seth MacFarlane, portrays Masculine hegemony's prevalent in society through humor and satire. A number of research has been conducted to highlight the use of satire in social commentary in the animated series *The Family Guy* but there is inadequate research that Analyses the show with the perspective of "Masculine Hegemony" revealing the portrayal of "gender roles and stereotypes" along with "Privilege and power dynamics". Therefore, by utilizing Qualitative textual analysis methodology this study aims to analyze the show with the perspective of masculine hegemony. The findings of this study reveal that "Masculine Hegemony" is depicted through portrayal of "gender roles and stereotypes" along with "Privilege and power dynamics with the help characters, dialogues and visuals.

**INTRODUCTION**

In the horizon of film and media studies, the depiction of power dynamics through media discourse offers a rich tapestry for analyzing societal norms, humor, and the complexities of modern society. *Family Guy*, created by Seth MacFarlane, exemplifies the prevalence of masculine hegemony in society through its use of humor and satire. This text is specialized for its unique blend of comedy and social commentary portraying the political, social, religious, economic, cultural, institutional problems of Society, making it a valuable subject for examining gender roles and stereotypes. This research problem stems from an interest in understanding how media shapes and reflects societal attitudes towards gender. Analyzing *Family Guy* through the lens of masculine hegemony contributes to the broader discourse on media influence and gender studies, highlighting its significance in contemporary literature. This study is significant as it can add further to the conducted body

of research on the series "Family Guy" providing further research opportunities for the students who want to study the amalgamated discipline of film studies and literature. The findings of this study can facilitate in conduction of various seminars and webinars on "Depiction of patriarchal norms in media discourse"

**1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine *Family Guy* through the lens of masculine hegemony, revealing how the show portrays gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics.

**1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:**

This study aims to analyze the story with R.W.Connel's theory of "Masculine Hegemony" revealing the portrayal of "gender roles and stereotypes" and "privilege and power dynamics"

### 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION:

How does *Family Guy* portray and critique masculine hegemony, gender roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics within contemporary media?

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Hall (1973) discusses in his paper *Encoding and decoding in the Television Discourse* that media communication is a dynamic process involving the encoding of messages by producers and the decoding by audiences. He emphasizes that the encoded message, shaped by socio-cultural and institutional contexts, must pass through a “message form” to be meaningful, where it is subject to cultural codes and conventions. This process transforms raw events into structured communicative acts. Hall further elaborates that decoding is not a passive reception but an active interpretation, leading to dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings based on the audience’s cultural positioning and ideologies. This perspective underscores the complexity of media’s role in shaping societal narratives and ideologies

Cici (2024), in his paper *Analysis of Verbal Humor Used in Family Guy by Using Relevance Theory: A Pragmatic Study* discusses that the application of relevance theory is crucial for understanding the mechanisms of verbal humor in *Family Guy*, as much of the humor relies on relevance communication principles. He elucidates the importance of context as he highlights that humor often reflects aspects of daily life, including friendship, work culture, and responsibilities. Moreover, Cici emphasizes that viewers need to understand the contextual references in the scenes, such as “Wall Street,” “Stock Market,” and “Lasik,” to fully grasp the humor being conveyed in the series. Without this contextual awareness, humor may be lost in the audience. The writer has emphasized the contextual awareness as it sets the base for satire to be precepted

Sienkiewicz and Marx (2014) explore *Family Guy*’s unique relationship with postmodern aesthetics in their paper *Click Culture: The Perils and Possibilities of Family Guy and Convergence-Era Television*. They examine the shows’ non-linear storytelling techniques and its intertextual bricolage, which are emblematic of postmodern television’s reliance on fragmented narratives and the constant circulation of cultural

references. Sienkiewicz and Marx assert that *Family Guy* engages with the postmodern condition by drawing from a wide array of pop culture references, including ephemeral internet memes and iconic moments from past television history. However, they contend that while *Family Guy*’s reliance on these techniques invites semiotic play and intertextuality, it often sacrifices the opportunity for deeper social critique. Instead of fostering meaningful commentary on issues such as race, gender, and power dynamics, the shows rapid, disjointed cutaways what Olson (as cited in Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2014) refers to as *ilinxes* serve primarily to disrupt the narrative and offer sensational, attention-grabbing moments that engage viewers in superficial ways. This strategy, Sienkiewicz and Marx argue, reflects the changing dynamics of media consumption in the convergence era, where quick, fragmented content often takes precedence over sustained narrative coherence or critical engagement with cultural issues.

Crawford (2009) discusses in her paper *Family Guy as Magical Realism* that the show employs elements of magical realism to blend the real and the fantastical seamlessly. She highlights that the show disrupts conventional narrative structures by introducing unexpected, fantastical elements into otherwise realistic settings. For instance, the disruptive arrival of the Kool-Aid Man in a courtroom setting is an example of the absurdity brought about through this technique, thus dislocating the viewers’ expectations and subsequently adding a dimension of absurdity to the plot. He also claims that the inclusion of truth and lies in their coexistence makes the series more appealingly and creatively handle the ethical and societal matters addressed. Conversely, by putting practical alongside the unrealistic, *Family Guy* can take serious matters as jokes. This technique is also characteristic of Garcia Marquez’s novels, which use magical realism in the form of metaphor called to life to produce unexpected storytelling and reveal the human character deeper. She also pointed out that the show’s usage of magical realism is not only for the purpose of comedic effect but also for the purpose of critiquing and satirizing present-day culture. Through the utilization of fantasy elements in an ordinary setting. *Family Guy* offers a fresh perspective on

societal norms and expectations, making it a significant example of modern animated satire. Rickie (2012) discusses in her paper “Funny or Harmful: Derogatory Speech on Fox’s *Family Guy* that the show employs derogatory language to provide satirical social commentary. She investigates the presence of derogatory messages in the show and their potential cultivating effects when presented in an animated format. Rickie’s study found that derogatory messages were present in roughly 9% of *Family Guy* scenes with hate speech being the most frequent type. The paper explores how such language, when used humorously, might desensitize viewers and normalize derogatory speech, especially among younger audience.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design to analyze depiction of Masculine hegemony in the series *Family Guy* as The methodology employs textual analysis technique with Catherine Belsey and Masculine Hegemony by R.W.Connell’s. Belsey’s method focuses on interacting with the text to unravel the construction of meaning and reflection of the culture and which the text is produced.

#### 3.1. DATA COLLECTION

The Series family guy consists of 21 seasons with 424 episodes, but our study will be focused on the script and visual of Season. 10<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> episode which is *Scrams of silence: the story of Brenda Q* which are that explicitly address controversial social issues.

#### 3.2. DATA ANALYSIS

The selected episode will be analyzed through textual analysis methodology

#### 3.3. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK:

This research on textual analysis of Family guy is grounded in the theory of “Masculine Hegemony” by R.W.Connell. Connell, R.W., Corrigan, T., & Lee, J. (1985) discusses in their book “Masculinities” that “The concept of hegemonic masculinity is defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of

women”. Dominant masculinity highlights the power imbalance between male and females, resulting in suppression of women, identity crisis, marginalization and othering of the female as the male being more “powerful” suppressing the “less powerful” women. But this analysis will be focused on the “Gender Roles and Stereotypes” and “Privilege and Power dynamics”

#### Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Hegemonic masculinity is perpetuated through the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which dictate that men should be strong, assertive, and emotionally restrained, while women should be nurturing and passive. The pressure to conform to these roles can lead to internal conflicts and psychological stress, as individuals struggle to align their personal identities with societal expectations. Demetrius (2001) discusses in his paper “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique” that sex role theory fails to acknowledge power relationships both between and within genders, reducing gender to two homogeneous and complementary categories, which underplays social inequality and power. Connell (1987) in his paper “*Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*” critiques sex role theory for its inability to conceptualize power and resistance to power as essential features of gender relationships. Butler (1990) also argues in her book “*Gender Trouble*” that gender is per formatively constituted rather than a fixed set of social norms

#### Privilege and Power Dynamics

Hegemonic masculinity is characterized by the unequal distribution of power and privilege between men and women, as well as among different groups of men. Men, particularly those who embody hegemonic masculinity, have greater access to economic resources, higher incomes, and better job opportunities. This economic advantage is often maintained through the exploitation of women’s labor and the marginalization of other men. Demetrio (2001) highlights in his paper “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique” that hegemonic masculinity is institutionalized in large-scale gender regimes, such as the labor market, the state, and the family, which are structured to maintain men’s

dominance over women .Connell (2005) also emphasizes in his book “Masculinities” that men control the means of institutionalized power, such as the state or the army, reinforcing their dominance. Additionally, the use of violence or the threat of violence is a common means of maintaining power, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of intimidation that reinforce male dominance and control over women and subordinate men . They play the role of “perpetrator” as well as “savior” negating the role of women to stand for herself.

### 3.4 ANALYSIS

#### Title:

The title *Screams of Silence: The Story of Brenda Q* in the *Family Guy*’s episode is profoundly significant, as it captures the essence of Brenda’s life and the broader themes of gender stereotyping, power imbalance, hegemonic masculinities, privilege, and power dynamics. The phrase “screams of silence” highlights

the silent suffering and oppression that Brenda bears, reflecting the societal expectations that women should remain silent and endure their pain without complaint. This title upholds the power imbalance in abusive relationships where the abuser’s dominance has silenced the cries for help on the part of the victim. It also brings to light the concept of hegemonic masculinity, where cultural norms promote male dominance and the subordination of women, as embodied by Brenda’s oppressor. Furthermore, the title makes sure to bring in the question of privilege and power dynamics, and how societal structures are positioned in favor of the abuser to keep the victim in an abusive circle. Choosing the phrase *Screams of Silence*, first rather than *The Story of Brenda Q* in the title is a conscious, meaningful choice that reinforces the fundamental argument of the episode. This is indicative of Brenda’s life rather than an occupied world characterized by silence and suffocating dominance of a hegemonic and patriarchal male figure.

#### VISUALS



This image is from the beginning of the episode, and this picture of characters contains poles regarding very deep-rooted power dynamics and gender roles in their household. Peter stands in a characteristic pose symbolic of being “man of the house,” which supports existing stereotypes about patriarch fathers. His conduct and interaction do make clear who wears the pants in the relationship, hinting at his being the decision-maker in the specified family session. It also defines the privileges he has enjoyed in the traditional set-up as a male figure, wherein much of what he does

will go unchallenged. His lack of attentiveness or sensitivity to his wife also highlights their very one-sidedness in that his dominance is assumed and rarely challenged by others. Lois appears to carry an air of quiet resignation, like every good “housewife,” under the heavy weight of Peter’s assertiveness. She is clearly delineated by the social expectation that says she is the nurturer, the caretaker, and often the one who bends and adjusts to fit the needs and demands of her husband. Her visual representation, marked by her subtle gestures of deference, highlights the

tremendous burden on women for family and household without a personal or authoritative identification. This situation is an example of ubiquitous gender stereotyping that gets confined to subservience-as a result, sidelined as secondary to any authority held by a male figure. Peter and Lois do not just serve to critique individual actions but, within this larger framework engendered by their culture, show a commentary on the standards that keep such disequilibrium unabated. Peter's commanding presence and Lois's subdued reactions only serve to reflect the unjust distribution of power that many, if not all, relationships have whereby the man takes the assertive role. These images are perfectly fuse inside the hegemonic masculinity framework which privilege men and subjugate women in both direct, and indirect ways. These elements are represented within

any representation of these dynamics. Peter's confident stance, unbothered expression, and larger-than-life presence are sharply contrasted with Lois's composition. Almost all apologetic posture draws attention to an overt nurturing quality, pushing it toward self-defense. Such visuals have largely constructed quill narrative stories about normalizing male dominance and normalizing female agency. The deliberate asymmetry is quite attractive and evokes curiosity in viewers as to how these structures in society have transformed into such dynamics and how they shape the realities of historical men-women relations. It is a powerful critique of the systems of privilege and the unspoken rules of gender that, despite being so deeply entrenched, must be challenged and dismantled to move toward true equality.



The picture speaks loudly about the imbalanced hegemonic power relations between Brenda and her husband Jeff. Even though it is but a single picture, Jeff's aggressive demeanor is immediately noticeable from his fierce facial expression and dominant posture, which reek of control and threats. His attire, fully likely formal as well as intimidating, serves to augment his authoritative presence, which goes by the hegemonic masculinity definitions, in which all males are said to be dominant figures in public as well as private spheres. This visual representation can be interpreted as showing the very power dynamics, whereby the warriors' angry looks represent his

privileged position and the societal norms that grant him authority and command. That image of Jeff with a beer in hand is a powerful living image of his economic power and superiority in the relationship. The casual yet confident hold of the beer suggests a kind of entitlement and authority that reinforces his dominance; the act signifies his financial control of decision-making in the home, thus demonstrating the economic disparity that often accompanies patriarchal relationships. In fact, Brenda's oppressed state in this whole conventional domestic stereotype is in stark contrast to her earmarked submissiveness. If there is body language that could be described by words like

hunched shoulders, a lowered gaze, and clothes of more revealing kind, there goes her body language, which supports the argument of the absence of power and agency. This imagery of Brenda is well in keeping with gender stereotyping, which confines women to subservience and compliance roles. Evidence is in

how Brenda looks subordinate - through the submissive looks and demeanor - indicating her marginalized position within the relationship. The visual cues in the picture convey the dynamics of privilege and power quite effectively inside this relationship.



This image suggests the dynamics of dominance, gender roles, and power imbalances that accompany the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In the frame, we see three characters—Brenda, Jeff, and Peter—whose interactions symbolize entrenched, societal hierarchies based on gender. Jeff, Brenda's husband, is the model of dominant masculinity. He has a posture and expression with his body that suggests he believes he owns this conversation and has control over his wife Brenda. His presence adds an aura of masculinity within this so-called private space, making it seem like the hallmark of hegemonic masculinity, legitimizing the subjugation of women. Jeff's tank top, casual wear and body assertiveness exemplify power, both physically and emotionally; he believes he owns over his wife. But on the other hand, Brenda is an embodiment of a passive and submissive person. She crosses her eyes and tips her body, indicative of discomfort and a lack of agency in her relationship. She stands slightly austere; signifies imbalance and verbal silence she must endure in the presence of male authority. Brenda's mission represents a reduced position in the dynamics of power, as she sits not as an equal partner but one under the control of Jeff.



This is what the society expects and often portrays women, being secondary figures in tension used to compliance and dependence. Peter, as the outsider, represents yet another layer of male dominance. His physical presence at this scene is neutral but subtly colluding with continued power dynamics. His position as a spectator and participant in the conversation underscores the strengthening of hegemonic masculinity in that Peter never directly challenged Jeff's actions because the latter was an outsider to their environment. However, the direct action of Peter was always inhibited when it came to defending Brenda from Jeff's authoritative nature.

#### TEXT:

The plot of the story follows a sequence of events from Quagmire's illness to Jeff's murder followed by continuous women suppression and power imbalance. When Quagmire gets ill, his sister Brenda comes to pay him a visit, where Quagmire realizes that her boyfriend is oppressive. So, when they all fail to make Brenda realize that she is being violated, oppressed, and dominated. Quagmire with his friends

decides to kill Jeff getting her sister rid of a violent boyfriend.

“You should be grateful I let you live here rent-free, Brenda.” (*Family Guy*)

This statement shows the intersectionality of socioeconomic privilege and power dynamics in the house. Jeff uses his financial advantages to dominate Brenda; what she offers as support becomes a means for controlling her. Jeff defines Brenda’s live-in arrangement as a favor, thereby institutionalizing co-dependency for the degradation of her freedom. This gives the revelation that economic privilege is ultimately wielded by men in couples as a means of dominance, which is one of the lines along which Connell propounds misogynist phenomena relevant to gender. The most disgusting aspect was that Jeff didn’t spring up for money; he often asked Brenda for cash. Yet the above counts as control in his book. Economic provisions such as offering accommodation do not form neutral caregiving actions but are viewed as weapons in the control arsenal for affirming masculine footing. Jeff’s reminder that Brenda should be “thankful” is just another way of ensuring her obedience but also a reminder of her powerlessness since it fits within a larger patriarchal framework where financial dependency becomes a means to subjugate women. This interaction also stands for larger social structures where socioeconomic privilege allows men to dictate terms and keep superiority within the family systems, as discussed by Demetrious (2001).

“Why can’t you just be quiet and do what I say for once, Brenda?” (*Family Guy*)

This sentence presents a power imbalance; leaning only towards the gendered aspect already present in the expectation of passivity from women in relationships dominated by men. The frustration that Jeff has isn’t due to a disagreement; it’s all about Brenda’s desire to voice or even assert agency—that is, it threatens his perceived authority. By calling on the silence of Brenda, he again shows the social fact of woman staying passive and obedient, in some cases under-deferring to men; such men, of course, assume a dominant role in the relationship. This, of course, corresponds very well with Connell’s hegemonic masculinity, wherein men are natural leaders and decisions makers, while relegating women to

subordinate, supporting roles. Such that, this quote signifies Judith Butler’s gender performativity, where Brenda’s resistance against silence brings a disruption to the typical feminine performance of being submissive and compliant. Jeff’s joining the pact looks to reaffirm dominance through silencing her amidst mustering the patriarchal order in their relationship. The male dominance in women’s voice and autonomy is normally built within societal narratives and builds the greater structure of gender inequalities. Jeff isn’t making a claim of dominance here by demanding Brenda’s silence; he’s merely upholding one of the broader social norms which tend to keep women in subjugation and compliance. This interchange illustrates perfectly how omnipresent gender stereotyping and power dynamics continue to underpin male privilege and control in interpersonal relationships and society at large.

“I know you don’t mean to hurt me, Jeff. You’re just stressed.” (*Family Guy*)

Brenda’s inner conflict and justification for Jeff’s cruel behavior is revealed in this statement, emphasizing how gender roles tend to overpower one another, as well as the power dynamics and manipulation involving emotions. This way in which Jeff’s actions are attributed to Brenda’s stress denies this reality and enforces their power imbalance. It mirrors social constructs on hegemonic masculinity, under which some men’s violence is excused on certain conditions as though it lies on women’s shoulders to understand and forgive. Brenda’s verbalizations also show the use of fear and emotional dependence as a control mechanism in abusive relationships. An external pressure framing Jeff as a victim indirectly condemns Brenda to downplay her own suffering, further embedding the dynamic power concerning whose feelings come before the other.

“I’ll stop talking now; I don’t want to upset you.” (*Family Guy*)

The words of Brenda exemplify a moment of self-silencing, a microcosmic reflection of the overall gender stereotypes and power imbalances indicative of their relationship. Self-censorship, it seems, appears from the fear of making Jeff mad. It is a powerful reminder of how threats of violence or intimidation can silence such voices and restrict autonomy. This act

typifies how patriarchal institutions teach women to silence their voices to keep public peace with personal dignity or emotional well-being sacrificing white's cause for his household. Thus, her silence directly reflects the power imbalance between the two, the often-punished use of brute force and mental restraint in which Jeff held power over Brenda. By silencing herself, Brenda conforms to the societal expected behavior of women being submissive but also brings to light the emotional price of living under constant intimidation, whereby speaking out seems too great a risk to take.

"I'm sorry, Jeff. I'll try harder to make you happy."

(*Family Guy*)

These words of Brenda show her full-fledged submissiveness and the power play in an abusive relationship. Her apology and taking the entire blame for Jeff's unhappiness make her sound conditioned to put his needs above her own. In fact, it suggests the kind of gendered power imbalance that hegemonic masculinity enforces, wherein women are to adjust and appease men, often sacrificing their own selves and self-worth, in an indirect way. It shows how both emotional violence and physical violence could produce compliance or self-blame in women—they grind them under the wheel of inferior conditions. Connell's framework about gender and power throws light on this, as it tells how patriarchy conditions women to see themselves as the problem, rather than challenging the structural inequalities that enable male dominance. Brenda's apology stands also as a mirror to the normalization of such societies, where women find it compulsive to justify their existence through satisfactory meeting of other standardized assumptions of the norm against which men are assessed. This then continues further into their marginalization, for they are forced to follow roles that go against their autonomy and lessen self-worth.

"If Jeff lays another finger on Brenda, we'll deal with him like men."

Peter's statement captures the very essence of the belief that men should confront and aggression conflict, both traits being defined conventionally to masculinity. It suggests that "deal with him like men" means being a man must be strong, physical, and

dominant. Although Peter considers himself the protector of Brenda, his words only serve to stereotype gender roles leaving Brenda as a passive victim needing a man's defense, as it marginalizes her. It reinforces men as the cause and solution to violence; it places men in this cyclical world where men become the enforcers of justice.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigates the comedy *Family Guy* in terms of hegemonic masculinity through the lenses of theory put across by R.W. Connell. The dominant idea in this thesis is an exploration of how media captures and reflects the images of masculine hegemonies through study then and thereafter into the depictions of gender roles, stereotypes, privilege, and the power dynamics offered in the animated show. The findings show the complex way "Family Guy" endorses and critiques such norms, thoroughly approaching media-gender interplay. This is one bit of evidence as to why popular culture should be gravely critically examined to overturn hegemonic masculinity and gender inequity. Such findings would serve well in the fields of media studies and gender studies

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