

Research Article

## Hegemonic Masculinity in the Super Mario Bros (2023)

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**Abstract.** This study explores the representation of hegemonic masculinity in *The Super Mario Bros (2023)*, focusing on the character Bowser as a central figure of dominance and authority. Using Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, this research identifies the masculine traits manifested through Bowser's verbal and non-verbal expressions. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method with textual analysis on thirty selected scenes from the film. The findings reveal that Bowser exhibits all seven traits of hegemonic masculinity, including aggression and competition, dominance and control, physical strength, emotional restraint, risk-taking, sexual conquest, and self-confidence. Among these, aggression and competition (23.3%) and dominance and control (20%) are the most prominent. Bowser's masculinity reflects how patriarchal ideals are embedded within modern animated cinema, emphasizing control, strength, and emotional suppression. This study contributes to the understanding of how traditional masculinity continues to be reproduced in contemporary media, influencing audience perceptions of male identity and power.

**Keywords:** Animated Film; Bowser; Gender; Hegemonic Masculinity; Masculinity

### 1. Background

Film operates not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a cultural text that shapes and reflects social values, including gender norms and power relations. In the realm of popular culture, masculinity is frequently portrayed through ideals associated with dominance, physical strength, emotional restraint, and authority. These portrayals contribute to the normalization of patriarchal structures by reinforcing the superiority of male characters and subordinating female figures (Connell, 2005; Wood, 2013). Such constructions are particularly evident in mainstream media, where male characters are designed to embody hegemonic power and control, sustaining a cultural expectation of masculine dominance (Johnson & Repta, 2011; Kimmel, 2004).

Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity provides a key conceptual lens for analyzing how media reproduces masculine hierarchies. Hegemonic masculinity refers to culturally exalted male traits that legitimize gender inequality and uphold male social dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Scholars argue that media, including animated films, functions as a symbolic arena for constructing and promoting these ideals (Pleck, 1981; Gerke, 2022; Zhang, 2021). Although animation is often associated with humor, innocence, and family-friendly narratives, it frequently embeds gendered power dynamics that subtly perpetuate patriarchal norms (Lubis et al., 2024).

Previous studies have highlighted portrayals of masculine power in animated and fantasy films. Fazel (2024) demonstrated how Colonel Quaritch in *Avatar* embodies militaristic masculinity through aggression and authority, while Daffa and Amelia (2024) examined Bowser in *The Super Mario Bros. (2023)* as a destructive masculine archetype focused on domination. Yet, many analyses remain concentrated on overt aggression and physical violence, overlooking more nuanced mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity is

Received: April 27, 2025

Revised: June 13, 2025

Accepted: August 28, 2025

Published: October 31, 2025

Curr. Ver.: October 31, 2025



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communicated—such as humor, stylization, romantic obsession, and emotional posturing in animated narratives (Penny, 2020; Zhang, 2021).

To address this gap, the present study explores Bowser's character in *The Super Mario Bros.* (2023) through Connell's hegemonic masculinity framework. Rather than solely emphasizing aggression, this research investigates verbal expressions, symbolic gestures, emotional displays, and narrative functions that reinforce masculine ideals. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how even comedic antagonists in children's animation can reproduce patriarchal values, normalize male control, and sustain traditional gender hierarchies within contemporary media culture (Pratama, 2023; Wedgwood, 2009). Ultimately, this study contributes to discussions on gender representation by revealing ideological contradictions in modern animated films that appear progressive yet covertly uphold hegemonic masculinity..

## 2. Theoretical Review

Connell's (1995; 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity serves as the foundation of this study. The theory highlights seven dominant masculine traits: aggression and competition, dominance and control, physical strength, sexual conquest, emotional control, risk-taking, and self-confidence. These characteristics form the idealized image of masculinity upheld by patriarchal structures.

Several previous studies are relevant to this research. Fazel (2024) examined the character Colonel Miles Quaritch in *Avatar* (2009), showing how aggression and authority reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Daffa and Amelia (2024) analyzed character archetypes in *The Super Mario Bros* (2023) and identified Bowser as "The Destroyer," emphasizing his destructive dominance. Lubis, Eryani, and Solin (2024) studied *Barbie* (2023) and demonstrated that masculinity can be performative and fragile through the character Ken. These studies collectively underline how male dominance is depicted across genres, supporting the relevance of this study.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using textual analysis. The primary data source is *The Super Mario Bros* (2023) movie. Data were collected by watching the film, reading the transcript, and documenting Bowser's verbal and non-verbal behaviors related to masculinity. Thirty scenes were analyzed based on Connell's (2005) framework. The analysis focuses on how Bowser's dialogue, tone, gestures, and body language reflect hegemonic masculinity.

## 4. Findings And Discussion

The analysis identifies seven traits of hegemonic masculinity manifested in Bowser's character. The dominant traits include aggression, competition, and the need for control. Bowser's use of violence to establish authority demonstrates how power is performed and maintained.

**Table 1.** Classification of Hegemonic Masculinity Traits Displayed by Bowser.

Traits	Percentage	Example in Film
Aggression & Competition	23.3%	Attacking the Penguin Kingdom with fire power
Dominance & Control	20.0%	Declaring himself as the most powerful turtle
Physical Strength	16.7%	Using brute force to defeat opponents
Emotional Control	13.3%	Remaining calm and confident after victories
Risk-taking & Courage	10.0%	Facing Mario and his allies without hesitation
Sexual Conquest	10.0%	Forcing marriage proposal to Princess Peach
Self-confidence	6.7%	Claiming no one can stop him

Bowser's hegemonic masculinity is constructed through his need to dominate, his aggression, and his emotional restraint. His actions signify authority and reinforce the ideology that masculinity equals control and strength. Even though the film presents these actions in a comedic context, they perpetuate traditional masculine ideals that influence audience perceptions. Theoretically, this finding reinforces Connell's concept that hegemonic masculinity is not limited to real-life contexts but is continuously reproduced in cultural products such as animated films. Socially, it shows how patriarchal values are subtly internalized by audiences through humorous or family-oriented media, shaping perceptions of male dominance as natural and acceptable. Therefore, *The Super Mario Bros (2023)* serves as both entertainment and a reflection of gender power relations in contemporary culture.

## 5. Conclusion And Suggestion

This study concludes that Bowser in *The Super Mario Bros (2023)* represents hegemonic masculinity through seven key characteristics proposed by Connell (2005). The most dominant traits aggression and competition, as well as dominance and control demonstrate how patriarchal values persist in modern animation. Bowser's behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal, reinforce the association between masculinity and authority, showing that even family-oriented animated films can reproduce gender hierarchies and traditional masculine ideals. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on how hegemonic masculinity operates within an animated and comedic context, a domain often overlooked in gender studies. This research contributes to the understanding of how popular media naturalizes male dominance through symbolic representation. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this discussion by comparing Bowser's characterization with other male figures in the film, such as Mario or Luigi, or by exploring the audience's reception of masculine portrayals in animation.

## Acknowledgement

The authors express sincere gratitude to Morada Tetty, S.S., M.Hum., Ph.D., for invaluable guidance and supervision throughout this research. Special thanks are also extended to the English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, for academic and institutional support.

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