



Heroine Masculinity in Peaky Blinders Netflix Series Season 1 Until Season 3

Elmosta Azzam¹, Hasbi Assidqi², Dadan Rusmana³

^{1,2,3}English Literature, Sunan Gunung Djati Islamic State University, West Java

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-01-10 Revised: 2026-01-20 Accepted: 2026-02-04</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Female masculinity, hegemon. masculinity, Peaky Blinders</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.9288</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Elmosta Azzam elmostaazzam@gmail.com English Literature, Sunan Gunung Djati Islamic State University, West Java</p>	<p><i>This research explores the representation of feminine masculinity in Peaky Blinders seasons 1-3 that portrays Polly Gray by exploring the characteristics she portrays and how her behavior conflicts or supports patriarchal power dynamics within the Shelby family and society. The study takes a qualitative descriptive approach and interprets selected critical dialogues, interactions and visual scenes. The theory of female masculinity by Halberstam (1998) is the primary theory to explain the social performance of masculinity by women, whereas the theory of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (2005) is the auxiliary theory of interpreting the negotiation of power in the structures dominated by men. The results indicate that Polly is assertive, decisive, strategic, and commands the team, and at the same time, she continues to be a woman. Her conflicts with Tommy, family and business management and her decisive steps, including getting rid of Campbell, demonstrate that feminine masculinity can be a socially intelligible and transformative power. The paper points out that the patriarchal hierarchies can be negotiated and women agency can be both performative and legitimate in cultural texts. Such findings have a role to play in the academic field of gender and media as they can help in the discussion of how female characters are able to exercise power in male-dominated situations as well as provide a more in-depth examination of how gender is performed and represented in television fiction.</i></p>

1. Introduction

The social construct of gender has traditionally influenced the separation of the roles between men and women and masculinity has been traditionally defined as strength, assertiveness, leadership, and dominance, whereas femininity as a concept has been traditionally related to tenderness, emotionality, and nurturing qualities. Nevertheless, researchers have claimed that gendered behaviors are not natural but socially constructed in the culture and repetitions (Pramudika, 2015). This knowledge is a challenge to the old-fashioned views that masculinity is male and femininity is female. In the modern representation, gender is being viewed as a more fluid, performative and negotiable in social and cultural environments.

In the various forms of popular culture, especially the film and television industries, gender representations have changed greatly over the past decades (Arianto & Al Ramadhan, 2024). Though the male heroes usually take up the action-oriented narratives, the female characters have taken certain roles that portray strength, agency, power, and leadership. This change implies that women can be able to execute masculine coded traits in the past. A good example of this phenomenon, based on the British television series, *Peaky Blinders* (2014), post-World War I England, is a character of Polly Gray, who demonstrates a sense of leadership, toughness, and authority in a male gang culture. Her description creates some crucial questions in terms of how female masculinity is framed and portrayed in contemporary television stories.

The existing research on the subject of gender representation in film and television has already pointed out the appearance of powerful female characters challenging the conventional gender standards. According to Tasker (2012) hypermasculine male heroes had been presaged through their physicality in the action cinema since the 1980s but in the 1990s the action focused roles were increasingly taken by females. Brown (1996) further points out that as the action heroine emerges this points to the beginning of a shift in culture where women are projected as those who are able to protect themselves and defy male control and be able to conquer their enemy. All these studies point to a recognition of increasing awareness of women as capable of doing masculine-coded behaviors.

Halberstam concept of female masculinity (1998) is a very important concept in gender theory that explains the use of women to signify and realize masculinity identities. Halberstam believes that female masculinity is not so much an imitation of male masculinity but a different type of gender expression that disrupts the naturalization of masculinity as being intrinsically male. In this vein, critics have examined how female visual media characters express power and agency using non-conventional gender performance and in the context of violence, leadership, or resistance in narratives (Salminen, 2022).

The importance of socio-historical contexts to the construction of gender representation is also highlighted in recent studies of television series and period dramas. The changes in economic and social conditions of post-World War I, where

women were cataly replacing men in the labor force, have been attributed to the reorganization of women role in the society and in the cultural discourse at large (Brinton, 2023). These studies propose that the images of female power in period dramas tend to reflect real historical shifts, which offer a multidimensional depiction of gender which cuts across the processes of class, labor and social transformation.

Although the literature on the subject of female masculinity and the feminine aspects of popular media is growing, little research has been conducted on Peaky Blinders in the context of heroine masculinity. The research on the topic of violence, trauma, and class struggle, and male gangster culture prevalent in the series pays minimal attention to the role played by female characters, and Polly Gray in particular. Moreover, although previous researchers also refer to generalized descriptions of action heroines, not many of them have researched their association with historically based accounts of women agency in post-war Britain.

This dissonance highlights the need for a specialized study on how Polly Gray embodies masculine traits within the socio-cultural context of the series and how her performance responds to or resists the patriarchal frameworks surrounding the Shelby family. Investigating this issue will contribute to a deeper understanding of gender construction in historical drama and expand the conceptual discourse on female masculinity in television narratives.

Following this gap, the present study aims to analyze Polly Gray's performance of female masculinity in Peaky Blinders and to examine how this performance challenges or reinforces the patriarchal power structures within the series.

This study will critically review the female masculinity as performed by Polly Gray and evaluate the implications of female masculinity in the story. What is novel about the present study is that it applies to a historically situated television series the theory of female masculinity offered by Halberstam and Connell's theory of Hegemonic Masculinity, to provide the new insights in terms of how the female power, agency and leadership are constructed in the framework of the male-dominated gangster narrative, which is set in early twentieth century England.

2. Method

This study employed a character analysis design, focusing specifically on the representation and performance of female masculinity by the character Polly Gray in the television series Peaky Blinders. Qualitative character analysis enables the researcher to examine how a fictional character's traits, actions, and narrative roles construct particular meanings within a socio-cultural and gendered framework. As noted by Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research explores meanings and interpretations derived from textual and visual data. This approach is appropriate for the present study because it centers on how Polly Gray's characterization

reflects and negotiates masculine attributes in relation to patriarchal power structures.

The scope of the research was limited to Seasons 1–3 of *Peaky Blinders*, as these early seasons provide the most substantial development of Polly Gray's leadership, authority, and gender performance within the Shelby family. Concentrating on these seasons allows for a systematic and in-depth examination of how female masculinity is established before the narrative expands into more complex character arcs in later seasons.

The primary source of data was the *Peaky Blinders* series itself, with particular emphasis on scenes involving Polly Gray. Her dialogues, interactions, and visual portrayals were treated as the unit of analysis. The selected scenes that illustrate her leadership, strategic decision-making, emotional control, and confrontation with male authority were purposively sampled. These elements correspond to Halberstam (1998) theoretical framework on female masculinity.

Data were collected using a documentation method, which is commonly applied in qualitative studies of audiovisual texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher repeatedly viewed the selected seasons and transcribed relevant dialogues and scenes that demonstrated aspects of female masculinity. The data were then organized into thematic categories derived from Halberstam's theory, including gender performativity, resistance to normative femininity, and the assumption of dominant social roles. To support systematic analysis, the researcher compiled these data into analytical notes and tables that contained contextual descriptions, dialogue excerpts, and interpretive observations.

For the data analysis, this study combined characterization analysis and narrative discourse analysis. Characterization analysis was used to identify how Polly Gray's personality, motivations, and actions express masculine qualities, drawing on Boggs' principles of film characterization. Meanwhile, narrative discourse analysis examined how the plot, historical setting, and character relationships shape the construction of female masculinity within the series.

To ensure the validity of interpretation, the findings were analyzed through theoretical triangulation, integrating Halberstam's concept of Female Masculinity (1998) and Connell's theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (2005). This triangulation enabled the study to compare the character's portrayal with broader gender theories in media. Ultimately, the analysis aims to demonstrate how Polly Gray's characterization performs female masculinity and how this performance negotiates, challenges, or restructures patriarchal masculine norms in *Peaky Blinders*.

3. Result

The heroine masculinity in *Peaky Blinders* Seasons 1-3 may be traced in a few major scenes where Polly Gray displays some types of authority, decision-making, and assertiveness that can be linked to masculine-coded behaviour.

Despite the abundance of instances of these traits throughout the series, the given study specifically chooses a few of the best ones that help to clearly understand her position in the power hierarchy within the family and her bargaining with the patriarchal relationships. Such scenes are representative samples that constitute the empirical basis of the analysis.

A significant early example appears in Season 1, Episode 1, during the church scene where Polly confronts Tommy Shelby after discovering that he has secretly acquired a crate of stolen guns.

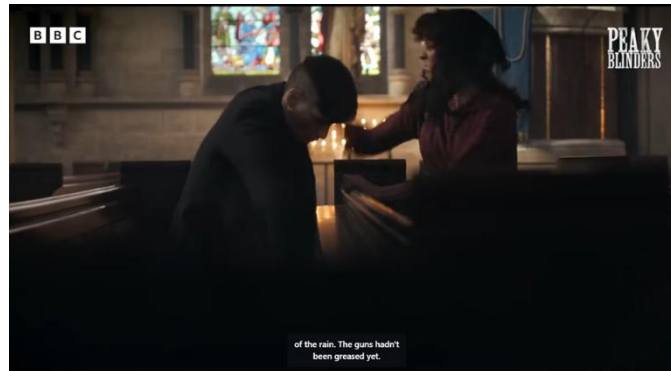


Figure 1. Polly confronts Tommy

At this point, Polly comes out straight before Tommy and insists that actions should be explained and clarified to put them in perspective before they put the family in danger. The tone and the position imply that she does not work as the subordinate relative, but as a person, who has the right to assess, challenge, and manipulate the high-risk decisions. This moment places her as an in-house authority within the Shelby order, which is a sign of strategic sense and moral accountability, which the series tends to attribute to male leadership characters. The communication also helps to define Polly as a person whose authority helps to stabilize the family at times when male leaders in the family make reckless or risky decisions.

Her performance of heroine masculinity comes out clearly in the scene where Freddie Thorne is in, Polly utters the sentence "*Sometimes, the women have to take over. Like in the war.*" (Peaky Blinders, Season 1, Episode 4)



Figure 2. Polly Talk to Freddie Thorne

This quote provides a wordy expression of her masculinized agency. Polly supports this through use of the role of women in times of war, which makes the concept of female leadership a legitimized reaction to the instability in history. The line emphasizes her opinion that ability and not gender should decide who is to take charge. It also shows her readiness to dominate in domestic and political conflicts which was traditionally given to the male characters narratives in crime drama.

The other representative moment is in the episodes of Polly and Inspector Campbell all through the Season 1.



Figure 3. Polly Faced Inspector Campbell

In these scenes, Polly is always able to hold on to her emotions and strategic power when confronting the authority figure that symbolizes the power of the state, patriarchy and threat. The fact that she is not cowed by Campbell even when she is manipulated and threatened by him, indicates some sort of strength and self-possession which is in-line with masculine-coded strength. The series supports her visually using the framing, costuming, and posture and portrays her not as a helpless female but as one who can be equally as psychologically aggressive like

Campbell. In examining Polly Gray's visual representation, it is productive to employ Ed Sikov's conception of *mise-en-scène* as "the totality of expressive content within the image," which includes settings, props, lighting, costumes, gestures, camera action, and angles as meaningful elements of cinematic expression.

In key scenes, the composition of the frame communicates authority beyond dialogue: Polly is frequently positioned in centrally framed close-ups, often at low angles, which visually emphasizes her dominance in a way that aligns with masculine authority traits. The tailored dark costumes, wide-brimmed hats, and controlled postures contribute to a visual rhetoric of control and power, signaling her strategic presence within the diegesis. Lighting choices also serve to underscore her psychological strength, shadows and contrast often highlight her face in moments of decision-making, suggesting not only internal resolve but also the weight of leadership typically reserved for male characters. Through this systematic *mise-en-scène* analysis, the series constructs Polly's masculinity not only through narrative agency but also through visual codes that position her as an authoritative figure in the Shelby world.

The visual framing of Polly Gray further reinforces her masculine authority within the narrative. In this scene, Polly is shown seated confidently in a vintage car, wearing a dark tailored coat and a wide-brimmed hat, while calmly smoking a cigarette. Her relaxed yet assertive posture, combined with the camera's close-up composition, constructs her as a figure of psychological strength rather than vulnerability. The costuming and *mise-en-scène* emphasize her alignment with traditionally masculine traits such as control, leadership, and dominance. Through this visual representation, the series portrays Polly not as a helpless female character but as one who is equally capable of psychological aggression and strategic power, comparable to male figures like Inspector Campbell.

Figure 3. Polly Gray's visual performance of female masculinity in *Peaky Blinders* (Season 2).



The other instance of the most conclusive expressions of the agency of Polly can be seen when she shoots Inspector Campbell.



Figure 4. Scene of Polly Shoots Inspector Campbell

This action is the climax of her individual fight against male superiority, manipulation and trauma she endured by the inspector. In making a deadly choice Polly is regaining the control of her body, of her pride, and of the protection of her family. In the story, this instance will be a representation of empowerment as resistance and survival, a statement of control over a figure who had tried to deprive her of the same on many occasions.

The power of Polly is also not just personal or feminine power, it is institutional. This comes out clearly in Season 3 when she states that she is independent of Shelby Company Ltd., stating, *“My senior position within the Shelby Company means I don’t have to ask permission from anyone to do anything.”* (Peaky Blinders, Season 3, Episode 1)



Figure 5. Polly shows dominance of the business operations

This is where her formal leadership in the organization is endorsed and her dominance of the business operations is brought to the fore. Her statement is a direct response to the patriarchal beliefs that male leadership is innately better or

automatically right. Polly is a female character who functions in the realm of corporate and criminal authority, which is usually a domain dominated by male figures in the show, through her control of money, decisions and negotiations within the company.

These three chosen scenes reflect the regular trends in the characterization of Polly Gray: she stands up to male authority where it counts, she is tactical in high-stakes circumstances, she is not a victim of patriarchal intervention by external institutions, and she has valid executive power in the Shelby enterprise. The examples are the basis of the empirical data on the comprehension of her heroine masculinity performance, as they can show how a female character negotiates and adopts masculine-coded roles within a narrative space that is dominated by male dominance.

4. Discussion

The Traits of Female Masculinity Performed by Polly Gray

The example of authority by Polly Gray in *Peaky Blinders* is most appropriately viewed as a gendered act that overlaps with what (Connell, 2005) terms as the social organization of masculinity. Instead of enacting a subordinate role that women should have in patriarchal systems, Polly identifies herself with the activities that Connell identifies with hegemonic masculinity, which is command, centrality, and institutional power. This can be traced back in her first appearance in the series and more so during the church fight with Tommy where she takes the lead of all family and business-related decisions when he is away. At such instances Polly is not only filling a vacuum but is exercising some type of culturally authoritative power that reorganizes the gendered hierarchy in the Shelby family.

The idea of female masculinity proposed by Halberstam (1998), who claims that masculinity is not necessarily connected with male bodies but it is produced by different actions and skills which break the traditional gender order, explains such a dynamic further. Polly represents this different masculinity by her unashamed control over space, tactical reasoning and emotional self-control, which were the masculine codes in early twentieth century Britain. It is posited that masculinity is a construct, the meaning of which is dependent on the social context of the individual (Pascoe, 2015). Her presence therefore disrupts the linear relation between masculinity and maleness and makes her a character who practices masculinity as an authentic figure and not one who in turn performs it imitatively leading to the identification of the overall expression of female masculinity throughout the series.

The other vivid moment of the Polly female masculinity is the moment when Polly confronts Tommie about hiding family and business affairs. In the exchange:

Polly : An explanation.

Thomas :An explanation of what?

Polly : Of what's so secret.

Polly : I've always been able to tell...

Thomas : Tell what?

Polly : When you're hiding something. People round here talk. Some of them work at the BSA.

Polly : I've been talking to wives of factory hands. Detectives have been asking questions in the proofing shops. Nothing happens at the factory without you knowing about it.

(Peaky Blinders, Season 2, Episode 1)

Polly, in this scene, portrays a superior and very reserved attitude as she fights Tommy, who is a male and the main boss of the Shelby family. She begins the discussion by making a demand to be explained and proceeds with the evidence she has collected on her own demonstrating a level of investigative intelligence and information network that rivals, and perhaps outdoes, even her male counterpart.

According to the female masculinity described by Halberstam (1998), the authority of Polly, in this case, is not an illusion of male characteristics, but a performance of power that shatters traditional gender rules. She takes the position of this information controller and ethical police as she emphasizes in her statement: Nothing happens at the factory without your knowing it. This serves to show that Polly goes beyond the conventional ideas of women being passive or submissive, and comes out as a major figure even in the male dominated power set-ups.

At the same time, research on social dominance suggests that individuals or groups with higher adherence to masculine norms tend to resist cultural or social reforms, highlighting how established power hierarchies can influence acceptance of changes in gender roles.(Wu et al., 2023). The idea of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (2005) can be used to further justify why the actions of Polly can be recognized and accepted: her decisiveness, ability to control information, and strategic qualities of being a foresight are the culturally acceptable achievement of masculine power, which gives her the authority to act in the patriarchal system. By doing so, the performance of Polly becomes a strong example of real female masculinity, which shows that power is performative and socially intelligible and not necessarily related to being a male.

In the conceptualization of female masculinity, Halberstam (1998) points out that the most pronounced expression of masculinity in women is when they proclaim their agency beyond the ranges of normative femininity and Polly is such a woman since she asserts herself and attempts to deny any relegation to emotional

or domestic roles. She says, Sometimes the women have to take over. Similar to the war, sums up the performative change Halberstam outlines: a gendered intervention making the masculinity a system of social processes, not the biological privileges. By saying this Polly is not only justifying her authority claim, but she is placing it in a historical context of women who have assumed the role of leadership when men were either not present or incapacitated.

This can be echoed by the ideas presented by Connell (2005) who states that gender hierarchies are not inert, but are reproduced and/or disrupted through all forms of daily activity. Such a disruption, made by Polly, re-examines the role of women in the world of power as something imperative and able to perform. Feminist media theory, including that by Tasker (2012), that female characters in crime and action films usually enact other forms of masculinity that interrogate the cinematic conventions of manhood, supports her point of view. Therefore, the fact that Polly defines wartime female leadership not only once again supports her masculine positionality in the Shelby hierarchy but also suggests the overall trends in culture where the authority of women is only visible when institutional arrangements have to recognize their potential.

The idea of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (2005) can be referred to explain why the positioning of Polly and her authority in the gender patterns of *Peaky Blinders* has been made possible. Polly's interactions with Tommy, Campbell, and other gang members reveal a nuanced negotiation of patriarchal power structures. Applying Connell's (2005) framework, Polly often oscillates among the categories of complicit, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities. She demonstrates complicit masculinity when leveraging her position as matriarch and senior business executive, aligning with hegemonic masculine norms to gain legitimacy.

Instances of subordinated masculinity appear when she strategically accommodates male authority, for example deferring to Tommy in high-stakes family decisions, which allows her to maintain influence without direct confrontation. Marginalized masculinity emerges in moments where institutional or social pressures, such as legal constraints or threats from Campbell, temporarily limit her autonomy. By navigating among these categories, Polly negotiates her authority, simultaneously challenging and reinforcing the patriarchal system, highlighting the relational and contingent nature of masculine power within the Shelby hierarchy.

Importantly, Polly's enactment of masculinity is not absolute; moments of compromise and vulnerability demonstrate the ambivalent nature of female masculinity. For instance, in certain interactions with Campbell or during negotiations with male gang members, Polly feigns acquiescence or strategically concedes, appearing temporarily subordinated to male authority. These moments do not signify weakness but rather a tactical recalibration, emphasizing that female masculinity can operate both assertively and adaptively. This ambivalence

complicates a selective reading of Polly as wholly dominant or unyielding, showing that her performance of masculinity is socially intelligible, relational, and contextually responsive. By presenting both strength and strategic concession, the series constructs a multifaceted image of a woman who performs masculinity in ways that are both resistant to and interdependent with existing patriarchal norms.

On the other hand, instead of just being a simple imitator of masculine behavior, Polly takes a social position where her control is accepted and allowed by people around her as outlined by Connell as legitimation of gendered power. Her encounters with the male characters, particularly when she is in charge of the younger gang members or when she is filling the role of directing the family affairs momentarily reveal that she is involved in a hierarchy that is organized according to hegemonic masculinity, but she has made the most of using the power that is usually dominantly enjoyed by men.

The dynamics are reflective of the larger studies on women acting in such institutions dominated by men, and where the power of women succeeds when they position themselves strategically to conform to the norms and expectations enforced by hegemonic masculinity (Budgeon, 2013). This is why the leadership of Polly in the series is not viewed as an anomie, but as structurally congruent: she operates with the masculine-coded mechanisms of decision-making, bluntness, and strategic hardness, already legitimized in the Shelby organization, and using them, since the Shelby organization structures actively promote her functioning as an influential actor objectively defined by patriarchy.

Based on the above discussion of the power of Polly in the male dominated hierarchy, the theory of female masculinity by Halberstam (1998) explains why Polly carries out her masculine acts in a genuine manner and not in a simulative way like the male models. Her tough decision-making, business planning of Shelby family, and the ability to deal with threats are the gendered performance that goes against the traditional norms of femininity and still remains a woman. This is especially noticeable by episodes where she is bargaining power with male characters or taking charge when Tommy is not around; these instances prove that masculinity is actually a series of socially practiced behaviors and is not necessarily related to male bodies.

This understanding is supported by the recent research, which demonstrates that women in leadership roles tend to perform traits that are socially represented as masculine, including decisiveness, assertiveness, and strategic thinking, without losing the traits of femininity (Morris & Ratajczak, 2019). The performance of Polly is a demonstration of this principle, which shows that female masculinity is a valid, consistent and socially intelligible way of expressing their gender, which not only works within the hegemonic masculine structures Polly lives in, but also works against them in a somewhat understated manner.

Through Polly assassinating Campbell, is a definitive representation of female masculinity wherein Halberstam (1998) argues that women can act in a masculine manner and in a strong willpower in places that are mainly dominated by men. Polly is seen in this scene to make deadly decisions, which are strategic and controlling an antagonistic male in a position of power, thus, culturally distinguished as masculine, assertive, and dominating, without denying that she is a woman. Connell (2005) also relates to this action: Polly, challenging Campbell, who represents the institutional and patriarchal power, disturbs the gender order temporarily showing that the dominance of male power can be challenged by a capable female actor.

The more recent trends in media and gender scholarship support that these demonstrations of women agency in violent or high-stakes situations are not merely narrative spectacle, but examples of female masculinity negotiation, challenge, and even co-optation of the arena of the hegemonic power (Boudet et al., 2012). The cold and rational manner in which Polly goes about executing her scheme is a clear demonstration that female masculinity is performative, albeit in a socially intelligible way, which functions inside and outside of the patriarchal framework, and makes her a key driving force of authority in the context of *Peaky Blinders*.

How Polly Gray's Masculinity Challenges or Reinforces Patriarchal Power Structures

The act of killing Campbell by Polly is an assertive act of female masculinity, which is the argument presented by Halberstam (1998) that women can be the authentic and assertive performer of masculinity anywhere that is traditionally a male dominated space. Polly in this scene has a lethal power, makes a strategic move and establishes control over a male antagonist, thus, assuming characteristics that are culturally coded masculine, decisiveness, courage and dominance, without necessarily losing her femininity. In a Connellian sense (2005), this performance is also associated with the intervention with hegemonic masculinity: facing another character, Campbell, who is an epitome of institutional and male power, Polly interrupts the gender order temporarily, proving that the equality of the male dominance can be challenged by a good female actor.

Recent works on media and gender studies support the fact that these depictions of women agency in violent or stakes-based situations are not merely narrative spectacle but are social resonances of female masculinity bargaining, refuting and even appropriating the areas of hegemonic power (Melzer, 2022). The cold and perfected manner in which Polly carries out her scheme serves as a reminder that female masculinity is performative but socially explainable as it works within and against patriarchal systems and solidifies her position as one of the key power brokers in *Peaky Blinders*.

The exercise of power by Polly Gray in *Peaky Blinders* is both disruptive and negotiating of the patriarchal circles around her. Her aggressiveness and tactical skills initially retaliate the traditional gender structure of the Shelby family, as the males used to be in the center of the decision-making process. Early in the series Polly frequently takes up the reins of the family in the absence of Tommy, proving that power as a concept is not necessarily a male attribute. The idea of female masculinity introduced by Halberstam (1998) helps to realize that these are not the attempts of a woman to imitate the male qualities but the genuine performance of the masculinity.

The performance of power as demonstrated by Polly in business and family affairs is a challenge to the patriarchal assumptions of women capabilities. Hierarchies that are dominated by men are based on their social construction, and therefore can be disturbed by competent actors who manoeuvre or take advantage of male rule (Mumby, 1998). Politically by asserting her power, which is strategic, Polly emphasizes the flexibility of the patriarchal order and reveals the conditional aspect of the male rule.

The encounters Polly has with Tommy would be a good example of how her femininity is in conflict with male authority and at the same time works within the limits of patriarchy. She also challenges Tommy over his choice in the family and business in a number of critical scenes, and she is categorical and confident in her own judgment. She points out that her role in the Shelby Company as seniors implies, she does not need any one to approve or disapprove anything she does. By making this statement, Polly is asserting an institutionalized status of authority as well as giving a justification to her involvement in the male dominated worlds.

The theory proposed by Halberstam (1998) is that feminine masculinity is performed by means of the behavior that violates the traditional gender norms, and the strategic intervention that Polly delivers can be considered a manifestation of this process. In line with Zahro et al., (2025) that female masculinity is represented through psychological, physical, action, and behavioral aspects. Through such negotiations of power, Polly is challenging as well as accommodating the patriarchal demands, showing that women masculinity may serve as an instrument of challenging gender regulations without necessarily discarding them completely.

Polly is not only an individual confrontation since her decision-making and leadership have an active role in transforming the balance of power in the Shelby family and its crime connection. Research by Lestari & Sugiarti (2022) shows that there are several representations of masculinity and decision-making, as well as leadership, because both refer to the use of logic. Polly is an active negotiator of power in all her dealings with male subordinates and allies, showing competence, a long perspective and a sense of morality, which force others to acknowledge her as a legitimate holder of power.

The process is in line with the argument by Halberstam (1998) that the concept of female masculinity enables women to take up masculine-coded positions of dominance in social structures without obliterating their gender identity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (2005) determines the effectiveness and tolerability of the authority that Polly possesses: performing actions that are coded masculinely, including decisiveness, assertive communication, and control over the operations, Polly follows the existing norms of masculine leadership and her power is intelligible in the patriarchal system. Modern studies support the idea that female power in organizations dominated by men succeeds when the behaviors of these women are shaped in accordance with the culturally accepted masculinity competencies but do not suppress the individual identity of the female (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998). The active involvement of Polly shows that feminine masculinity has the ability to undermine the patriarch in subtle ways, negotiating power, redefining the hierarchical relationships, and justifying the authority of women in a male dominated environment.

The assassination of Campbell by Polly is the most extreme but the most consistent statement of female masculinity in the world of patriarchy. She uses lethal power in this act and ruthlessly gets rid of a male figure who represents an institutional and patriarchal power, which momentarily distorts the current gender hierarchy. Halberstam (1998) points out that female masculinity occurs at those moments when women assert control over a space that is culturally coded as masculine, Polly has been performing a performative act of competence, courage, and decisiveness, the performance that is carried out without jeopardizing her identity as a woman.

In the eyes of Connellian approach (2005), this incident shows the potential to challenge hegemonic masculinity whereby a woman actor is able to strategically position power which reveals a contingency of male dominance. Polly shows that the patriarchal power is not inherent and absolute by seizing control of a situation traditionally dominated by men, she shows that it can be negotiated and challenged.

As stated by Panigrahi (2025) that fragility underlying male dominance, revealing that patriarchal control is neither innate nor absolute. This interpretation can be justified by gender and media scholarship, which points out that scenes depicting women in high-stakes or violent situations act as culturally readable forms of feminine masculinity opposing male hegemony (Havas, 2017). In this way, Polly boldly acts against Campbell, therefore, asserting her power, disrupting the male dominated systems and setting an example of how female masculinity can serve as a subversive as well as a socially understandable power in patriarchal systems.

In general, the performance of female masculinity by Polly Gray is a process of constant negotiation with the patriarchal systems presented in *Peaky Blinders*. In domestic, business and confrontational settings she challenges and

accommodates male authority in a strategic manner demanding her legitimacy without being delegitimized by the gender hierarchy in place. Halberstam (1998) model indicates that female masculinity is a socially intelligible act whereby women such as Polly can assert power as part of the culturally masculine without losing their femininity.

Meanwhile, Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity explains the mechanisms through which her authority is recognized and tolerated: by aligning her behaviors with culturally coded masculine norms, decisiveness, command, and strategic oversight, she maintains legitimacy within a patriarchal system while simultaneously subverting its assumptions about women's capacities.

Together, these theoretical lenses illuminate how Polly's actions, from confronting Tommy and directing family operations to executing Campbell, reveal female masculinity as both a challenge to and negotiation with hegemonic power, demonstrating that patriarchal dominance is neither fixed nor impermeable. Polly's complex enactments of authority thus offer a nuanced portrayal of women's agency, illustrating how female masculinity can function as a transformative force within male-dominated structures, while remaining socially coherent and narratively compelling.

5. Conclusion

This paper discussed how female masculinity has been depicted in Polly Gray in the first three seasons of *Peaky Blinders*. The results show that Polly is a culturally coded masculine, assertive, decisive, strategic, and commanding person who retains her womanhood. Based on the idea of female masculinity by Halberstam (1998), the study demonstrates that masculinity is constructed socially as opposed to biologically, which means that women can exert power in the male-dominated environments.

The hegemonic masculinity theory described by Connell (2005) also makes it easy to understand how the power of Polly can be accepted and accepted in the patriarchal system since she manages to manipulate her actions by aligning them with culturally accepted standards of masculine dominance. Polly challenges and negotiates the status quo of gender hierarchy through her actions such as confronting Tommy, the family business affairs, and murdering Campbell that shows that female masculinity can become a socially intelligible and transforming power. This paper is however confined to Polly Gray in Season 1-3, textual and visual representation, which limits the extrapolation of this to other characters, subsequent seasons, and other media places.

According to these results, the study of female masculinity in future studies can be done on other television programs or movies to compare the manner in which women bargain power in various cultural and historical contexts. The reception of the audience could also examine how the viewers perceive female masculinity and how it challenged the patriarchal norms. Sociology, media studies

and psychology interdisciplinary approaches would add to the knowledge on gender performance in media texts. In practice, the research emphasizes the need to portray complex female protagonists as leaders to provide advice to media developers and producers on how subtle depictions of women as the source of authority in male-dominated environments can make more socially responsible and inclusive plots.

6. Acknowledgement

State the contributing parties or institutions which help your research. It is important to acknowledge those who help you in funding, research facilities, or meaningful suggestions in improving your article. If your article has been presented in a seminar or conference, you can also mention the forum in this section.

7. References

- Arianto, S. D. A., & Al Ramadhan, M. F. (2024). The Changing Perceptions of Gender Equality in Media and Popular Culture. *Alinea: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Pengajaran*, 4(3), 418–430.
- Boudet, A. M. M., Petesch, P., Turk, C., & Thumala, A. (2012). *On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries* (Washington, DC: The World Bank).
- Brinton, M. C. (2023). *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar* (Vol. 21). Univ of California Press.
- Brown, J. A. (1996). Gender and the Action Heroine: Hardbodies and the "Point of No Return". *Cinema Journal*, 52–71.
- Budgeon, S. (2013). The Dynamics of Gender Hegemony: Femininities, Masculinities and Social Change. *Sociology*, 48, 317–334.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513490358>
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd Edition (ed.)). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116479>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429469237-3>
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinities*. Duke University Press.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cwb00>
- Havas, J. E. (2017). *Invocations of Feminism: Cultural Value, Gender, and American Quality Television*. University of East Anglia.
- Kerfoot, D., & Knights, D. (1998). Managing Masculinity in Contemporary Organizational Life: A Managerial Project. *Organization*, 5(1), 7–26.
- Lestari, F. A., & Sugiarti. (2022). Representasi Maskulinitas pada Tokoh Utama dalam

- Novel Selamat Tinggal Karya Tere Liye. *Kajian Linguistik Dan Sastra*, 1. <https://doi.org/10.23917/kl.v7i2.18995>
- Melzer, P. (2022). *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*. University of Texas Press.
- Morris, E. W., & Ratajczak, K. (2019). Critical Masculinity Studies and Research on Violence Against Women: An Assessment of Past Scholarship and Future Directions. *Violence against Women*, 25(16), 1980–2006.
- Mumby, D. K. (1998). Organizing Men: Power, Discourse, and the Social Construction of Masculinity (s) in the Workplace. *Communication Theory*, 8(2), 164–183.
- Panigrahi, S. S. (2025). Gender, Power, and Prophecy: Reimagining the Feminine in Macbeth. 10(6), 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels>
- Pascoe, G. J. (2015). A Qualitative Textual and Comparative Analysis of the Representation of Masculinity in the Action and Romantic Comedy Genres Gerald James Pascoe, University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 1–26.
- Pramudika, A. D. (2015). Visualisasi Maskulinitas Melalui Pengkarakteran Tokoh Dalam Film “5 Cm.” INSTITUT SENI INDONESIA (ISI) SURAKARTA.
- Salminen, J. (2022). *Gender Narratives of Hollywood Legacy Blockbuster Franchises in the 2010*. Doctoral dissertation, The University of Helsinki.
- Tasker, Y. (2012). *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. Routledge.
- Tyas, N. (2022). Students' Perception on Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in Learning English by Using Youtube Video. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 10(2), 1307- 1314. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v10i2.3208>
- Wu, Michelle E, Nicol, Adelheid A M, & Ralph, Cindy Suurd. (2023). Masculine Conformity and Social Dominance's Relation with Organizational Culture Change. *Armed Forces & Society*, 0095327X231178522. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231178522>
- Violita, V., & Cholsy, H. (2022). Speech Acts Equivalence of Audiovisual Translation on Enola Holmes Netflix Movie Subtitle. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 10(1), 209-225. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v10i1.2589>
- Zahro, F, Afkar, T, & Suwandana, E. (2025). Forms of Female Masculinity Power in the Novel *Women Waiting in the Hallway to the Sea* by Dian Purnomo. *International Journal of Multilingual Education and Applied Linguistics*.