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**Exploring the Gender Stereotypes in an American Sitcom The
Big Bang Theory: A Feminist perspective.**



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Abstract

The American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* is widely recognized for its portrayal of scientific communities, nerd culture, and interpersonal relationships. However, embedded within its narrative are various gender stereotypes. It has been a popular sitcom which aired on CBS from September 24, 2007, to May 16, 2019, and has been playing a significant role in shaping people's perception regarding gender. This study attempts to examine the linguistic choices of the characters and character development with plot progression to analyze both the reinforcement as well as subversion of traditional gender norms. The qualitative discourse analysis grounded in Janet Holmes' Theory of masculine and feminine style of interaction which is supplemented by Queer Theory, are utilized to analyze linguistic behavior and character development across various episodes. The findings reveal a dual narrative: while it reinforces traditional gender roles, the development in characters also suggests progressive shifts. This sitcom, with its dual narrative, becomes a complex media text – one that both reinforces as well as challenges stereotypical gender ideologies.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Masculinity, Femininity, Stereotypes, Gender representation, Media, Gender performativity, Stereotypical roles, sitcom.

Introduction

Media heavily influences society's view on gender norms¹, particularly on masculinity and femininity. Sitcoms on television serve as a major source of entertainment and pop culture; they are both a symptom of, and a possible cure for, gender stereotyping. *The Big Bang Theory* is an American sitcom that is remembered, from 2007 to 2019, as much for the accolades and the anger surrounding gender relations as for the show itself. To some extent, the character's humor, dialogues, and interactions both fight and foster gender bias. This makes the series interesting for analyzing the perception media constructs and how they seek to persuade society regarding gender. Interaction involving the male and female characters is what mainly keeps *The Big Bang Theory* alive and entertaining. All four, Sheldon, Leonard, Howard, and Raj are socially awkward scientist archetypes. The males are depicted as rational, sometimes illogically so, emotionally restrained, which entails an aggressive form of masculinity. These are overemphasized for laughs fierce, socially inept STEM² men who possess unmatched intellect. In contrast to the male main cast, the females are Penny, Amy, and Bernadette, who are seen through the lens of their social and caregiving roles, with an emphasis on physical appeal. Even as accomplished scientists, Amy and Bernadette are often boxed within the scope of their love lives rather than professional achievements.

These stereotypes drive home the point that gender roles are still alive and well whereby women are appreciated mostly for their nurturing or sentimental side instead of how capable and intelligent they really are. Regardless of the traditional stereotypes, the series contains several moments which subvert gender expectations. For example, Amy

¹ Gender norms: the socially constructed rules and expectations about how people should behave, think, and express themselves based on their gender.

² STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

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and Bernadette succeed in STEM which perpetuates the social stereotype that women are not interested in STEM. Their participation in the show fuels the narrative of the absence of women in science and technology and provides women deeper than mere gendered role models who defy societal expectations. Also, Raj's character adds to the soft side of masculinity with his emotional expressiveness concerning his fears and insecurities.

Eagly and Steffen (1984)³ define gender differences between men and women as communal and agentic. Selflessness, empathy, and a desire to socialize the communal type, associated with women, is characterized by relationships, while the agentic type, associated with men, is characterized by self-assertion, dominance, and self-expansion. The Big Bang Theory contains linguistic features that are to be analyzed for exploration of gender biasness and subversion. The male characters participate in the conversations with domineering and blunt talk because of their social authority and perceived intelligence. The women, however, come across as warm and agreeable, using subservient strategies such as hedging and tag questions to minimize the impact of their statements. These interactions replicate societal standards in which men are placed as authoritative figures, whereas women take on more nurturing roles. Still, there are instances when the patterns are broken, such as Bernadette's dominating behavior towards her husband Howard, as well as Amy's comments during more open discussions.

This research studies data through the lens of the characters development and language of the series to assess its impact on the perception of gender in culture. The analysis incorporates feminist and queer views to reveal how The Big Bang Theory simultaneously upholds and challenges dominant progressive representations of gender. This approach will deepens understanding of the extent to which the media shapes social perceptions of gender, thus adding to the discourse in feminist and media studies.

Research Objectives:

The aim of this study is to explore linguistic features used by characters during their interactions that tend to perpetuate gender norms. The difference between use of language by male and female characters are to be explored to understand the role of language in conforming stereotypical gender representation.

Another objective of this study is to explore masculine and feminine styles of interaction and character development that defies traditional gender roles. It includes exploration of male and female characters that exhibit range of speech pattern to subvert traditional norms.

Research Questions:

What are the linguistic features in The Big Bang Theory that reflect and promote gender stereotypes?

In what ways, this series challenges traditional gender norms through character development and linguistic choices?

Significance of Study:

This study is significant for various fields such as linguistics, gender studies as well as media studies as it attempts to explore the use of language as well as humor in perpetuation and subversion of traditional gender representation. The series such as one under examination is more than just entertainment; it is also an important part of

³ "Eagly and Steffen (1984)" → Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 46(4), 735-754.

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media's representation of gender. The analysis of linguistic features aims to explore the role it plays in maintaining traditional gender norms and its subversion.

It is a very crucial point to develop an understanding of gender representation in media as media plays an important role in the development of audience perception and point of view. The study of character of this series and their linguistic features in perpetuation and subversion of gender roles can be highlighted by how media can play its role in a progressive or regressive manner.

The study's conclusions are probably going to benefit academics, media professionals, and educators by offering a more sophisticated understanding of the connection between language and gender in popular media. As a result, media content that better captures the diversity of contemporary society may become more egalitarian and inclusive.

Literature Review

Gender representation through media has been a closely examined topic in feminist studies, with television shows typically either reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms. A popular American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* was studied in several academic articles which analysed its depiction of gender roles.

Šustić⁴ (2024) reviewed *The Big Bang Theory* in such areas where it enforced gender stereotypes by presenting women in a subordinate or, even more, romanticized roles. The research paper mentioned how the show uses Penny and her femininity to make her an attractive object to men, the first order to specify her intellectual power. In the meantime, Bernadette, and Amy, who are scientists, ignore it and continue to function at the female level; however, they are still the objects of gendered humour wherein the traditional expectations are confirmed.

Character evolution is vital aspect of gender representations. Khan and Anwar (2020) focused on the liberation of Penny, Amy, and Bernadette from the customary roles prescribed to them and to the evolvment of their characters through the show.

Language is a central element in maintaining stereotypes of gender in media. O'Barr and Atkins (1980) and Bucholtz and Hall (2004) suggested that women and men use language differently. An array of research has been conducted which covered the language patterns in *The Big Bang Theory* that demonstrated how the way of speech was different between male and female characters. Dennin (2024) & Yi (2019), who studied the interactions between male and female characters in the series *The Big Bang Theory* and how their linguistic exchanges communicate about gender power dynamics, concluded that female characters, particularly Penny, is the ultimate target. The report found out that male characters, especially Sheldon and Leonard, suppress women's discourse. Typically, they control conversations by acting in a patriarchal manner like interrupting, undermining, and/or disrespecting female contributions. This is also penned down in other papers besides sociolinguistics, which discovered the fact that males in media and real-life talk are more likely to be the ones holding the reins, expressing their dominion through speech. This leads to the development of a feminine identity that is focused on meeting men's physical wants (Smith 2007).

Haley & Estes (2002) are of the opinion that women are satisfied with their sexual lives if their marriage is successful. The idea that also conforms to the doctrine of getting

⁴ Šustić, D. (2024). Gender Performativity in Popular Media: A Queer Analysis of Sitcom Discourse. *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 36(2), 101–118.

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validation through the success of marriage/romantic relation than a successful career. Furthermore, through the studies by Marin (2020), Walsh (2015), and Meyer & Wood (2018), although the show sometimes inclusively and progressively acknowledges the non-binary and malleable nature of masculinities and femininities and the gender performativity, the main thrust of The Big Bang Theory is to perpetuate gender stereotypes. The said studies suggest that sitcoms are still the main tools of gender ideologies hence using The Big Bang Theory as a bellwether of the media power to either create or analyse the effect of the traditional narrative on gender could be an interesting future study. A follow-up study could take the form of a more detailed intimation into viewers' consciousness in terms of their recognition or resistance of the gender portrayals that are beamed across the screen.

The study aims to progress feminist media analysis by using other methodologies and perspectives in the study of The Big Bang Theory's gender portrayal along with the subversion of gender stereotypes which will make critical reception and recognition thereof a common feature in any similar piece of scholarly work.

This research among others, as a means of showing the significance of discourse analysis grabbed my attention. That is the way The Big Bang Theory characters interact, converse, and how interruptions happen in dialogue. Other studies have focused on the gender aspect of language use in the show (Dennin, 2024; Azmi et al., 2016), however, the main linguistic elements like genre, thematic structure are frequently overlooked. This work will go deeper into the analysis of the language use of men and women by focusing on the interruptions, the subject of conversation, and the strict no switching/turns. Similarly, this study will be conducted to find out whether there has been a change in the language used during the seasons, especially as the characters have grown and developed.

This study will continue from past work of reinforcement of gender stereotypes and will get a new level with focus on changes the gender representations would be fully understood which would prove to be a helpful source of the public perception of gender norms.

Theoretical Framework

To analyse the gender dynamics in The Big Bang Theory, this study employs Janet Holmes' theory of masculine and feminine interaction styles⁵, alongside Queer theory. These frameworks provide a comprehensive perspective on how the show strengthens and contests conventional gender roles.

Research Design and Data Collection:

This study uses a qualitative research design that focuses on textual and discourse analysis. This study uses descriptive analysis to investigate the characters of the series The Big Bang Theory and attempts to explore their linguistic features by utilizing Holmes theory of masculine and feminine style interaction. Queer theory is also employed to investigate how these characters then subvert traditional gender norms by challenging them.

The episodes were selected across the series in accordance with their relevancy to gender representation. To perform textual analysis the subtitles of these episodes are

⁵ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Ballantine Books, 1990).

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used as the transcript of these subtitles are available online.

The episodes were selected on the following criterion:

Scenes showing gender norms through interaction between male and female characters.

Gender-related power relations, emotional expressiveness, and social positioning -

Representation of non-normative sexualities and identities.

Data Analysis Method:

The data was evaluated using a combination of Holmes' theory of masculine and feminine ways of interaction and Queer Theory to provide both linguistic and ideological viewpoints.

Holmes Theory of Masculine and Feminine Interactional: Holmes' (2006)⁶ framework provides an essential lens to decode male communication styles marked by assertiveness, competition, and directness whereas feminine communication is cooperative, affective, supportive, and rapport oriented. These distinctions are used to identify gendered discourse patterns in character.

Holmes' theory helps decode the linguistic markers that perpetuate gender stereotypes in the sitcom. However, there are also an aspect that reflect a resistance to normative masculinity — does not align with Holmes framework — hence the need for a supplementary framework like Queer Theory.”

Queer Theory which was initially coined by Teresa de Lauretis (1990) questions heteronormative assumptions and binary gender constructs, was used to evaluate characters that deviated from established gender roles or identities.

Fluid gender performances (e.g., Sheldon's lack of interest in romance or Raj's emotional sensitivity).

Moments of gender nonconformity.

Subtle criticism or reinforcement of societal norms.

The Queer theory⁷ is utilized to explore how this series The Big Bang Theory attempts to challenge traditional gender norms and expectations. It also attempts to explore queer-platonic relationships (QPRs); that blur the boundaries of friendship and idea of romance. Such relations are characterized by deep emotional bonds and affection for the same gender, but that affection is neither romantic nor sexual and attempt to defy social norms that put the label of romantic context on such relations.

Queer Theory is critical in analysing characters whose behaviours blur gender binaries.

While Holmes' model explains interaction patterns, Queer Theory captures identity performances — especially in scenes in which characters exhibit gender nonconformity.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive interpretive lens.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Holmes' (2006) theory characterizes masculine style of interaction with assertiveness, competitiveness, directness, and avoiding emotional and intimate disclosures during interactions. Feminine style of interaction, as asserted by Holmes' (2006), is facilitative, supportive, conciliatory, indirect, collaborative, person/process-oriented, and affectively oriented.

Here we will analyze masculine and feminine style interaction side by side.

⁶ Janet Holmes, *Gendered Talk at Work: Constructing Gender Identity Through Workplace Discourse* (Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

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Speech Function: Competitive vs. Cooperative/Facilitative:

Masculine conversations are seen as contests with the objective of winning or proving a point, exhibiting a competitive nature.

Howard: You don't even drive! Why do you need a parking space?

Leonard: That's not the point. If I let you take it, then I'm just giving in.

Howard: Oh, so is this about pride? Fine, let's settle it like men—winner gets the spot. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S6E9).

Female frequently focus on encouraging others to engage and contribute during talks. Women frequently use this method by inviting quieter people to offer their ideas.

Penny asks, "You've been awfully quiet. What do you think?" (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S6E2).

Direct vs Indirect use of language:

Masculine: Direct, minimal mitigation

The language used in masculine interactions is straightforward and plain, with a preference for clarity over civility. It prioritizes clarity and factual accuracy over politeness and societal needs.

Leonard: She wants to fund my research, and she made it clear there are conditions.

Howard: So, are you doing it or not?

Leonard: I don't know yet.

Raj: It's a yes or no question, dude. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S4E15)

Howard and Raj demand a clear yes-or-no answer from Leonard, forcing him to commit without ambiguity.

Feminine: Indirect, uses hedges/politeness

The feminine style of interaction uses supportive feedback, which includes active listening cues such as nodding, responding 'yeah', or 'mm-hmm' to encourage the speaker.

Sheldon: String theory is an elegant solution to fundamental questions of physics.

Penny (nodding): Wow, which sounds... really smart. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S1E2)

Penny gives Sheldon constructive input; even if she doesn't fully comprehend the topic, her response encourages him to continue speaking.

Aggressive Interruptions vs Supportive Feedback

Masculine: Controls topic, interrupts

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Dominance in Communication is a very prominent feature of masculine style of interaction. It refers to the idea that men's communication aimed at establishing dominance, authority, or expertise. It is centered on establishing prestige and power.

For instance, in Season 5, Episode 7 (The Good Guy Fluctuation)

Excuse me, but the focus of this conversation should be my Noble-worthy research, not your trivial social activities. (Lorre & Prady, S5 E7)

Masculine interaction is characterized by aggressive to dominate conversations or assert control.

Penny: Sheldon, I just need—

Sheldon (interrupting): Need? If I had a dollar for every time someone needed something, I'd be able to purchase this entire building. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S3E8, 12:45)

Feminine: Supports, follows conversation flow

Conversely, Bernadette often affirms her partners during conversations:

"That's really interesting, sweetie. Tell me more."

Such backchannel supports signals cooperation and engagement, key traits of Holmes' feminine style.

Task-driven vs Person/Process oriented:

Masculine:

It is goal-oriented, with an emphasis on obtaining a certain end rather than developing relationships. Task-oriented interactions center on resolving an issue, devising a strategy, or achieving a specific objective.

We are here to discuss science, not your personal problems. Let's focus on achieving results" (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S3E9).

Feminine: Feminine style of interaction is person/process oriented as mentioned in Holmes theory of feminine style of interaction. Rather of focusing solely on task-related goals, feminine style of interaction prioritizes connection building and emotional understanding. Women frequently place an emphasis on emotional well-being in addition to productivity.

. For example, in Season 2, Episode 18 (The Work Song Nanocluster), Penny tries to console Leonard about the failure of his experiment by saying.

Penny: Leonard, it's okay. You're still brilliant, and there's always another chance to try again. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S2E18)

Confrontation vs Conciliatory:

Masculine: The masculine style of engagement is more likely to follow Confrontational Approach; debates or arguments, with disagreements addressed openly and assertively. Such interactions confront disagreements head on, frequently with assertiveness bordering on insensitivity.

Leonard: Raj, you're being ridiculous. Just admit you were wrong!

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Raj: Oh, I'm sorry; do you have a PhD in astrophysics? No? Then shut up! (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S6E14)

Leonard and Raj disagree on scientific credibility, with Raj expressing intellectual dominance in a combative manner. Raj flatly dismisses Leonard's argument, not by discussing its content, but by attacking his qualifications.

Feminine: The feminine mode of interaction is conciliatory (mediating conflicts) and seeks to maintain peace, resolve disputes, and avoid confrontation in interactions according to Holmes (2006). Rather than raising tensions, they settle arguments to promote a harmonious workplace.

Penny frequently serves as a mediator, using her emotional intelligence and sense of humor to ease stressful situations. The Big Bang Theory Season 3, Episode 22 (The Staircase Implementation) features Penny mediating between Sheldon and Leonard.

Okay, you guys obviously have some stuff to work out. So, why don't you talk it out like grown-ups, and I'll just be over here drinking wine and pretending I don't live across the hall from crazy people. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S2E22)

Her casual yet effective approach assists Leonard and Sheldon in resolving their issues without escalating the confrontation.

Autonomous vs Passivity:

Men tend to emphasize independence, self-reliance, and taking an own stand in communication. Masculinity is frequently associated with strength, decisiveness, and autonomy, which reinforces the notion that asking assistance or admitting fragility is a sign of weakness.

In the series The Big Bang Theory we witness such patterns; one such instance is present in Season 4, Episode 2 (The Cruciferous Vegetable Amplification).

Leonard: Why don't we work on this project together?

Sheldon: Because I am a solo genius. History will not remember "Sheldon and Leonard," it will remember Sheldon. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S4E2)

This autonomy underscores his self-reliance and desire for individual recognition.

Feminine:

According to Holmes female tends to make minor contribution in public settings thus taking a passive role. In public debates, women frequently play a supporting role, deferring to others even when they are competent. This behavior is influenced by societal standards that encourage women to value group voice over individual power. Although Amy is a highly intellectual and powerful character in the series, she occasionally takes on a submissive attitude, supporting women's traditional roles. For example, in Season 4, Episode 5 (The Desperation Emanation), Sheldon proposes a scientific idea or hypothesis while Leonard seeks Amy's validation as a fellow scientist. She responded by saying:

Amy: I do, but I think he can explain it better than I can. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S4E5)
Although she agrees with Sheldon, she downplays her own competence, supporting the tendency of women to undervalue their public contributions.

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Referentially Oriented vs Affective:

Masculine:

Masculine style of conversation is mostly referentially oriented according to Holmes' theory. In a conversation men prefer to exchange information, statistics, or knowledge rather than relational or emotional content. Their emphasis is on communicating information rather than displaying emotions or social cues. The male characters in *The Big Bang Theory* exhibit this pattern throughout the series. For instance, in Season 2, Episode 18 (The Work Song Nano cluster)

Penny: This is too hard to understand.

Sheldon: It's not hard. Physics of motion is simply an interaction between mass, velocity and force. I'll draw a diagram for you. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S2E18)

This interaction between Sheldon and Penny demonstrates that, despite Penny's irritation with her inability to grasp Physics, Sheldon focuses on imparting factual knowledge and responds with a technical explanation, effectively disregarding Penny's emotional frustration.

Feminine:

Affective communication is another feature of feminine style of interaction which focuses on emotional expressiveness, human connections, and empathy. Women typically utilize this strategy to help and reassure others. In Season 5, Episode 6 (The Rhinitis Revelation), Howard vents his dissatisfaction with his mother, saying, "I can't believe my mom isn't proud of me." Bernadette replies with empathy.

Bernadette:

Oh, sweetie, I'm sure she's proud. She just has a unique way of showing it. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S5E6)

Her response acknowledges and reassures Howard, reinforcing their emotional link

Subversion of gender stereotypes:

Character development is an important aspect of the analysis, as it helps us in developing an understanding of gender modification over time. The series stick to conforming to traditional idea of masculinity and femininity in starting seasons. In the latter seasons, there is gradual shift with the introduction of more independent, intellectual and smart women such as Amy and Bernadette. The male characters are also seen subverting norms by being more expressive about their emotions and by being proud and supportive to women thriving in the STEM.

According to Queer theorists the gender is not something innate or natural rather it is a product of society and is a performative. This contradicts the assumption that men and women must conform to set roles based on biological sex.

Asexuality: It refers to lack of sexual attraction, which challenges societal norms that prioritize sexual relation as essential to human fulfillment. Traditionally the idea of male always looking for sexual/physical relation is reinforced while Queer Theory challenges this notion. **Sheldon:** I am quite fond of Amy, but sexual intimacy is off the table. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S4E1)

His reply demonstrates that he has no interest for the physical relationships that are required of him as a 'male' in society.

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The concept of asexuality is also evident in the character of Leonard's mother, Beverly Hofstadter, who expresses her disinterest in physical connection with Leonard's father, claiming that their sex life was purely for reproductive reasons. This not only validates her asexual perspective but also demonstrates that females can be rational and have greater intellectual aptitude and desire for information exploration than males.

Powerful Career Women maintaining personal and professional life: Amy are examples of successful career women in STEM, challenging the stereotype that women in STEM are socially awkward or unattractive also debunking the myth that women must choose between professional achievement and a satisfying personal life. Amy is deeply committed to her study while still maintaining a complex romantic relationship with Sheldon. Bernadette's character demonstrates subversion as she is a successful microbiologist who is clever, outspoken, and conventionally attractive. She also does more than her spouse, Howard. Howard teases about her being the "breadwinner," and she proudly responds I don't make more money than you to emasculate you; it's just a perk. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S7E2). Bernadette rejects the notion that a woman earning more than her husband is bad, instead accepting it with humor and confidence. She also breaks away this notion by being a successful microbiologist and by maintaining a balance between her marriage, children and a successful career. Thus, proving that successful career as well as successful personal life are possible, and women don't always have to choose between them.

Defying Traditional Relation Dynamics:

Men are emotionally vulnerable:

Unlike typical representations of males as stoic and emotionally disconnected, guys in The Big Bang Theory appear to be emotionally susceptible as the plot progresses. For example:

Raj is the group's most emotionally open character, revealing his worries, fears, and sentiments. He also appreciates conventional female hobbies like knitting, party planning, and watching romantic flicks. He explains his liking for romantic comedies in Season 4, Episode 20 (The Herb Garden Germination). 'Just because I like rom coms doesn't make me a less man.'

Sheldon begins the series as an emotionally detached person but his relationship with Amy brings about his emotional side gradually. He expressed his love for Amy 'I'm not a man who believes in fate, but I believe we're meant to be together.' Such rare moments of emotional honesty showcase Sheldon's growth and challenges the idea that men should suppress their emotion.

Leonard's character frequently suffers with self-doubt and craves validation, especially in his interactions with Penny and his mother. In Season 6, Episode 2, he reveals his dread of losing Penny: 'I am sacred, yet I am not enough for her.' Similarly, he frequently seeks approval from his mother, a well-known neuroscientist and psychiatrist. He at one instance said, 'You know it wouldn't kill you to say you're proud of me once in a while.' This shows Leonard's vulnerability as he craves a simple acknowledgment of his worth thus breaking away from the tradition.

Reversing Breadwinner Dynamic:

Traditionally, males are expected to provide food and shelter for their families. In the series, Penny's character evolves from a struggling actress to a successful

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pharmaceutical sales representative, reversing traditional gender stereotypes. This reversal also became a source of amusement, particularly when Leonard struggles with Penny earning more than he does.

Leonard: I'm supposed to be the one providing for us.

Penny: You can still provide...by grabbing the wine I paid for. (Lorre & Prady, 2007, S9E3)

Penny's witty comeback not only dispels any possible tension but also highlights the ridiculousness of adhering to archaic gender norms. Penny used humor to lighten Leonard's uneasiness while also criticizing the traditional concept that males must be the primary earners in the relationship. Leonard and Penny's relationship progresses dramatically over the series. Initially portrayed as a conventional "nerd" pining for the "popular girl," their relationship develops into one of equals.

Queer-Platonic Relationships (QPRs): Queer-platonic relationships (QPRs) blur the boundaries of friendship and idea of romance. Such relations are characterized by deep emotional bonds and affection for the same gender, but that affection is neither romantic nor sexual. It is characterized by a deep sense of emotional bond towards each other and support to one another. Such relations attempt to defy social norms that put the label of romantic context on such relations. According to QPRs actions such as holding hands or sharing a home are not just reserved for romantic relationships.

The characters of Rajesh Koothrappali and Howard Wolowitz from the series *The Big Bang Theory* show such Queer-Platonic relation by depicting their closeness and emotional dependency on each other. They tend to be open towards each other about their insecurities, likes/dislikes, their struggles thus demonstrating a subversion of traditional idea of male being strong all the time.

In a similar sense female characters such as Amy and Penny show a strong bond. Amy shows a deep sense of admiration for Penny and often puts forward flirty comments. Bernadette helps Penny in building her career by offering her work at her firm. Penny helped them to be more socially involved by making them comfortable with themselves and defying traditional standards of beauty.

Much of the analysis of *The Big Bang Theory* shows that the women of the program are mostly known through normally behaving charmingly in fact, physical attractiveness, emotional intelligence, and relationships are more frequently the female characters are constructed by rather than the intellectual capabilities. Particular attention is given to Penny, who is illustrated as the common "dumb blonde," with her beauty being assimilated at the expense of her intellect, confirming last studies by Yi (2019) and Šustić (2024). Besides the fact that women scientists, such as Amy and Bernadette, are role models in the STEM field by defying some of the gender norms, they hardly act in any other way than to affirm the stereotype that a woman is a man's adjunct.

The discussion of these findings is important because the media is not only a medium of entertainment but a driving force of cultural awareness and a seller of social roles. Being a popular comedy series, *The Big Bang Theory* is among the programs defining the way people perceive gender. The reason is that it brings out the intricacies of gender in media, showing how television can be the omnipresent and the absent one that is of traditional gender norms at the same time. The projection of these characters considering their disability to talk about themselves and their relationships may help us to become more critical of entertainment's role in shaping societal attitudes toward

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gender, thereby making media analysis a fundamental component of feminist and media studies.

Even though *The Big Bang Theory* is a show that confirms conventional gender roles, it also has moments that question the norm, and one of them is the inclusion of female researchers that have a significant role in the story. The appearance of Amy and Bernadette as established females in STEM fields constitutes a major deviation from the cliché of women being mainly valued for their looks, relationship status, or household work in sitcoms. Female characters in various TV comedy shows have been portrayed less intellectual in scientific and technical fields, which is the main reason for the gender imbalances in STEM portrayal. Nevertheless, Amy and Bernadette attracted the stereotype by demonstrating their high IQ, striving for the top, and enjoying career success.

The multi-dimensional and complex portrayal of female characters in *The Big Bang Theory*, mirrors the modern society's problems with gender roles. As the show acknowledges the advancements that women are making in male-dominated areas, like STEM, it also maintains female stereotypes for the sake of humor. Women's mental abilities are often underestimated when compared to men which means there are still some gender-related requirements besides qualifications that might affect women's careers and academics. In addition, their depiction is usually based on the idea of balancing a high intellectual level with a very feminine attitude, and that duality is an expression of the pressure on women to fit into the societal norms of dress and behavior. Thus, the show introduces a portrayal of women that on the one hand is slightly challenging the traditional gender roles, but on the other hand it also supports those roles, revealing the ongoing tension between contemporary feminism and traditional ideas.

It can be said that *The Big Bang Theory* offers a complex look at gender that notices movement while still being the driver of most of the stereotypes. The series is a place where sex is both the object of interrogation as well as the site for the illustration of the intricate and sometimes contradictory nature of the representation of gender in popular culture.

This study manifests groundbreaking conclusions, predominantly, for the arenas of media portrayal and gender studies. *The Big Bang Theory* has a central position in the process of the society creation of gender; it features the characters mixing up stereotypes and using humor and language to address societal debates about gender. The presence of gender roles through characters and their interactions in the show mirrors the societal norms and influences the way in which the audiences view gender in real life. The portrayal is obtained by the viewers when they see the images of stereotype men and women mean the audience attitudes were also molded to gender equality, job roles as well as social behaviors. In other words, *The Big Bang Theory* is an excellent example of the media, which lets the audience look at the prevailing cultural norms through it, thus showing that social change may be brought about even if that change is slow or is impeded by the continuance of certain facile narrative.

This research interprets the intersection of character growth, verbal communication, and situational comedy in the series to reveal the extent to which it balances—and sometimes swings wildly between—traditional societal norms and advanced gender portrayals. The linguistic analysis through Holmes theory of masculine and feminine style of interaction reveals that males tend to take a lead in conversation thus conforming to traditional expectations. It also subverts these norms as the character of

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Bernadette uses commanding language when necessary, illustrating her dominance. For example, Howard's flirting and Raj's sobbing tendencies are couched in a context of rivalry and intellectual superiority. Yet within these patterns there are still some elements of resistance. Her sharp wit and commanding demeanor as a wife to Howard places her above the typical female passive role.

The series may not escape the bounds of representation but offers hints of hope that resonates with feminism and queer theory. Facing such portrayals can challenge audiences to think deeper about the construction of culture through media representations of gender. Follow up studies may focus on audience analysis and the changing portrayal of gender in contemporary sitcoms to widen the scope of media and social change. The Big Bang Theory shows us the challenges of gender stereotypes representation in pop culture. In particular, the show's use of humor, conversations, and character growth both fulfills and undermines cultural norms regarding male and female identities. The show does revert to stereotypes at times, but these progressive representations assist in understanding the evolving state of gender relations in media. If we keep examining these representations, all of us—scholars and audiences—can work toward expanding the narrow bounds of cultural narratives.

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