

Analysis of Social Domination and Alienation: A Critical Reading of Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* within the Context of Modern Power Relations

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the practices of social domination and the experiences of alienation encountered by Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* through the integration of Seeman's Alienation Theory and Pratto's Social Dominance Theory. This investigation emerges from the need to understand how power relations within the family sphere and pressures from the capitalist work system shape conditions of estrangement that erode an individual's identity, dignity, and social relations. The research employs a qualitative approach using close reading techniques applied to the literary text. The analysis is strengthened by Abrams's model, which emphasizes the relationship between text, reader, and contemporary social context, thereby enabling a more interdisciplinary interpretation. The findings reveal that Gregor experiences the five forms of alienation identified by Seeman—powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, self-estrangement, and anomie. These forms of alienation emerge as direct consequences of the family's structure of domination, led by the father and reproduced by Grete, and are further reinforced by pressures from the capitalist economic system that reduces Gregor to an instrument of production. The results demonstrate that social domination operates not only through physical and symbolic power but also through internalization processes that lead Gregor to accept himself as "the other," ultimately causing the loss of his identity and the meaning of his existence. This study offers an original contribution by addressing a gap in the literature through the integration of Seeman's and Pratto's theoretical frameworks—a combination rarely applied in Kafka studies—to show that alienation cannot be understood solely as a psychological phenomenon but must be viewed as the outcome of structural power relations within the family. The study also affirms that literary works can serve as reflective media for examining the dynamics of domination, structural violence, and the erosion of human dignity in contemporary social realities.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis praktik dominasi sosial dan pengalaman alienasi yang dialami tokoh Gregor Samsa dalam *The Metamorphosis* karya Franz Kafka melalui integrasi teori Alienasi Seeman dan Dominasi Sosial Pratto. Kajian ini berangkat dari kebutuhan untuk memahami bagaimana relasi kuasa dalam ruang keluarga serta tekanan dunia kerja kapitalistik dapat membentuk kondisi keterasingan yang menggerus identitas, martabat, dan relasi sosial individu. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pembacaan dekat (*close reading*) terhadap teks sastra. Analisis diperkuat dengan model kajian Abrams yang menekankan hubungan antara teks, pembaca, dan konteks sosial modern sehingga membuka pembacaan yang lebih interdisipliner. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Gregor mengalami lima bentuk alienasi menurut Seeman—*powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *social isolation*, *self-estrangement*, dan *anomia*. Seluruh bentuk alienasi ini muncul sebagai konsekuensi langsung dari struktur dominasi keluarga yang dipimpin oleh ayah dan direproduksi oleh Grete, serta diperkuat oleh tekanan sistem ekonomi kapitalistik yang menempatkan Gregor sebagai instrumen produksi. Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa dominasi sosial bekerja tidak hanya melalui kekuasaan fisik dan simbolik, tetapi juga melalui proses internalisasi yang membuat Gregor menerima dirinya sebagai “yang lain”, hingga pada akhirnya kehilangan identitas dan makna keberadaannya. Secara orisinal, penelitian ini mengisi kekosongan literatur dengan mengintegrasikan kerangka teoretis Seeman dan Pratto—kombinasi yang jarang digunakan dalam kajian Kafka—untuk menunjukkan bahwa alienasi tidak dapat dipahami secara psikologis semata, tetapi harus dipandang sebagai hasil dari relasi kuasa struktural dalam keluarga. Penelitian ini sekaligus menegaskan bahwa karya sastra dapat menjadi medium reflektif untuk membaca dinamika dominasi, kekerasan struktural, dan erosi martabat manusia dalam realitas sosial kontemporer.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of social domination has become an increasingly prominent social issue in modern society. A UN Women report (2023) shows that more than 736 million women worldwide have experienced violence rooted in unequal power relations within families and communities. These unequal power structures generate not only physical violence but also symbolic violence that erodes human dignity and disrupts personal identity. In many societies, social structures and cultural values implicitly legitimize the superiority of particular groups—such as men, specific social classes, or those with higher economic status. These conditions give rise to various forms of alienation across family environments, the workplace, and broader social relations.

Similar dynamics appear in domestic contexts. Data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2022) indicate that one in three children in Southeast Asia experiences discriminatory treatment within the family as a result of social value constructions that shape expectations regarding gender roles, economic contribution, or certain physical conditions. Unequal power relations in families often produce psychological pressure, loss of personal autonomy, and even social exclusion. These phenomena

demonstrate that social domination constitutes a structural issue with far-reaching impacts on the dynamics of identity, relationships, and individual dignity within communities.

In literary studies, experiences of social domination and human alienation often serve as reflections of social reality. Abrams (1953) asserts that modern literary works function as a “historical mirror” that captures the sociopolitical conditions of their time. Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* stands as one of the strongest representations of these dynamics, particularly in its portrayal of economic pressures, family power relations, and the existential alienation experienced by Gregor Samsa. Studies by Gültekin (2025) and Manzar (2024) show that Samsa’s existential condition is rooted in the meaninglessness of life and the loss of self-control as consequences of the oppressive power relations that bind him. However, these issues cannot be separated from the family’s structural domination, which positions Samsa as an economically and socially burdened subject.

Research on social domination and alienation in Kafka’s work has developed along several trajectories. First, studies emphasize existentialism and absurdity, such as those of Gültekin (2025), Manzar (2024), and Tekin (2023). These works interpret Gregor’s alienation as a symbol of human powerlessness in confronting an impersonal modern system. Their focus lies on the absurdity of existence and the loss of meaning, but they do not engage deeply with the family’s power dynamics as a structural source of alienation.

Second, studies link *The Metamorphosis* to economic and capitalist issues, including research by Evans (2021), Romdon and Muslim (2020), and Grecu et al. (2022). This body of work views domination by the capitalist economic system as the primary force that pressures Gregor until he loses his sense of self. However, these studies tend to emphasize external economic pressures while often neglecting the micro-power relations within the family, which constitute the immediate cause of Gregor’s alienation.

Third, some studies examine *The Metamorphosis* through gender and social-relational perspectives, such as Sari (2024) and Marshburn et al. (2023). These works highlight how shifting gender roles and social legitimacy shape interactions within the Samsa household. While relevant, these studies have not explicitly integrated Seeman’s concept of alienation with Pratto’s Social Dominance Theory (SDT) to map how familial power structures shape Gregor’s alienative experience.

A research gap emerges from the absence of studies that comprehensively combine Seeman’s Alienation Theory and Pratto’s Social Dominance Theory to interpret *The Metamorphosis* as a representation of modern power relations. Yet both theories converge strongly on concepts such as powerlessness, social legitimacy, and group hierarchy—all relevant for mapping Gregor’s transformation of identity.

The purpose of this study is to describe Gregor Samsa as a subject of social domination within the family in *The Metamorphosis* and to analyze his experiences of alienation using Seeman’s five principal concepts: powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, self-estrangement, and normlessness/anomie. In addition, the study aims to explain how practices of social domination, as conceptualized by Pratto, interact and intertwine with Gregor’s alienative experiences, thereby producing a complex condition of estrangement. Overall, this research seeks to fill gaps in previous studies by introducing the theoretical integration of Seeman and Pratto as a new approach for interpreting modern literary works, especially in understanding power relations and their effects on character identity and existence.

This study argues that Gregor’s experience of alienation does not merely stem from economic pressure or existential absurdity but primarily arises from the layered and systemic structure of social domination within the Samsa family. The power relations led by the father—then reproduced by Grete through internal social legitimacy—construct a familial hierarchy that positions Gregor in the most subordinate role. This structure triggers all forms of alienation identified by Seeman, from powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement to anomie, progressively eroding his identity and dignity. Gregor’s physical exclusion from the family space, the emotional distancing imposed by his mother, and his labeling as a burden indicate that his alienation is a direct result of domestic power mechanisms rather than merely a consequence of biological transformation. Thus, *The Metamorphosis* can be read as a profound critique of structural violence and the dynamics of power relations in the modern family—dynamics that oppress not only the human body but also undermine an individual’s capacity to maintain identity, self-worth, and social existence.

This study's theoretical framework integrates Social Dominance Theory (Pratto, 1999) with Seeman's concept of alienation (1959, 2024). SDT is used to explain the formation of power hierarchies within the Samsa family, while Seeman's theory maps their impact on Gregor's personality structure and existential condition. The integration of these theories enables a more interdisciplinary literary interpretation, aligned with the Open Integrity approach that emphasizes the interrelation of power dynamics, humanity, and social processes in plural societies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study is the literary text *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka (1971), particularly the construction of Gregor Samsa's character and the representation of power relations within the family. The study focuses on mapping concepts of social domination and experiences of alienation as reflected in the narrative structure, dialogue, and relational dynamics among the characters. Thus, the object of examination is not only the content of the story but also the psychological and social dynamics that shape the development of the protagonist.

This study uses a qualitative research design because the nature of literary texts requires an in-depth analysis of meanings, symbols, and social relations that cannot be reduced to numerical data (Haq, 2025; Haq & Sugiharto, 2025; Lune & Berg, 2017). A qualitative approach enables the researcher to conduct a critical reading through the frameworks of Seeman's alienation theory and Pratto's Social Dominance Theory, thereby allowing a deeper exploration of domination and estrangement. The selection of this design is based on the need to interpret human experiences within power relations in a contextual and interpretive manner.

The data used in this study consist entirely of secondary sources. The primary source is *The Metamorphosis* as included in *The Complete Stories*, republished by Schocken Books in 1971. Supporting sources include books, journal articles, and previous studies that discuss alienation theory, social domination, modern literary analysis, and the intellectual context of Franz Kafka. These sources strengthen the analysis, build the theoretical framework, and help identify research gaps.

Data collection was conducted through a literature study by examining the primary text and comparing it with theoretical discussions and previous research. Data were gathered through a close reading of specific paragraphs, dialogues, and descriptions in the text that represent social domination or alienation. In addition, relevant quotations from Seeman's and Pratto's theoretical works were organized as interpretive foundations for the analysis.

Data analysis in this study follows the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 2013), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, quotations related to social domination and alienation were classified according to theoretical categories. The data display stage involved arranging thematic patterns, such as patterns of powerlessness, the structure of familial hierarchy, and Gregor's identity transformation. The conclusion-drawing stage was conducted by connecting textual findings with the theoretical framework to produce a comprehensive understanding of how the integration of Seeman's and Pratto's concepts explains domination and alienation in Kafka's work.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Gregor Samsa as a Subject of Social Domination within the Family

A close reading of *The Metamorphosis* shows that, from the beginning of the story, Gregor Samsa is positioned in a state of profound dependence and burden within his family. Before his physical transformation, Gregor is depicted as the only family member who works and bears the entire economic responsibility for the household. He works for a company that operates with strict discipline and deep suspicion toward its employees; even minor negligence is treated as a serious offense (Kafka, 1971, pp. 94–95). This situation makes Gregor feel that he must continually work hard to repay the family's debt and maintain their financial stability. The text indicates that the family lives entirely on Gregor's income, while his father, mother, and Grete contribute little at the beginning of the story.

The data also show that the pressure exerted on Gregor does not come solely from his employer but also from his father. Gregor's father is portrayed as a harsh and easily angered figure who demands complete obedience from Gregor. When Gregor wakes up late and fails to leave for work immediately, his father reacts with anger, suspicion, and physical force to push him back into his room. After Gregor transforms into a giant insect, his father repeatedly uses aggressive actions to drive Gregor away from the common areas of the house, prodding him with a stick and his feet until Gregor retreats and hides in his room (Kafka, 1971, pp. 89–90). This pattern shows that whenever Gregor is perceived as disrupting the household order, the father responds with pressure and physical coercion.

Grete's role as Gregor's sister appears different at the beginning of the story. She is initially portrayed as the family member who shows the most care for Gregor: she brings him food, cleans his room, and attempts to mediate between Gregor and their parents. However, over time, the data reveal a shift in her attitude. Once the family's economic burden begins to be shared and Grete starts working, she gradually displays impatience and irritation toward Gregor's presence. In one part of the narrative, Grete explicitly tells her father that Gregor has become a source of suffering and exhaustion for the entire family, and she proposes that the family "get rid of" Gregor for their own well-being (Kafka, 1971, p. 133). This shift is clearly reflected in the text: from being a caregiver, Grete transforms into someone who actively advocates for Gregor's removal from the household.

The data also show the position of Gregor's mother, who stands somewhere in between. She has an emotional urge to approach and care for Gregor, yet she is forced to restrain herself by Gregor's father and Grete. In one scene, Gregor's mother pleads to be allowed to enter Gregor's room because she still considers him her "poor child," but her wish is denied by Grete and the father on the grounds of health concerns and household order (Kafka, 1971, p. 114). The mother is repeatedly depicted as wanting to show affection, yet she is consistently prevented or pulled back by other family members. These data show that her access to Gregor is controlled by others in the household.

In addition to the domestic dynamics, Gregor's internal reflections further reinforce his subordinate position. In one section, Gregor contemplates his fate as an employee in an oppressive company where he feels "punished" and where even minor mistakes lead to immediate suspicion. He views himself and his colleagues as workers who are never fully trusted and are constantly monitored (Kafka, 1971, pp. 94–95). These reflections illustrate the intense pressure from his workplace, which he then carries into his home life.

Gregor's physical transformation into a giant insect also emerges as crucial data. Early in the story, Gregor realizes that his body has changed: his back has hardened like an armor plate, his stomach has become large and segmented, and his numerous thin legs move helplessly before him (Kafka, 1971, p. 89). This transformation renders him incapable of performing his previous roles—either as a worker or as a "normal" family member. The family's reactions to this change recur throughout the narrative: the father responds with aggression, Grete with increasing disgust, and the mother with a mixture of fear and restrained affection.

In the final part of the story, the data show that Gregor overhears his family discussing him as a source of hardship. He realizes that they would feel relieved if he were no longer present. Gregor then decides to "withdraw" and gradually stops eating until he eventually dies in a state of resignation after thinking about his family (Kafka, 1971, p. 135). This decision indicates that Gregor fully internalizes the family's view of him as a burden and uses it as the basis for removing himself from their lives.

To summarize the key textual evidence related to Gregor's position within the family, the following table is prepared:

Table 1. Fragments Representing Gregor's Position within the Samsa Family

No	Text Fragment (Paraphrased)	Main Data Focus
1	Gregor becomes the sole breadwinner; the family's entire livelihood depends on his income.	The family's economic dependence on Gregor.
2	Gregor's company is highly suspicious; even minor negligence is treated as a serious offense.	Heavy work pressure draining Gregor physically and psychologically.

3	The father forces Gregor back into his room with physical pressure after seeing Gregor's transformed body.	The father's aggressive and coercive behavior.
4	Grete initially cares for Gregor, bringing him food and cleaning his room.	The early phase of Grete's empathy.
5	Grete later states that the family must "get rid of" Gregor for the sake of peace and survival.	Grete's shift from empathy to rejection.
6	The mother wants to visit Gregor as her "poor child," but the father and Grete prevent her.	Restrictions placed on the mother's access to Gregor.
7	Gregor realizes his body has transformed into a large insect, making him unable to work or function normally.	Loss of physical capacity and social function.
8	Gregor hears his family describe him as a burden and eventually decides to withdraw from life.	Gregor's internalization of the family's view of him.

This section specifically presents textual data regarding Gregor's position within the family: economic dependence, the father's treatment, Grete's changing attitude, the limitations placed on the mother's role, and Gregor's internal state as reflected in the narrative. Analysis of patterns, interpretations of social domination, and their theoretical connections will be elaborated in the following subsections.

The presented data consistently show that Gregor Samsa occupies the most subordinate position in the Samsa family structure—economically, socially, and emotionally. Before his transformation, Gregor serves as the family's financial pillar, so the family values him solely based on his capacity as a breadwinner. After he loses the ability to work due to his physical transformation, his social position deteriorates drastically. His father exercises physical and symbolic power to control Gregor's interactions and distance him from other family members, while Grete—who initially shows care—gradually accepts and later reproduces this pattern of domination. Even the mother, who has the strongest emotional bond with Gregor, loses the authority to determine her relationship with him because access to Gregor is controlled by the father and Grete. Thus, all textual evidence indicates that Gregor exists in a condition where his identity, role, and social relationships are continually diminished until he no longer has space to participate in the life of the household.

This sub-finding can be summarized into several patterns. The first clear pattern is the presence of a power hierarchy within the family that positions the father as the most dominant figure, while Gregor occupies the lowest rank. This structure is reflected not only in the father's physical actions—such as forcing Gregor back into his room or preventing the mother from seeing him—but also in the father's ability to shape how the family evaluates and treats Gregor. Every action taken by the father serves one purpose: to maintain control and reaffirm his authority as the highest decision-maker.

The second pattern is the use of economic expectations as an instrument of domination. Before the transformation, Gregor's value in the family is tied solely to his economic function. Once he can no longer work, this economic function collapses, causing his social and emotional status to deteriorate as well. The family no longer views Gregor as a subject but as a burden disrupting household stability. The economic expectations that once justified their appreciation of Gregor become the very reason they seek to remove him when he fails to meet those demands.

The third pattern is the shift in affective relationships, particularly visible in Grete's changing attitude. At the beginning of the story, Grete is the most empathetic and attentive figure toward Gregor. She cares for him, brings food, and serves as a mediator between Gregor and their parents. However, as economic and social pressures within the family intensify, Grete begins to inherit her father's patterns of domination. She becomes firmer, harsher, and eventually more dominant than the father in determining Gregor's fate. This affective shift not only reflects changes in Grete's feelings but also illustrates how power can shift and be reproduced through everyday interactions within the household.

The fourth pattern is the presence of early dehumanization that emerges even before Gregor's physical transformation. Although Gregor transforms into an insect at the beginning of the story, signs of dehumanization were already evident long before. Gregor is treated more as an economic resource than as a family member with needs, emotions, and dignity. After the transformation, this dehumanization becomes explicit: Gregor is treated as a foreign creature, his movements are restricted, and his access to social interaction is removed. The physical transformation merely highlights a psychological and social reality that had long been in place.

Overall, these four patterns demonstrate that Gregor Samsa is situated within a systematic mechanism of familial domination. From hierarchical structure and economic expectations to the shift in affective relations and the process of dehumanization, these dynamics operate simultaneously and multilayeredly to place Gregor in a profound state of powerlessness. These findings provide an essential foundation for understanding how social domination within the family becomes the starting point for alienation, which will be discussed in the next subsection.

Gregor's Experience of Alienation Based on Seeman's Five Concepts of Alienation

A close reading of *The Metamorphosis* reveals that Gregor Samsa undergoes a series of alienative experiences that can be mapped through Seeman's five principal concepts of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, self-estrangement, and anomie. These five forms of alienation appear especially in Gregor's internal monologues, his views of his job, his responses to his transformed body, and his sense of place within the family after the transformation.

First, powerlessness appears when Gregor realizes that he despises his job but feels he has no choice but to continue. He knows that the company he works for is harsh and deeply distrustful of its employees; even minor lateness puts him at risk of losing his job. In several parts of the text, Gregor describes himself as someone who must keep working to repay the family's debts, even when his body and mind are exhausted. He never seriously considers resisting or quitting; instead, he accepts his situation as if no alternative course of life exists (Kafka, 1971, pp. 94–95).

Second, meaninglessness emerges when Gregor begins to question the purpose of his life. He becomes aware that the exhausting work commute, the cold relationship with his superior, and the pressure to meet targets provide no sense of meaning. After his transformation, this awareness intensifies when he realizes that all his sacrifices have not made him valued as a human being. At one point, Gregor imagines that if he were no longer present, his family would feel more at ease. Such reflections show that Gregor views his life as lacking a clear purpose beyond merely sustaining others.

Third, social isolation is evident in Gregor's drastically changing interactions with those around him. After becoming an insect, Gregor is rarely greeted, looked at, or spoken to by his family members. He listens to their conversations only from behind his door or from the corner of his room. Even when they are in the same space, the family avoids eye contact and rushes through their tasks. Gregor then chooses to hide under the sofa or behind furniture to avoid "disturbing" them. Over time, his presence shifts from being a member of the household to someone concealed from view.

Fourth, self-estrangement can be seen when Gregor loses connection with his deepest desires. Before the transformation, he had other aspirations—such as funding Grete's music education or living a freer life—but these were sacrificed for his job. After his transformation, Gregor gradually loses interest in the food he once enjoyed, becomes more drawn to crawling on the walls and ceiling, and feels estranged from his own body. At one point, he realizes that his newfound pleasures as an insect are no longer aligned with his memories of himself as a human being, placing him between two identities, neither of which he fully recognizes as "himself."

Fifth, anomie or the inability to adhere to societal and familial norms appears when Gregor realizes that the standards of being a "good son" and a "responsible breadwinner"—which he had always held—can no longer be met. He cannot leave his room, cannot work, and cannot fulfill familial or social expectations. The values that once guided his life—hard work, obedience to authority, and dedication to the family—turn into measures that continuously condemn his existence. In the final part of the story,

when Gregor decides to withdraw from the family's life, it becomes clear that he no longer has any normative framework that gives him a reason to remain.

These experiences can be summarized in the following table as an initial map of Gregor's alienation based on Seeman's five dimensions:

Table 2. Seeman's Five Forms of Alienation in Gregor Samsa's Experience

Dimension of Alienation (Seeman)	Evidence from the Text (Paraphrased)	Focus of Gregor's Experience
Powerlessness	Gregor hates his job but feels he has no choice because of the family's debts.	Feeling trapped in his job and unable to determine his own fate.
Meaninglessness	Gregor reflects that his exhausting routine provides no meaning and believes his family may feel relieved if he disappears.	Viewing his life as purposeless except for supporting the family.
Social isolation	After the transformation, Gregor is rarely spoken to, hidden in his room, and chooses to hide under the sofa.	Severed from social interaction and emotional closeness with the family.
Self-estrangement	Gregor loses interest in human food, enjoys crawling on walls, and feels estranged from his new body.	Detached from his former identity and no longer recognizing himself.
Anomie	Gregor can no longer fulfill his role as the family's provider and eventually decides to withdraw from life.	Loss of normative orientation and social role within the family and society.

The data in the table illustrate that Gregor's experience does not stop at a single dimension of alienation but instead progresses gradually—from powerlessness in the realm of work, to the loss of meaning, the severing of social ties, estrangement from the self, and finally the collapse of normative grounding. These five forms of alienation serve as an empirical foundation for further analysis of how alienation interweaves with social domination in the Samsa family, which will be elaborated in the next section.

The presented data show that Gregor's alienation is layered and mutually reinforcing. His alienation appears not only at the psychological level—such as powerlessness, anxiety, and loss of meaning—but also at the social level as his relationship with his family deteriorates. At the same time, this alienation evolves into a deeper existential problem in which Gregor no longer recognizes himself, loses his value orientation, and feels he has no place either in the family or in the world of work. These forms of alienation do not appear independently but operate in conjunction, revealing that Gregor's life collapses in a structured and systematic pattern: beginning with work pressures, followed by familial neglect, and culminating in the disappearance of self-identity.

These explanations reveal several notable patterns. The first pattern is that Gregor's alienation originates in the realm of work, where capitalist demands and the family's economic burden trap him in a job he does not desire. Gregor works not out of personal choice but out of obligation toward debts and the family's full dependence on his income. He lacks control over his time, space, and life, making the powerlessness in his job the initial foundation of his psychological alienation.

The second pattern shows that alienation then enters the intrapersonal realm, where Gregor experiences self-estrangement. After the transformation, he no longer recognizes his body, desires, or sources of happiness. His former interests disappear and are replaced by impulses unfamiliar to him as a human being. He becomes divided between his former identity—as a son and worker—and his new identity as a creature unintelligible within human social norms.

The third pattern demonstrates that this alienation creates a rupture between the "old" Gregor and the "new" Gregor. In several scenes, Gregor continues to think like a human and views himself as part of the family. Yet his body can no longer support that identity, trapping him between two

incompatible forms. This shift destabilizes his entire sense of self: he can no longer fulfill the roles of son, worker, or family member. His new identity is not a chosen one but an imposed identity that gives him no room to understand himself fully.

The fourth pattern emphasizes that Gregor's alienation deepens because of familial domination, particularly through the emotional and symbolic control exercised by his father and the shifting attitude of Grete. The family's pressures not only worsen Gregor's sense of powerlessness but also reinforce his position as someone "irrational," "unwanted," and "useless." At this point, the integration between Seeman's concept of alienation and Pratto's theory of social dominance becomes apparent: familial domination strengthens Gregor's psychological and existential alienation, while this alienation makes Gregor even more susceptible to domination because he no longer has the capacity to resist or maintain his identity.

The conclusion drawn from these patterns shows that Gregor's alienation is a gradual and interconnected process: beginning with pressures from the capitalist work system, entering the realm of inner life through self-estrangement, severing his identity, and finally deepening through familial domination that reproduces Gregor's powerlessness. Thus, Gregor's alienation is not merely the result of physical transformation but the outcome of social structures and power relations that slowly and systematically erode his dignity and identity.

The Interaction Between Social Domination and Alienation and the Theoretical Integration of Seeman-Pratto

The data in *The Metamorphosis* show that Gregor's experience of alienation cannot be separated from the patterns of social domination exercised by his father and later reproduced by Grete. In several early sections following the transformation, Gregor's father appears as a figure who uses his physical strength and authority to control Gregor's place within the household. After witnessing Gregor's transformed body, the father does not attempt to communicate; instead, he immediately pushes Gregor back into his room with forceful movements, using a stick and his feet to drive Gregor backward until he is trapped behind the door (Kafka, 1971, pp. 89–90). This action not only creates physical distance but also marks the beginning of Gregor's exclusion from the family space.

Other data show that important decisions concerning Gregor are made unilaterally by the father and later supported by Grete. In one fragment, Gregor's mother pleads to be allowed to visit him, insisting that Gregor remains her poor child and deserves compassion. However, her request is denied, and she is physically restrained or pulled back by Grete and the father on the grounds of health concerns and household order (Kafka, 1971, p. 114). Here it becomes evident that Gregor's emotional and physical access to his mother is controlled by other family members; Gregor has no voice in determining his own relationship with her. This data also illustrates that Gregor becomes an object of decisions rather than a subject capable of participating in them.

Grete's evolving role is crucial for understanding the interconnectedness of domination and alienation. Initially, Grete assumes the role of caretaker: she brings food, cleans Gregor's room, and becomes the only family member who regularly enters his space. However, over time—especially when Grete begins working and the family's needs shift—the data show a sharp change in her attitude. In one conversation, Grete tells her father that Gregor's presence in the house has become unbearable. She states that they all work hard and cannot continue enduring the "suffering" caused by Gregor and then suggests that the family must get rid of him so they can live in peace (Kafka, 1971, p. 133). This statement indicates that Grete is no longer merely following her father's lead but actively voicing the idea of Gregor's removal.

The narrative data also show how the family's structure of domination shapes Gregor's self-perception. In the middle and later parts of the story, Gregor rarely attempts to leave his room or show himself. He often hides under the sofa or in corners of the room so that the family will not see him, especially after realizing that his presence triggers fear, anger, or irritation (Kafka, 1971). He comes to accept that his role in the family has disappeared and that his presence has become a source of difficulty for the very people who once depended on him.

In the final part of the story, Gregor overhears his family discussing their future without him. They talk about the burdens they must bear, the mother's health, and the need to move forward with their lives. Gregor realizes that the family will live better if he is no longer there. He then stops eating and allows his

body to weaken until he eventually dies peacefully after thinking lovingly of his family (Kafka, 1971, p. 135). This data shows that the family’s perception of him as a burden has been fully internalized by Gregor, leading him to view his disappearance as a “reasonable” and necessary decision.

When viewed through the lens of character relations, the data reveal a clear relational pattern: the father holds the highest authority, Grete grows into a supportive figure who continues the father’s mindset, the mother remains pressured in the middle, and Gregor becomes the member with the least control. These relationships are reflected not only in dialogue and family decisions but also in spatial arrangements—for instance, Gregor’s room becomes an enclosed space far from the family’s common areas and main activity spaces.

These situations can be summarized as follows:

Table 3. Data on the Interaction Between Family Domination and Gregor Samsa’s Alienation

No	Family Situation (Paraphrased from Kafka, 1971)	Impact on Gregor’s Experience
1	The father drives Gregor back into his room with physical force after seeing his transformed body (pp. 89–90).	Gregor is expelled from the family space and confined to his room.
2	The mother tries to visit Gregor as her “poor child,” but she is stopped and pulled back by the father and Grete (p. 114).	Gregor loses access to his mother’s emotional support.
3	Grete states that Gregor’s presence is no longer tolerable and proposes that the family remove him (p. 133).	Gregor is regarded as a burden rather than a family member.
4	The family discusses their future without Gregor; Gregor realizes they will be better off without him (p. 135).	Gregor accepts the idea of disappearing as natural and necessary.
5	Gregor hides in the corner of his room and stops eating until he eventually dies (p. 135).	Gregor slowly withdraws from life and from his own identity.

The data in this table show that every act of domination within the family—whether performed by the father or later continued by Grete—directly corresponds to changes in how Gregor perceives himself and his position in the household. Domination, which initially appears in the form of physical coercion and unilateral decisions, gradually enters Gregor’s own understanding of his existence, leading him to withdraw entirely from his family and ultimately from his own life. All of these data form an essential basis for understanding how social domination and alienation not only coexist but are fundamentally intertwined in Gregor Samsa’s life trajectory.

The following figure presents a conceptual flowchart summarizing the causal relationship between social domination, alienative experiences, and Gregor Samsa’s loss of identity as depicted in *The Metamorphosis*. The diagram functions as a concise visualization illustrating how unequal power relations within the Samsa family trigger the psychological and social estrangement that Gregor experiences. By simplifying these interconnected phenomena into three primary stages, the diagram clarifies the theoretical mechanisms operating behind character dynamics and highlights the continuity between Social Dominance Theory (Pratto) and the concept of Alienation (Seeman) as the analytical foundation of this study.

Figure 1. Flow of the Interaction Between Social Domination, Alienation, and Loss of Identity in Gregor Samsa



The diagram illustrates that social domination constitutes the initial point structuring Gregor’s entire alienative experience. The father’s dominance—later reinforced by Grete’s legitimization—forms

a hierarchical pattern that places Gregor in a powerless position with no control over his relationships, roles, or existence within the family. This dominant-subordinate relationship generates the alienative conditions described by Seeman, ranging from powerlessness to self-estrangement. These alienative states extend beyond social relations and penetrate deeper into existential realms, where Gregor no longer recognizes or understands himself as part of the family or society. The final stage of this process is the loss of identity, reflected in Gregor's acceptance of the idea that his family will live better without him. Thus, the diagram demonstrates that the loss of identity is not a direct consequence of Gregor's physical transformation but rather the result of the interaction between social domination and alienation, which gradually erodes his dignity and existence.

The data presented show that family domination over Gregor does not merely generate temporary psychological pressure but creates layered and continuous alienative conditions. The father's dominance, later reproduced by Grete, forms a power structure that determines how Gregor is treated, evaluated, and positioned within the family. These power relations are not merely issues of emotion or harsh behavior but constitute an internal social structure that restricts Gregor's movement, regulates his access to emotional relationships, and reshapes how other family members perceive him. Therefore, Gregor's alienation does not arise simply from his physical transformation but constitutes a direct consequence of structural and systemic domination that affects all aspects of his identity and social role.

Patterns emerge from these findings. The first pattern shows that social domination functions as the initial trigger for alienation. The father's actions—expelling Gregor, limiting his access to interaction, and controlling discourse about him—demonstrate that Gregor is placed in a subordinate position from the outset. The family hierarchy, with the father at its center, becomes the foundation for the various forms of alienation Gregor experiences.

The second pattern shows that the family's social legitimization reinforces Gregor's position as "the other," an individual no longer regarded as an integral part of the household. When Grete begins to justify the father's actions and actively advocates for Gregor's removal, the father's power no longer stands alone; it gains social endorsement from another family member. This legitimizing process widens and deepens the social distance between Gregor and his family.

The third pattern shows that alienation accelerates the process of dehumanization, both physically and socially. After losing his economic role and social rights, Gregor is not only perceived as a threat or nuisance but gradually treated as something other than human. He is hidden, avoided, and discussed as though he has no awareness or emotions. This dehumanization makes the family feel that removing Gregor is "reasonable," while Gregor himself begins to doubt his own dignity and worth.

The fourth pattern shows that integrating Seeman's and Pratto's theories offers the most comprehensive framework for explaining the relationship between power structures and individual identity. Social Dominance Theory (Pratto) explains how family hierarchies and ideological legitimization shape the treatment of Gregor, while the concept of alienation (Seeman) captures Gregor's inner experience as he faces these pressures. Integrating both frameworks produces a holistic picture of how unequal power relations can dismantle a person's identity from within.

The conclusion from these patterns is that social domination and alienation operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. Domination generates alienation, and alienation accelerates the collapse of Gregor's identity, ultimately erasing his position as a human being within the family structure. The theoretical integration provides a strong analytical foundation for understanding the complexity of Gregor's experiences in the narrative.

Discussion

The findings show that Gregor Samsa's experience in *The Metamorphosis* is an accumulation of familial social domination and a simultaneous, gradual process of alienation. The key results indicate that Gregor is placed in a subordinate position due to economic pressure, the patriarchal structure of the family, and the reproduction of authority by Grete. These conditions trigger the five forms of alienation identified by Seeman—from powerlessness to anomie—which ultimately lead to the loss of Gregor's identity as both a human being and a family member. The integration of Pratto's Social Dominance Theory with Seeman's Alienation Theory demonstrates that power relations operate not

only as external structures but also internally through the family's social legitimization that permeates Gregor's consciousness.

Explanatorily, the relationship between social domination and Gregor's alienation occurs because the power structure within the Samsa family is hierarchical and inflexible. Gregor's father holds the highest position in this hierarchy, and therefore all decisions concerning Gregor's existence are shaped by the father's interests, perceptions, and authority. When Grete later internalizes this pattern of domination, the family structure transforms into a social space that produces and reinforces alienation. Gregor is not only forced to accept his physical transformation but also compelled to accept the altered social meaning of himself. This explains why Gregor's alienation becomes not merely an inner psychological condition but a structured existential experience shaped by power relations.

In comparative context, this study extends previous scholarship in three major ways. First, unlike existentialist analyses such as those by Gültekin (2025), Manzar (2024), and Tekin (2023), which focus on the absurdity of modern human experience, this study demonstrates that Gregor's absurdity cannot be separated from the micro-level power structures within the family. In other words, absurdity is not merely a metaphysical condition but a product of social domination. Second, unlike economic-capitalist interpretations such as those of Evans (2021), Romdon and Muslim (2020), and Grecu et al. (2022), this study finds that workplace pressure is only the initial layer of Gregor's alienation; the more dominant trigger emerges from family relations that expel him from the social sphere. Third, compared with gender- and social-relational studies such as Sari (2024) and Marshburn et al. (2023), this study contributes a new perspective by simultaneously integrating Seeman's and Pratto's theories, enabling power relations and alienation to be understood as a single interconnected process rather than separate phenomena. The novelty of this study lies in this theoretical synthesis: interpreting alienation in literature not merely as a psychological condition but as a structural effect of social domination within the family.

From an interpretive standpoint, the findings of this study hold significance in three key aspects. Historically, Kafka's work reflects the conditions of early twentieth-century European society, when industrialization and patriarchal family structures became increasingly dominant, making Gregor's alienation not merely an individual phenomenon but a representation of the modern human crisis within a system centered on productivity. This observation aligns with studies on modernity, which show that industrialization, bureaucratization, and the dominance of instrumental rationality generate structural forms of alienation, as described by Marx, Weber, and Durkheim through concepts such as alienation, the iron cage, and anomie (Kalekin-Fishman, 2006; Podvoyskiy, 2022). Contemporary research also emphasizes that modernity produces social role fragmentation, weakened interpersonal relationships, and heightened psychological isolation, which intensify alienative experiences in both family life and the workplace (Ran, 2025). In addition, philosophical critiques from phenomenological traditions, such as Arendt's notion of world-alienation, demonstrate that modernity creates existential distance between individuals and their lifeworlds (Kovács, 2012), while theories of epistemic alienation show how tensions between social knowledge and personal experience deepen modern human estrangement (Barry, 2024). Thus, Gregor's alienation in *The Metamorphosis* can be understood as a profound metaphor for the condition of modern humanity trapped in socio-industrial structures that demand productivity while eroding identity and human relationality.

Socially, this study shows that the family is not merely a space of affection but an arena of power capable of producing exclusion and dehumanization when its relations are unequal. Gregor loses his social place not because he becomes an insect but because he can no longer fulfill the economic value imposed upon him. This finding aligns with research on family power dynamics, which demonstrates that power distribution within families strongly determines how members are evaluated and treated; unequal power often leads to exclusion, subordination, and emotional dysfunction (Coben, 2011; Lindahl et al., 2004). Studies on gender and family decision-making likewise show that domination by one member diminishes the authority, voice, and social legitimacy of others, particularly within families shaped by strong patriarchal structures (Coskuner-Balli & Cross, 2017; Owoputi et al., 2024). Cross-cultural research further confirms that familial power shapes mechanisms of control that restrict emotional access and facilitate the exclusion of members who are deemed unproductive or misaligned with household economic interests (Sikhakhane & Roman, 2025). Accordingly, Gregor's experience

illustrates how intrafamilial power relations can become a source of dehumanization when human worth is reduced to economic function.

Ideologically, the findings reveal how legitimizing myths operate within the Samsa family: the family justifies Gregor's removal as a socially reasonable and even "moral" action undertaken for household stability, making their domination appear rational and unavoidable. This mechanism aligns with research on legitimizing myths showing that social groups often construct moral narratives to preserve hierarchies, normalize power, and justify exclusion—whether through political myths, symbolic moral narratives, or selectively constructed historical accounts (Bennett, 2022; Esch, 2010). Studies on media and contemporary society also demonstrate that legitimizing myths shape public perception and generate a sense of pseudo-cohesion that masks exclusionary practices and inequality (Plotichkina, 2020). Moreover, research in economic and organizational contexts indicates that myths of efficiency or meritocracy frequently serve to legitimize inequality and obscure dehumanizing practices beneath moral or technical rationalities (Prokopenko et al., 2025). In this way, legitimizing myths within the Samsa household function as an ideology of domination that renders Gregor's alienation seemingly correct, logical, and inevitable.

From a reflective perspective, the findings of this study have both functions and dysfunctions. Functionally, the study enriches the understanding of modern literature by providing a multidisciplinary analysis that integrates power relations theory and alienation theory, thereby opening new interpretive space for understanding how literary characters reflect oppressive social structures. Dysfunctionally, the dominant-subordinate dynamics in the Samsa family show that family structures can reproduce symbolic violence and dehumanization. A family that should serve as a protective space instead becomes a site of exclusion, control, and identity formation that restricts an individual's existential space. This pattern aligns with research on family violence and dehumanization, which shows that when individuals are perceived as less human—through mechanisms such as diminished agency, objectification, or negative stereotyping—perpetrators more readily justify aggression, domination, and control (Cheng et al., 2025; Sáez et al., 2022). In family contexts, dehumanization is often intensified by unequal power structures, as seen in teen dating violence or intimate partner violence, where emotional and relational dominance silences victims (Morera et al., 2022). Other studies show that when family members are treated as objects or threats, patterns of exclusion and removal become morally normalized, deepening cycles of violence and eroded dignity (Gamarel et al., 2022). Thus, the Samsa family dynamic illustrates how intrafamilial power relations can normalize dehumanization and marginalize individuals who lose their instrumental value.

Based on these insights, several action plans emerge from this study. First, there is a need to strengthen social literacy to recognize power relations within families so that harmful patterns of domination do not develop. Second, educational and cultural approaches must emphasize egalitarian family relations in which an individual's worth is not determined by economic function. Third, in the context of literary education, interpretive frameworks that integrate psychological, social, and ideological dimensions should be expanded so that literature is not viewed solely as an aesthetic text but also as a structural reflection of social reality. These discussions affirm that Gregor Samsa's experience—from domination to alienation to loss of identity—is the result of the interaction between familial power structures and modern socioeconomic pressures. This study fills a gap in the literature by offering an interdisciplinary reading that demonstrates that alienation is not simply a consequence of physical transformation or existential absurdity but the outcome of power relations that continuously erode human dignity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Gregor Samsa's experience in *The Metamorphosis* results from the complex interaction between familial social domination and a gradually intensifying process of alienation. The findings show that social domination—enforced primarily by the father and later reproduced by Grete—places Gregor in a subordinate position that slowly erodes his social,

psychological, and existential identity. The sequence of alienation he undergoes, beginning with powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, self-estrangement, and ultimately anomie, demonstrates that his estrangement is not merely the consequence of physical transformation but a manifestation of the family's power structure that removes him from social and emotional space. In the end, the dissolution of Gregor's identity represents the culmination of mutually reinforcing dynamics of domination and alienation.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in its theoretical integration of Seeman's concept of alienation with Pratto's Social Dominance Theory as an analytical framework for interpreting modern literature. The study offers a new perspective by showing that alienation does not originate solely from economic systems or existential absurdity, as widely discussed in previous scholarship, but is also a product of micro-level power relations within the family. This approach expands current insights into how literary characters can represent repressive social structures and enriches Kafka studies by demonstrating that Gregor's psychological dynamics cannot be separated from the ideological and power structures of domestic life. These findings contribute meaningfully to literary studies, family sociology, and power relation studies, and open broader interdisciplinary avenues for critical interpretation.

This research also has limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis focuses only on one character and his connection to family structure, and therefore does not examine broader social contexts such as societal structures, the historical development of patriarchal culture, or the dynamics of labor during the period in which Kafka wrote the text. Additionally, the study relies solely on library data and does not employ comparative analysis with Kafka's other works, which could further deepen the understanding of domination and alienation. Future research may expand the analysis by comparing this text with other works that explore similar themes or by incorporating historical, psychoanalytic, feminist, or critical theory approaches to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of domination and alienation in modern literature.

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