

DEADLY AND DOMESTIC: YOR FORGER'S PERFORMANCE OF DUAL FEMININITIES IN *SPY × FAMILY*

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the dual performance of femininity embodied by Yor Forger in the first season of the anime *Spy x Family*. As a wife and mother, Yor performs a socially idealized femininity characterized by care, emotional availability, and accommodation, while as the “Thorn Princess,” she embodies physical strength, autonomy, decisiveness, and violence. This study aims to examine how Yor performs these contrasting forms of femininity, how her assassin identity challenges conventional gender expectations, and what tensions emerge from the collision between her maternal and assassin identities. Employing a qualitative approach, the study uses visual and discourse analysis to examine purposively selected scenes from Season 1, focusing on Yor’s domestic interactions, her transformation into the Thorn Princess, and moments in which her maternal and assassin identities intersect. Drawing on Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity and R. W. Connell’s concepts of emphasized femininity and gender order, the analysis demonstrates that Yor’s femininity is constructed through repeated domestic practices while simultaneously disrupted by her physical power and capacity for violence. The findings further show that her two identities are not entirely separate: her capacity for violence becomes a means of maternal protection, blurring the boundary between the “good mother” and the “dangerous woman.” The study concludes that Yor’s character presents femininity as an ongoing negotiation between socially regulated expectations and individual agency, illustrating how anime can reimagine conventional gender roles through contradictory yet interconnected performances of womanhood.

Keywords: anime studies; femininity; gender performativity; *Spy x Family*; Yor Forger

ABSTRAK. Artikel ini mengkaji performativitas ganda femininitas yang diwujudkan oleh Yor Forger dalam musim pertama anime *Spy x Family*. Sebagai seorang istri dan ibu, Yor menampilkan femininitas yang diidealkan secara sosial, yang ditandai oleh kepedulian, ketersediaan emosional, dan sikap akomodatif. Sementara itu, sebagai “Thorn Princess”, ia menampilkan kekuatan fisik, otonomi, ketegasan, dan kekerasan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana Yor menampilkan bentuk-bentuk femininitas yang kontras tersebut, bagaimana identitasnya sebagai pembunuh bayaran menantang ekspektasi gender konvensional, serta ketegangan apa yang muncul dari pertemuan antara identitasnya sebagai ibu dan sebagai pembunuh bayaran. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan analisis visual dan wacana terhadap adegan-adegan yang dipilih secara purposive dari musim pertama, dengan berfokus pada interaksi domestik Yor, transformasinya menjadi Thorn Princess, serta momen-momen ketika identitasnya sebagai ibu dan pembunuh bayaran saling beririsan. Dengan menggunakan konsep performativitas gender Judith Butler serta konsep femininitas yang diidealkan (emphasized femininity) dan tatanan gender dari R. W. Connell, analisis menunjukkan bahwa femininitas Yor dikonstruksi melalui praktik-praktik domestik yang berulang, sekaligus diganggu oleh kekuatan fisik dan kapasitasnya untuk melakukan kekerasan. Temuan penelitian selanjutnya menunjukkan bahwa kedua identitas tersebut tidak sepenuhnya terpisah: kapasitasnya untuk melakukan kekerasan menjadi sarana untuk melindungi secara maternal, sehingga mengaburkan batas antara “ibu yang baik” dan “Perempuan berbahaya”. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa karakter Yor merepresentasikan femininitas sebagai suatu proses negosiasi yang terus berlangsung antara ekspektasi yang diatur secara sosial dan agensi individual, sekaligus menunjukkan bagaimana anime dapat membayangkan kembali peran gender konvensional melalui performativitas femininitas yang kontradiktif tetapi saling berkaitan.

Keywords: femininitas; kajian anime; performativitas gender; *Spy x Family*; Yor Forger

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Japanese popular culture, few anime characters have captured global attention quite like Yor Forger from *Spy x Family* (2022-present). Created by Wit Studio and CloverWorks, the series debuted in April 2022 and rapidly became one of the most-watched anime both in Japan and worldwide, largely through streaming services like Netflix and Crunchyroll. Its critical acclaim was cemented when it won “Best TV Series” at the 2023 Tokyo Anime Award Festival (*PREVIOUS WINNERS | TOKYO ANIME AWARD FESTIVAL 2026*, n.d.). The source

manga by Tatsuya Endo had already sold over 21 million copies by May 2022 (*SPY×FAMILY | 声優・キャラクター・あらすじ・配信・アニメ - コミックナタリー*, n.d.), demonstrating the franchise’s remarkable reach across different media. Yet beyond box office numbers and viewing statistics, *Spy x Family* marks an important moment in how Japanese animation portrays gender, family structures, and personal identity.

The narrative centers on an unconventional family unit: Loid, a spy; Yor, an assassin; and Anya, a telepathic child. Each harbors secrets unknown to the others, and their hidden lives unfold through moments

that are both comedic and emotionally layered. Among this trio, Yor stands out as a particularly fascinating character. She navigates a duality seldom seen in *shōnen* anime heroines, functioning simultaneously as a nurturing mother figure and a deadly professional killer. This contradiction opens up questions about how femininity is enacted, managed, and fragmented across different contexts. During daytime hours, Yor maintains her cover as a city hall employee, playing the role of a soft-spoken wife and caring mother. Her household behavior reflects politeness, warmth, and self-sacrifice, qualities closely tied to Japan's longstanding "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) cultural ideal (Koyama, 2013). After dark, however, she becomes the "Thorn Princess", a skilled assassin known for precision and lethal grace. These are not simply two different jobs; they represent fundamentally different ways of being a woman, each shaped by its own set of social expectations, visual codes, and power dynamics.

This split identity makes Yor an ideal subject for exploring gender not as something inherent, but as something actively constructed through repetition. Judith Butler's influential argument suggests that gender is not a fixed essence but rather emerges from "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 2004, 2014). From this perspective, gender is continually performed and reinforced through physical movements, ways of speaking, and everyday interactions that seem natural only because they are constantly repeated. Yor's movement between tenderness and violence, between motherhood and assassination, illustrates this performative nature of gender. Her identities are maintained through actions that sometimes align with conventional gender expectations and sometimes break away from them entirely. The purpose of this study is to examine how Yor's character performs these contrasting versions of femininity and what these reveals about the social construction of gender roles in contemporary media.

Understanding Yor also requires situating her within broader patterns of gender organization in Japanese society, where patriarchal ideas continue to shape cultural narratives. Connell's concept of emphasized femininity (R. Connell, 1987; R. W. Connell, 2005) helps illuminate this context. According to Connell, emphasized femininity represents a culturally promoted version of womanhood built around qualities like empathy, accommodation, and emotional caretaking, traits often defined in relation to and subordination to masculine dominance. Yor's domestic persona clearly reflects this model. Her assassin identity,

however, operates differently. It embodies what we might call transgressive femininity, a performance that claims traditionally masculine traits such as physical strength, independence, and aggression, while still maintaining certain feminine visual markers. This internal contradiction positions Yor both as a product of existing gender hierarchies and as a challenge to them.

Scholarship on gender representation in Japanese animation has historically moved between two opposing viewpoints: criticism of objectified and sexualized portrayals of women versus celebration of empowered magical girl (*mahō shōjo*) narratives (Allison, 2019; Napier, 2016; Saito, 2014). Though *Spy x Family* takes a more realistic and humorous approach to gender dynamics, it also engages with a longer tradition in anime where female characters oscillate between empowerment and constraint. Classic works like *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) featured women embedded in technologically advanced or militarized settings. Characters who possessed intelligence and capability yet remained caught within patriarchal and institutional frameworks (Lamarre, 2009; Napier, 2016). More recent series such as *Attack on Titan* (2013-2023) continue this pattern, presenting heroines like Mikasa Ackerman who display physical prowess and emotional control but never fully transcend gendered power structures (Cavallaro, 2010; *The Japanese Journal of Animation Studies* 22(1): 43-54 (2021), 2021). Within this history, Yor Forger's dual existence pushes the conversation forward by situating female power not in dramatic rebellion or dystopian futures, but in the mundane negotiations of daily life. *Spy x Family* reimagines what it means to be a woman not through sexual spectacle or magical metamorphosis, but through the everyday tensions between caring for others, keeping secrets, and simply surviving, contradictions that shape modern femininity itself.

The scope of this study focuses specifically on Yor's character development across the first season of the anime, analyzing key scenes where her domestic and assassin roles intersect or conflict. Guided by Butler's concept of gender performativity and Connell's concepts of emphasized femininity and gender order, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How does Yor perform a socially idealized form of femininity through her role as a wife and mother? (2) In what ways does her identity as the Thorn Princess challenge or disrupt conventional gender expectations? and (3) What tensions emerge from Yor's negotiation between her domestic and assassin identities? By addressing these

questions, this study contributes to the humanities by offering fresh insights into how popular media texts such as anime function as sites of cultural critique and imagination. Within cultural studies, it demonstrates how entertainment media can reveal and challenge dominant ideologies about gender. For literary and narrative analysis, it shows how character construction in serialized storytelling can embody complex theoretical concepts in accessible ways. More broadly, it adds to our understanding of how Japanese popular culture continues to negotiate between traditional gender ideals and contemporary social changes. Ultimately, this article argues that Yor Forger extends beyond fiction to mirror the tensions that many women navigate today. In a world that expects women to be simultaneously nurturing yet ambitious, gentle yet strong, accommodating yet self-reliant, Yor's split existence dramatizes the contradictory demands placed on gender performance. Through her story *Spy x Family* transcends its premise as an espionage comedy to become a cultural commentary on the complex expectations placed on women and the tensions involved in negotiating multiple versions of the self.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach centered on visual and discourse analysis, examining only the first season of the *Spy x Family* anime adaptation. The decision to focus on Season 1 is intentional and practical: Yor Forger's dual expressions of femininity, as both caring mother and skilled assassin, are fully introduced and consistently portrayed throughout these episodes. While subsequent seasons continue exploring these roles, they do not fundamentally alter the patterns established in the first season. Therefore, Season 1 offers a complete and coherent foundation for analyzing how Yor performs gender across her two identities.

The analysis treats the anime as an audiovisual text rather than relying on the original manga. This choice recognizes that Yor's femininity is conveyed not just through dialogue or plot, but through visual and auditory elements: the way she moves, speaks, dresses, and how the camera frames her body. Elements like vocal tone, physical gestures, costume choices, and shot composition all function as meaning-making tools that shape how viewers understand both her domestic and assassin personas (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020; Machin & Mayr, 2023). The anime's audiovisual language allows for a richer reading of how femininity is constructed and communicated across different social contexts.

Data for this study comes from carefully selected scenes in Season 1 where Yor's contrasting roles are most clearly demonstrated. The scenes were selected according to three criteria: (1) scenes representing Yor's performance of socially idealized femininity in her roles as wife and mother; (2) scenes representing her identity as the "Thorn Princess" and its challenge to conventional gender expectations; and (3) scenes in which her domestic and assassin identities overlap, intersect, or come into tension. These criteria were used to ensure that the selected data directly corresponded to the three analytical dimensions of the study. The selected scenes include everyday interactions with Loid and Anya, sequences depicting Yor's transformation into the Thorn Princess, and moments in which her capacity for violence becomes connected to her maternal role.

For transparency and possible reproducibility, the principal scenes analyzed in this study are specified as follows. Episode 2 includes the scene in which the Shopkeeper contacts Yor and addresses her as the "Thorn Princess," followed by Yor's transformation from her domestic persona into her assassin persona and her subsequent assassination mission against Deputy Secretary Brennan. Episode 5 includes the scene in which Yor imagines eliminating individuals who might threaten Anya at Eden Academy, highlighting the intersection between her maternal instincts and her assassin identity. Episode 6 provides several key scenes of Yor's domestic performance, including taking Anya to collect her school uniform, walking with her after leaving the tailor, advising Anya about the appropriate use of physical strength, and reacting emotionally after Anya hits Damian. The episode also contains the most significant collision between Yor's maternal and assassin identities, when she confronts Anya's kidnappers and explicitly connects her capacity for violence with her role as a mother. These scenes constitute the primary corpus for the close visual and discourse analysis presented in the Results and Discussion.

The study draws on two main theoretical perspectives to interpret this material. The first is Butler's idea of gender performativity (Butler, 2007, 2014), which argues that gender is not something we inherently are, but something we continuously do. According to Butler, gender identity emerges through repeated actions, gestures, and behaviors that create the appearance of a natural, stable self. There is no "real" gender hiding beneath these performances but the performance itself is what creates gender. This framework helps explain how Yor's femininity exists through her actions for example the way she speaks softly at home, prepares meals, shows concern

for her family, or conversely, how she moves with deadly efficiency during assassinations. Each gesture contributes to constructing a particular version of womanhood appropriate to that moment and setting.

The second framework comes from Connell's work on emphasized femininity and gender hierarchies (R. Connell, 1987; R. W. Connell, 2005). Connell describes emphasized femininity as a culturally idealized form of womanhood organized around being nurturing, accommodating, and supportive. These are qualities that often position women in relation to and beneath male authority. This concept illuminates Yor's domestic role, where she displays warmth, deference, and care in ways that align with traditional expectations of wives and mothers. However, Yor's assassin identity challenges this model. As the "Thorn Princess", she claims qualities typically coded as masculine, physical dominance, emotional control, decisiveness, and the capacity for violence. This creates what we might call a transgressive femininity that operates outside conventional gender boundaries while still being recognizably feminine in appearance and presentation. Connell's framework helps explain why these two versions of Yor feel contradictory within the same social and cultural system.

Together, these theories provide complementary lenses for analysis. Butler's performativity explains how Yor's different femininities are enacted moment to moment through embodied practice, while Connell's structural approach clarifies why certain performances are valued or marginalized within broader power relations. The combination allows this study to examine both the micro-level details of Yor's gestures and speech, and the macro-level social meanings those performances carry.

The analytical process follows several systematic steps. First, relevant scenes from Season 1 were identified and reviewed multiple times to notice patterns in how Yor's character is visually and narratively constructed. Second, specific moments within these scenes were selected for detailed examination. Moment where the contrast between domestic and violent femininity is particularly sharp or where tensions between these roles become visible. Third, each moment was analyzed using the theoretical frameworks outlined above, paying attention to visual elements (clothing, body position, facial expression, camera angle), auditory elements (tone of voice, background music, sound effects), and narrative context (what is happening in the story, who else is present, what social expectations are at play). Finally, these observations were synthesized to

identify broader themes about how Yor navigates conflicting demands on her gender performance.

This approach is qualitative and interpretive rather than quantitative. It does not aim to measure or generalize across all anime representations of women, but rather to offer a deep and contextual reading of how one particular character embodies contradictions within contemporary femininity. The goal is to show how specific audiovisual choices in *Spy x Family* make visible the ongoing labor involved in performing gender. The constant adjustments, the management of contradictions, and the limited spaces for resistance within a system that defines acceptable womanhood in narrow and often conflicting ways. By focusing closely on Yor's visual and discursive construction, this study reveals broader insights about how popular media both reflects and shapes cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the analysis, examining how Yor Forger's two identities, a devoted mother and a feared assassin, reflect and challenge different understandings of what it means to be a woman. Drawing from key scenes across Season 1 of *Spy x Family*, the discussion explores three interconnected dimensions of Yor's character. Together, these dimensions respond directly to the study's core questions about how femininity is performed, disrupted, and negotiated in contemporary anime.

The first part of this section takes a closer look at how Yor carries herself within the domestic space. Through the way she speaks, moves, and makes decisions as a mother and wife, Yor enacts a version of femininity that closely mirrors what Connell describes as emphasized femininity, a socially rewarded form of womanhood built around care, selflessness, and emotional availability. By examining these everyday moments, this section reveals how deeply ingrained these expectations are, even within a fictional narrative, and how Yor navigates them as part of her daily life.

The second part shifts focus to Yor's life as the Thorn Princess. Here, the analysis explores how her assassin persona challenges and even breaks conventional gender boundaries. Through her physical strength, independent decision-making, and the emotional complexity she displays during combat, Yor steps outside the framework of traditional femininity in ways that are both striking and meaningful. This section unpacks what it means for a character to reclaim power and autonomy while

still existing within a world that defines womanhood in narrow terms.

The third and final part brings these two identities together, examining what happens in the spaces where Yor's roles as mother and assassin collide. These are the moments where the study's deepest insights emerge, a moment where personal conflicts, moral dilemmas, and the weight of constantly performing different selves become most visible. Rather than treating these tensions as simple contradiction, this section reads them as evidence of a more complex and human experience. The ongoing negotiation of being a woman in a world that demands many, often conflicting, things at once

1. Performing Socially Idealized Femininity as a Mother

Within the domestic scenes of *Spy x Family*, Yor Forger's portrayal as a mother is wrapped in the quiet aesthetics of care, softness, and moral goodness. The way she carries herself, her gentle smiles, her hesitant gestures, and her slightly lowered gaze, build a visual language of what Connell (R. Connell, 1987; R. W. Connell, 2005) describes as emphasized femininity, a way of being a woman that society rewards for its warmth, compliance, and emotional generosity. Yor clearly aspires to become the "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) figure that has long been embedded in Japanese ideas about what women should be. Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler, 2007) helps us understand how this maternal version of Yor does not simply exist. It is built, piece by piece, through repeated actions: the apologies, the smiles, the small rituals of domestic life. Together, it creates the impression of a natural and stable feminine identity. Yor constantly measures herself against an imagined standard of motherhood, looking to Loid and Anya for signs that she is doing well enough. This need for validation becomes especially visible in moments where she blushes at a compliment or spirals into worry over something she sees as her own failure, showing how femininity, in practice, is closely tied to systems of watching and being approved of.

And yet, beneath the clumsiness and self-doubt, Yor's maternal performance carries its own quiet agency. Her decision to enter a fabricated marriage, after all, is not accidental, but it is a calculated move to find safety and social acceptance in a world that does not treat unmarried women kindly. As Connell points out, emphasized femininity is never simply about giving in, it is always a negotiation. Women reproduce these gender norms not because they are helpless, but because doing so is often the most

practical way to get by within a system that was not built for them. Yor's homemaking, then, is both heartfelt and strategic, a careful dance of affection, insecurity, and smart compliance that lays bare the emotional work required to keep idealized femininity alive and functioning. This negotiation comes into sharp focus in Episode 6 (Season 1), which offers a series of small but meaningful domestic moments that show just how Yor performs socially idealized motherhood through her body, her voice, and her emotions.



Picture 1. Yor Performing Maternal Compliance in Response to Loid's Request

The first of these moments arrives when Loid asks Yor to take Anya to pick up her school uniform at the tailor. Yor responds with an easy, "Of course, leave it to me". Her face bright and open as the camera moves in close. On the surface, this is a simple act of compliance and care, two qualities that sit at the heart of what Connell identifies as emphasized femininity. A woman's role, in this framework, is often understood through her willingness to serve and to be emotionally present for others. But if we look a little deeper, Yor's enthusiastic response also hides a layer of calculation. She understands, whether consciously or not, that fulfilling her part as a mother helps keep their made-up family together. Her compliance, in other words, is not passive, it is adaptive, a form of agency that helps her stay safe and accepted within a rigid social world.



Picture 2. Yor Performing Maternal Affection through Physical Closeness with Anya

The next moment unfolds gently as Yor and Anya walk side by side after leaving the tailor. In picture 2, Yor reaches for her daughter's hand and softly asks "Shall we stop by the park?" Her voice is warm, her pace unhurried, and the camera settles behind them in a way that feels intimate and protective. This is what Butler would call the ritual

repetition of gendered acts (Butler, 2007). The small, everyday gestures like holding hands, speaking gently, and smiling that slowly build and reinforce the identity of “mother”. These moments may feel spontaneous, but they are also quietly regulatory. They shape how Yor sees herself while teaching both Anya and the viewer to recognize her as a maternal figure. Through these little acts of affection, Yor both reproduces and internalizes the version of femininity that the world expects of her.



Picture 3. Yor Reframing Physical Strength as Maternal Care

Perhaps the most telling moment in the episode comes a little later, when Anya recalls advice that Yor gave her during a run-in with Damian Desmond (Picture 3). After Anya punches Damian for bullying her friend Becky, the headmaster steps in and asks for an explanation. A flashback takes us back to Yor gently but firmly telling her daughter: “Listen carefully, Anya. The right time to use your strength is, for example, when helping your friend out of trouble.” The way Yor delivers this, soft yet steady with a raised finger and a calm expression, positions her as both a nurturing and an authoritative figure. In this small teaching moment, Yor performs the role of the moral mother, someone who guides her child’s sense of right and wrong. What makes this scene particularly interesting is how Yor weaves strength, a quality usually associated with masculinity, into a framework of feminine care. By telling Anya that physical power can be used to protect others, Yor gently stretches the boundaries of what emphasized femininity is allowed to look like. As Butler might suggest, this is a subtle act of re-signification: the capacity for violence, which femininity typically pushes down and hides, is quietly reframed here as an expression of compassion.



Picture 4. Yor Performing Maternal Guilt and Emotional Responsibility

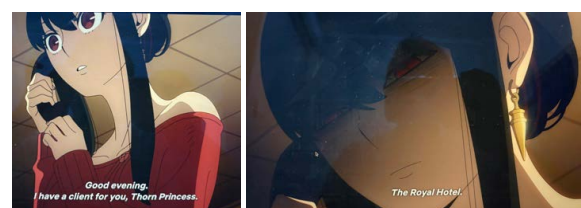
In picture 4, the emotional fallout from this incident further reveals how deeply Yor has taken on the weight of being a mother. When the headmaster tells Loid and Yor that Anya has hit Damian, Yor’s

first reaction is to burst into tears, exclaiming, “I’m sorry, Loid! It’s all because I trained her!” Her voice shakes, her eyes fill, and the camera frames her slightly lower than Loid, a visual detail that underscores her sense of guilt and self-blame. This is what Connell describes as the emotional burden of emphasized femininity: women are not only expected to take care of themselves but to feel responsible for the moral lives of the people they raise (R. Connell, 1987). Yor’s tears here feel both exaggerated and deeply genuine, capturing the kind of emotional intensity through which femininity keeps its social role intact.

Taken together, these scenes paint a picture of Yor’s motherhood as something alive and constantly shifting. Her gestures of care are real, but they are also carefully managed. They carry emotional weight, but they are also shaped by social expectations. Through repetition, Yor builds the image of an “ideal mother,” but every time she does so, the effort and strain behind that image become just a little more visible. The way the anime frames these moments, close-up shots, warm lighting, and gentle music, translates this emotional labor into something the audience can feel (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020; Machin & Mayr, 2023). Ultimately, what Yor’s portrayal as a mother shows us is that femininity is not something natural or effortless. It is a crafted performance, one sustained by anxiety, hard work, and a deep need to be seen as good enough. Her motherhood is neither fully obedient nor fully free. It lives somewhere in between, in the everyday space where love, performance, and survival all meet.

2. Disrupting Gender Norms through the Assassin Persona

If Yor’s life at home reflects an idealized version of motherhood, her identity as the assassin “Thorn Princess” flips that image on its head entirely. In her scenes of violence and careful precision, Yor performs a version of femininity that blends grace, discipline, and physical power, qualities that the gender hierarchy typically reserves for men (R. Connell, 1987; R. W. Connell, 2005). Her assassin self, then, becomes a space where gender norms are both followed and quietly dismantled, showing us, that femininity can look very different from what we might expect.



Picture 5. Yor’s Transformation into the Thorn Princess

This shift (picture 5) first becomes visible in Episode 2, Season 1, when Yor's handler, the Shopkeeper, calls her and says, "Good evening, I have a client for you, Thorn Princess." The warmth in Yor's face disappears almost instantly. Her eyes widen, and the soft, golden light of her apartment gives way to cold shadow. The moment the Shopkeeper mentions "The Royal Hotel." Something hardens in her expression. Her pupils narrow, and a quiet darkness settles over her features. This visual transformation marks her crossing from gentle woman to silent predator, and it tells us something important about what Bulter means when she says identity can be called up and remade depending on the situation we find ourselves in (Butler, 2014). A few moments later, Yor steps out in her black battle dress, a kunai (a small Japanese dagger traditionally used by ninjas) held loosely in her hand. She enters Room 1307 to carry out her mission against Deputy Secretary Brennan, and as she does, she says, almost tenderly: "I'm terribly sorry, but may I take your last breath?"



Picture 6. Yor's Polite Speech and Lethal Assassin Persona

There is something deeply unsettling about the way that line lands, soft, almost apologetic, and yet spoken right before an act of violence. The gap between her calm tone and what she is about to do dissolves the wall we usually draw between femininity and aggression. In picture 6, the way Yor moves through the room tells the story just as clearly: precise, fluid, almost choreographed. In these moments, violence becomes something close to poetry, and the female body transforms from something the story might typically frame as vulnerable into something powerful, in control, and fully alive.



Picture 7. Yor's Assassin Instincts within Her Maternal Role

A different kind of tension shows up in Episode 5 (picture 7), when Yor briefly fantasizes

about "eliminating" anything that might stand in Anya's way at Eden Academy. The moment is played for laughs, but underneath the humor, it reveals something real about how Yor is wired. Her assassin instincts do not stay neatly locked away when she steps into her role as a mother, they bleed through. Violence, it turns out, is not just something she does professionally, but it has become an emotional reflex, an instinctive way of responding to anything that threatens what she cares the most.



Picture 8. The Convergence of Yor's Maternal and Assassin Identities

The point where Yor's two selves come together most powerfully arrives in Episode 6 (picture 8), when Anya is kidnapped. The moment Yor realizes her daughter is missing, everything shifts. She tracks down the kidnappers and takes them apart with frightening speed and precision. When one of them throws a pumpkin at her, she shatters it in midair with a single punch and her eyes burning as she shouts, "I'm the girl's mother!" It is one of the most striking moments in the season, because in that single instant, Yor's identity as a mother and her identity as an assassin stop being two separate things. Her love, her fear, and her rage fold into one act of protection. The scene does not just show us how strong she is physically, but it also shows us the emotional weight behind that strength. A woman who knows what violence looks like up closely, and who turns it into something that keeps the people she loves safe.

Through moments like these, Yor comes to embody what Connell calls contradictory femininity, a way of being a woman that works within existing expectations while quietly reshaping them from the inside (R. W. Connell, 2005). She never stops being graceful or caring, but her strength and independence refuse to shrink down to fit traditional ideas of what femininity should look like. The truth that Yor's character keeps circling back to is that nurturing and destroying are not opposites. They come from the same place. A love that, at its most honest, can be

both impossibly soft and genuinely terrifying. And yet, for all the composure Yor holds on the outside, something beneath the surface is quietly stirring, a restlessness about who she really is when the roles fall away. The next part of this analysis turns to that inner tension, tracing how Yor's constant movement between mother and assassin reveals the fragile line between duty, desire, and the search for a self that feels truly her own.

3. Negotiating the Emotional Tension between Dual Selves

Yor's ability to move between the world of a loving mother and the world of a ruthless assassin may seem impressive on the surface, but it also quietly reveals just how much it costs her to keep both selves alive at the same time. Beneath the bright smiles and the graceful way, she holds herself, there is a fear that never fully goes away. The fear of being seen for who she is, of falling short in the eyes of a world that expects her to be both morally pure and capable of surviving at any cost. Yor's life, then is not simply a matter of juggling two roles. It is a constant, exhausting negotiation between what is real and what is performed, between tenderness and violence, and between the need to belong and the loneliness that comes with keeping so much hidden.

Butler thinking on gender helps us sit with this discomfort. No gender performance is ever fully stable, it is always being made and remade through what we do, what we hide, and how we compensate for the gaps in between (Butler, 2007). Yor's two identities do not simply sit side by side in peace. They bleed into each other, fracture, and reform. The gentleness she shows at home carries the shadow of everything she has done at night, and the precision of her assassin work carries, somewhere underneath, the warmth of the mother she is trying to be. In this way, the neat line between the "good mother" and the "dangerous woman" starts to blur. Connell's framework adds another layer: when Yor performs the role of the caring, selfless wife and mother, and whether she intends to or not, reinforcing the very gender hierarchy that her Thorn Princess identity pushes back against. Her compassion gives her purpose and belonging, but it also keeps her tethered to an idea of womanhood that never quite allows her to be whole.

What makes Yor's story feel so human, in the end, is not the violence or the perfection, it is the mess in between. *Spy x Family* uses her contradictions to mirror the kind of womanhood that exists in real life too: the kind where softness and resilience have to live in the same body, and where care and exhaustion

sit right next to each other. Yor's fractured sense of self becomes, quietly, a metaphor for what gender performance really is. A reminder that no matter how seamless it might look from the outside, every performance of femininity carries the traces of struggle just beneath the surface.

Yor Forger's dual life as mother and assassin becomes more than a narrative trick. It mirrors the multiplicity of contemporary femininity itself. Through her, *Spy x Family* stages an ongoing negotiation between contradictory social demands: be gentle yet strong, caring yet efficient, beautiful yet self-sacrificing. As Butler argues, each time Yor moves between these roles, she reconstitutes her gender identity, exposing the fragility of what society perceives as "natural" womanhood (Butler, 2007, 2014; Januarsyah & Finalia, 2026). Her domestic gestures, smiles, apologies, acts of care, are not simply tender moments but disciplinary performances that sustain the illusion of feminine virtue. Placed beside her assassin persona, however, these gestures take on new meaning: the hand that nurtures are also the hand that strikes.

Connell's framework deepens this reading (R. W. Connell, 2005). Yor's domestic self-enacts emphasized femininity, while her assassin identity introduces a contradictory femininity that appropriates masculine-coded power without abandoning emotional depth. The analysis of her Thorn Princess persona shows that her physical strength, decisiveness, and capacity for violence do not simply represent a rejection of femininity. Instead, these qualities are performed through a body that remains visually and emotionally associated with femininity. Her black battle dress, controlled movements, precise combat techniques, and even her polite and gentle tone during violent encounters complicate the conventional opposition between the soft-spoken Yor and the lethal Thorn Princess, as visual and embodied signs contribute to the construction of social meanings within cultural texts (Hardiyanti & Firmonasari, 2025). Through her assassin persona, Yor re-signifies qualities such as strength, autonomy, and violence, showing that they can coexist with grace, care, and emotional attachment.

The findings further show that Yor's assassin identity does not remain separate from her maternal role. In several moments, particularly when Anya is threatened, her capacity for violence becomes directly connected to her desire to protect her daughter. Her assassin instincts therefore acquire a different meaning when they are activated through motherhood. Rather than violence functioning

solely as a professional skill, it becomes a form of protection and care. This collision between identities complicates the distinction between the “good mother” and the “dangerous woman.” Yor can be nurturing precisely because she is capable of violence, while her capacity for violence is itself motivated by attachment and care. Her two identities therefore do not simply represent opposing versions of femininity but they continuously reshape one another.

This collision also reveals the emotional tension produced by Yor’s simultaneous performance of different gendered expectations. Her domestic identity requires her to appear caring, socially acceptable, and emotionally responsible, while her assassin identity requires physical dominance, decisiveness, secrecy, and the capacity to kill. These expectations are not easily reconciled, and Yor’s repeated movement between them exposes the labor involved in maintaining the appearance of a coherent self. From a Butlerian perspective, this instability demonstrates that gender identity is never completely settled but must be continuously performed and adjusted according to social context (Butler, 2007, 2014). Yor’s struggle is therefore not simply about hiding her profession, but it is also about maintaining different performances of womanhood and ensuring that each remains believable within its respective social space.

Connell’s concept of gender order further highlights the structural dimension of this tension. When Yor performs the caring, selfless wife and mother, she participates in the expectations associated with emphasized femininity. At the same time, her Thorn Princess identity challenges the gender hierarchy by occupying forms of physical power and autonomy that are conventionally coded as masculine. Yet the anime does not present this challenge as a complete escape from gender norms. Yor remains emotionally invested in being perceived as a good wife and mother, suggesting that empowerment does not necessarily eliminate the expectations of care, accommodation, and moral responsibility placed upon women. Her character therefore occupies an ambivalent position: she simultaneously reproduces and disrupts the gender order in which she exists.

Taken together, the three dimensions examined in this study, Yor’s performance of socially idealized motherhood, her disruption of gender norms through the Thorn Princess persona, and the collision between these identities, demonstrate that her femininity cannot be reduced to either compliance or resistance. Her character instead illustrates how gender is negotiated through contradictory performances that

may coexist within the same individual. *Spy x Family* uses Yor’s dual identity to stage broader tensions in contemporary femininity, where women are increasingly expected to be independent and capable while continuing to fulfill ideals of care, emotional availability, and moral responsibility. Ultimately, Yor becomes an allegory for a form of womanhood that is neither wholly obedient nor wholly emancipated, but constantly negotiating between care and power, vulnerability and autonomy, social acceptance and individual agency. Her story suggests that femininity is not a stable category but an ongoing choreography of survival, adaptation, and negotiation within a social order that continues to place contradictory demands on women.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined Yor Forger’s dual performance of femininity in the first season of *Spy x Family* through Butler’s concept of gender performativity and Connell’s concepts of emphasized femininity and gender order. The findings demonstrate that Yor’s femininity cannot be understood as a single, stable identity. Rather, it emerges through the continuous negotiation of different expectations, social contexts, and embodied performances. Her character illustrates how apparently contradictory qualities, care and violence, vulnerability and strength, accommodation and autonomy, can coexist within the same performance of womanhood.

The findings address the three research questions of this study. First, Yor performs socially idealized femininity through repeated practices of care, emotional availability, compliance, and responsibility in her roles as wife and mother. These practices align with Connell’s concept of emphasized femininity while also revealing the effort and agency involved in maintaining an idealized feminine identity. Second, her identity as the Thorn Princess disrupts conventional gender expectations by associating femininity with physical strength, decisiveness, autonomy, and violence. Rather than simply abandoning femininity, however, Yor combines these qualities with visual and emotional characteristics conventionally associated with feminine identity. Third, the collision between her maternal and assassin identities reveals that these performances are not entirely separate. Her capacity for violence becomes a means of protecting those she loves, while her maternal identity shapes the purpose and meaning of that violence. The tension between these identities therefore demonstrates that gender performance is not merely a matter of switching between roles but of

continually negotiating and redefining the boundaries between them.

Taken together, these findings suggest that *Spy x Family* presents femininity as both socially regulated and potentially transformative. Yor reproduces aspects of emphasized femininity in order to gain social belonging and fulfill expectations associated with motherhood, while her assassin persona opens a space for forms of power and agency that challenge conventional gender hierarchies. At the same time, the anime does not present empowerment as a complete escape from gender norm. Yor remains subject to expectations of care, emotional responsibility, and moral legitimacy, producing an ambivalent form of femininity that is neither wholly compliant nor wholly resistant. Her dual identity thus demonstrates the instability of gender categories and the ways in which femininity can be continuously performed, negotiated, and re-signified across different social contexts.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on the first season of the anime adaptation and therefore does not account for Yor's character development in subsequent seasons. Second, the analysis is limited to the anime rather than comparing the anime adaptation with Tatsuya Endo's original manga. This means that the findings primarily reflect the audiovisual and narrative strategies of the anime and cannot necessarily be generalized to the character's representation across the entire *Spy x Family* franchise. Finally, the study focuses on a single female character, limiting its ability to establish broader patterns of gender representation in contemporary anime.

Future research could address these limitations in several ways. A longitudinal study could examine how Yor's gender performance develops across later seasons and whether the relationship between her maternal and assassin identities changes over time. Comparative research between the anime and manga could also investigate how visual, narrative, and discursive choices differ across the two media and how those differences shape the representation of Yor's femininity. Finally, future studies could compare Yor with other contemporary female characters who occupy dual or contradictory identities, particularly heroines who combine traditionally feminine roles with physical power, violence, or professional autonomy. Such comparisons would help determine whether the negotiation of care and power identified in Yor's character represents a broader pattern in contemporary Japanese popular culture or a distinctive feature of *Spy x Family*.

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