

Power and gender: Antagonist construction in times of “The Crown”

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Abstract

This study incorporates an analysis of how the series “The Crown” reproduces a definition of power associated with gender identity. Such social construction based on an antagonistic relationship between both concepts. The research drives feminist and political theory, a significant idea of semiology, the correlation with signs, and their representation on the screen to preserve hegemony.

Keywords: movies, identity, femininity, semiology, social values.

Poder y género: construcción antagonista en tiempos *De Crown*

Resumen

Este estudio aborda el análisis de cómo la serie “The Crown” reproduce una definición de poder asociada a la identidad de género. Tal construcción social está basada en una relación antagónica entre ambos conceptos. La investigación impulsa la teoría feminista y política, una idea significativa de la semiología, la correlación con los signos y su representación en la pantalla para preservar la hegemonía.

Palabras clave: cine, identidad, feminismo, semiología, valores sociales.

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Introduction

Media products have been transforming people's lives through visual performances like "The Crown" (Morgan, 2016) as a result of reflecting women's power and their representation into the screen. This research looks at the convergence between women and power. As well, to understand how "The Crown" has worked to break the male paradigm, whether female roles play a subtext, marginalizing women into weak characters, or they drive an antagonism expressed by men's view of power deposited in the wrong hands. "The Crown" reveals a systematic call for an invitation to undermine women's roles on the screen. This series is an answer to legitimize their influences. It creates a rebellion of those whose power drives the narrative: a woman with a power given by God (The Queen [Frears, 2006]) or a global transformation of women's play-role in the industry. Women representation on the screen might call for a resolution between two agents of control: those whose ideas claim to break down masculinity paradigm and those whose female representation shall call for a motherland. Women might represent what society calls "the normal," socialization of women as a protector of the family, making them invisible into other aspects like politics and human rights.

Reconstructing the Meaning of Being a Woman: Axiological Standpoint of Power and Femininity

"I am aware that I am surrounded by people who feel that they could do the job better, strong people with powerful characters, but for better or worse, the crown has landed on my head."

Queen Elizabeth II (Claire Foy), *The Crown*, Season 1: *Pride & Joy* (Morgan, 2016).

This analysis starts with one quote from the series "The Crown," where Queen Elizabeth II, character interpreted by actress Claire Foy, lets to know the implications of having power after the Crown landed over her head. This narrative of power would be construed, such as the axiological assumption of power and divinity detached from God as his representation on earth. This conjunction of moral values determines why this woman can be a carrier of this tremendous message. Its origin comes from a male representation of power itself (God).

This idea -values and control- is taken by David Hume. His relation with morality is explained by Callicott (1984) as an anthropocentric value, whether some forms of lives are like *instrument values*, an extended instrument used by human beings. In the case of "The Crown," the main character, her primary role as an instrument to maintain control, goes over a different power settlement. Beyond Elizabeth II's figure, Claire Foy's representation is ruled by a human kingdom's statement inflicted on history and established as part of a monarch's definition. In his book "Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject," Coward and Ellis (2016) explained Karl Marx's materialism and its relationship with semiologic control of languages, such as extended variation of Hume's morality and values, in the way language is an interception of the social, historical and individual background. His analysis brings back the concept of communication and the idea of being men, such as a component that needs each other to recreate the social identity through a linguistic model that can explain reality.

Bringing the concept of language into "The Crown," the relationship established between monarch and

divinity as concepts attends to explain the social implication of why power landed in the head of a woman, instead of exemplifying a discussion on why she got the role. Power, as a social construction, reveals the dominance of heterosexuality, a tendency of a total ideology designed by the use of pronouns like *it* to describe the function of the Crown as an object with the capacity to dominate, leaving aside the person, in this case, the woman, an instrument controlled by the Queen's coronet. "The idealist assertions underlie the fundamental assumption of bourgeois ideology with its necessity/will to present society as consisting of 'free' individuals, whose social determination results from their pre-given essences like 'talented,' 'efficient,' 'lazy,' 'profligate,' etc." (Coward, 2016, p. 2). But On the other hand, the Bourgeois ideology explained by Coward determines how language can create *free* humans such a constant evolution of themselves; however, there is a particular group whose determination alienated in terms of a *pre-given* concept of them. Here, the idea of being women and power separated into two opposites: part of essences described for some common adjectives (irritable, frumpy, bossy, among others); and the second determined by power and its influences in freedom and narratives, such as signified concept impressed in the mind of the people who look at the idea in association with the object it symbolizes (Crown).

Hence, there is an antagonism between women and power in terms of how women conceptualize and how control is represented, in other words, there is an arbitrary way to assume a divinity presence, and a social commodity embodying the monarchy's protagonist. Elizabeth II in real life and Elizabeth II (Claire Foy) on the screen both play an arbitrary role because a divinity representation of humans control imposes power. This structuralism allows women to convey an idea of masculinity where power comes from an external source associated with the male nature incarnated in the agent of authority (the Crown) - a signature product of the interaction of various elements with a different corpus (Coward, 2016).

Severin and Tankard (1992) enacted in their theory an *abstraction ladder*, such as an explanation of categorizing and classifying characteristics of words, brought by experiences produced by our senses. This correlation might apply to The Crown and the symbols used in terms of power representation because they appeal to an intersection between two narratives (control and femininity). Also, Korzybski (1958) opened the discussion on *structural differential*, an entity that works from the abstraction of the language, incorporating a system of adaptations from an indefinite number of characteristics. This association identified in series whether the social representation of the woman, in this case, the role played by Foy, is a construction of social definitions by several numbers of characteristics taken from other symbols of power or the Crown. The object designed to empower Elizabeth and Foy's character by putting an object into the different levels of abstraction (the Crown). The object as the actual construction of power, which recognizes no matter whose head is wearing, symbolizes all monarchs. However, Elizabeth II and Claire Foy, their roles are associated with Femininity behind male control, attributing women a sign of oppression, even the power landed into their hands.

"The labor of *choosing*, among the set of signals that I have at my disposal, those that might be articulated to compose and expression, and the labor of insulating and expression-unit to compose an expression-string" (Eco, 1976, p. 151). At this point, Eco correlates the sign and content to create a unit full of expression. The Saussurean theory and Eco's ideas of semiotics can learn at an utterance of the components that articulate feelings and how communication can transform it into a message able to generate a view on audiences' minds. According to the crown symbols, the idea is to recreate control and conceive women's nature to explain how they exemplify themselves at the big screen (Probyn, 1990).

Women's values refer to a different perspective, a male-centric assumption of power, whether it is a *social equanimity*. Because force does not lean in their hands such a natural creation, or they are the instrument

used to empower the sign, in this specific case, the Crown as a material object, and an idea. They continue developing their own identity, even when the agent of control bases its intentions on male dominance. For example, The Crown narrative belongs to the object, such a symbol of dominance, letting the sign get a social recognition as the agent of influence into the script and the discourse itself. It makes the Crown the object of control, and it is how it resembles the divinity and gets an *opportunity* to the woman to shine behind its lights. Elizabeth -like the concept of dominance- sets her influence in the original idea of the Queen beneath an abstraction, linked with social construction that granted her symbol of a monarch to a misleading creation empowered by God.

Femininity and “The Crown” Political Power, Feminist Theory Overview, and Agents of Control

The centerpiece of “The Crown” leans into two different antagonists: Femininity as the concept of preservation of social norms, and political power as a vision of feminist theory and agents of control in television. Johnson (2007) analyzed in his book *Third-wave feminism and TV how* the influences of certain television shows affect women’s social-representation and maintain the status quo statues. Women take their role in society. These correlations of concepts can be specified by *normative gender expectations* associated with patriarchal content. In the first season, before becoming Queen, Elizabeth II was a woman who followed the rules, his father (The King). She put aside her human desire to accommodate herself into a man ruling the world.

When She got married, she perpetuated the normative of gendered expectations cited by Johnson (2007), such as a romantic role, the muse of womanhood identity (Moses, 1984), idealizing her representation, putting her survival in men’s hands, and accomplishing men’s interests. This sexist construction comes from a masculine symbolism of being pure, contrasted with the rebellion of some feminist ideas of body liberation.

Elizabeth, as the main character of the series “The Crown,” rebels a domestic sphere developed during the ‘40s, when women attempted to work in factories during World War II, provoking a new narrative of women’s workplace (Skeggs, 1995). The Queen became the start point of a new age, even though her power was the promulgation of God, such a male agent of control (De Beauvoir, 1953). This secondary role taken place, in the earliest times, included a misplace of women into the language, excluding them, for an instant, for the influences of the economic and social conditions, like Marx held in his materialism, that every human condition is determined “by the social forms of human labor” (Sunstein, 1990, p. 69). His definition of labor and human health creates a relationship between biological and social perspectives. Women cannot compete with men in some areas: “Women’s work is one domain in which symbolism, organization, and identity come together” (McCall, 1992, p. 838).

Melodrama, Women, and Emotions Dominance

“Discussing the melodramatic concentration on ‘family relationships, star-crossed lovers and forced marriages’ in the direct predecessor of the genre” (Merck, 2016, p. 364). This quote from the book “The British Monarchy on Screen” reflects the monarchs dominance over their feelings, and how the British monarchy controls what happens inside of their houses. This *control-machine* was established to promote good manners and expose a different face to the others, making the difference between them and the public.

In the series “The Crown,” the visual treatment developed according to royal family traditions, such as an extension of Elizabeth II power, even into the screen. This narrative motives founding a feeling of dominance; even some chapters reflected an imperial discourse, where the power of the Crown might subjugate women. Foy’s role keeps this distance from an *ordinary* woman and maintains similarity equivalent to the real royal treatment in real life. The royal family and their cultural practices extend beyond the screen into social habits or norms (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004). The habitus, then, set up an exchange value from the self and culture, where people adopt some characteristics from the screen, as social behaviors, entrusted by the divinity in the inanimate object, the Crown.

Everything that involves women’s sexuality, even on screen, “might attend to the social hierarchy of men over women” (Sunstein, 1990, p. 209). As part of the emotional side, sexuality in “The Crown” did not expose a discourse of liberation. Conversely, it is a construction based on male sexuality, leaving behind women untouched and unmoved. Therefore, sex is on the screen, like a reproductive commodity. Beneath their identities, because both the Queen and her consort might prevail the control of the Crown over people. Likewise, Princess Margaret plays an antagonist role, breaking down body paradigms in how their bodies might be pleased. However, the Crown’s power is beyond Margaret’s identity and constrains her rights to marry a divorced man because that power is not granted to women (Sunstein, 1990, p. 209).

Experiences construct normativity of social identities (Skeggs, 1995) in a commodity and subordinated dilemma: are women able to express themselves, or are they just seeing in male behavior concordance? Women representation still lacks a proper construction based on their cultural approximation into society; some men, like in the series “The Crown,” are always looking at Elizabeth as a minority in power because her feelings can interfere with her purpose as the Crown. The lack of expressing her feelings is very notorious along the two seasons; as a result, she was looked at, by their pairs, as a strong woman, because she was able to manage what she felt at the moment.

In contrast, her sister abandoned all royal nature, and as a rebellion against Elizabeth’s power, she is no longer seen as royalty. Still, she interpreted a real woman able to express her feelings. But what makes a woman a real one? Is there a connotation in how they express their belief that makes them weak? Or being the representation of power in the earth makes her being beyond the humans? These questions emerge from a collectivity of values, not only expressed on screen but as well on Elizabeth II real life; beneath social construction of power and women representation, there is a hidden answer in how men manipulate the definition of feelings, to create a less weak society. Showing in public a single piece of love is synonymous with humanism, which lets them at the mercy of their pair, in this case, the executors (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004).

Patriarchal Rules and its Shadows in Time of the Monarchy

In times of ruling monarchy, political power, and other forms of control society transforms their identity into a body of apprehension of controlling the unconsciousness of several elements and behaviors (Bartky, 1997). This theory developed, even by Foucault, transmuted as a *Political Anatomy*, presuming someone’s power over others’ bodies by articulating subjected regimes of control as part of the apparatus of production. In his book “*Discipline and Punish*,” Foucault (2012) established a disciplinary practice that ends up producing *docile bodies*, tasking the historical institutions and the instrumental reason into condemning the body.

His analysis can turn into the British monarchy and its imperative construction of power based on political anatomy. Whether the organization is doomed to be determined by history's oppression or acquiring power is a non-sense production of disciplinary practice.

Gendering male and female differences assuming bodily compartments and acts according to gestures and postures (Bartky, 1997) could be one of the most significant correlations between body theory and patriarchal rule implemented in times of monarchy. Socially talking, there is a social construction in the ruling character, in this specific case, Elizabeth II, whose movements and postures are determined by a social manifest of power that goes beyond her resistance of typical performance of being The Queen. In one of the episodes of *The Crown*, Foy's character questioned herself why a monarch only has to know about British Constitution, instead of general matters like math, science, philosophy, etc., components restricted to power but opened to the public. Bringing Foucault's ideas, the social punishment of illiteracy a monarch exposed corresponds to political anatomy intrinsic related to the ruling agent, in this case, Elizabeth II. As a result, power limits knowledge or knowledge limits to power, understanding this example as a modeling concept originated in the series.

The object, in this case, "The Crown" reveals a manhood dominance in a rational understanding and moral manifestation of human power as a potential capacity to develop injustice and oppression such as the mere manifestation of a negativity society based on controlling material resources, extending differences between people (Michael, 1994). The Crown limits Elizabeth's power if she does not accept what power means by wearing it in a symbolic appropriation of hierarchy and history. Elizabeth herself corresponds to a part of "The Crown," which becomes Elizabeth's ruler manifestation in a manhood society; women, in this series, are objectized, such as the social pattern of a patriarchal construction of power. Power corresponds to a manifestation of women and men acceptances of control, and it embraces a gendered subordinate form of general identity.

The British Monarchy and its Exposition on Tv: The New Language Behind "The Crown"

The social construction of sovereignty on-screen compiles axiological instrumentation of values related to national traditions, established to maintain a status quo statute and protect national traditions. Merck (2016) claims: "Monarchy remains one of the most enduring aspects of the British national heritage. These stories and characters, their iconic settings, and their splendid mise-en-scène still play a vital role in the historical and contemporary experience and projection of British national identity and nationhood ideas" (p. 339). Nationhood, like Merck, says it is one of the most prominent social characters of British identity, as a reminder of hundreds of years of social establishment, and national values. Series like "The Crown" play an essential role, not only keeping nationhood in people's minds but as well as connecting Elizabeth II with those who are watching the string through the platform. Foy's interpretation was claimed as one of the greatest of the last time, comparing her with Helen Mirren and her memorable performance at "The Queen." Both productions reveal an ordinary commander: social resilience and patriarchal fundamentalism of power, as a commodity product of a divinity transmutation, that ended up into the recognition of control, such as ethereal discourse.

"The Crown" invites a juxtaposition of ideas, one related to women and power. Then other one appeals to a pattern that embodies a hermeneutic tradition, present in the language that links governance and the capacity of acquiring experiences, and contradicts the correct definition of a woman (Craig & Muller, 2007). Power

connected with a male figure, as the stable referent of wisdom, and intellectuality, attributing to women a lack of big decisions where the situations pushed them to choose in between to possible solutions. Figures like Winston Churchill took control of The Crown's decisions while playing in a crucial moment of history. The narrative exposed in the series let the audiences this bitter/sweet sensation as part of controversial segments in Elizabeth's life. Her achievements were, always, a compilation of men's decisions, trying to maintain The Crown power over its people.

The power beyond the animated object corresponds to an assertive principle of whose power might reign in times of crisis, and whose agent of control remains God's willing. The Crown gives a sense of shaping realities, rather than a close-up in how they keep, this social rule of leaving everything behind the public, such a format of auto-control. Elizabeth's power was imposed by several old regulations and facts that let her on behalf of The Crown make her, the receiver, part of a great moment of history where she put herself beneath the object that identifies the ruling monarchy. This dull moment calls for men's interpretation of power, whether she is part of a series of events that left a masculine- subjectiveness in her coronation.

Reality vs. screen is not further from each other, because of the appealing contract generated two agents of power: one is the ruling monarch, a woman with series characteristics that represents her as an extension of the divinity, transforming her body into a receiver, and the second one assuming Elizabeth's manners, temper as a man embodies into a woman monarch; feelings are the only reserve for mortals whose bodies are not blessed by God's authority, yet with God's hand praising them, all women incarnation replaced by a male construction functioning pro everyone's favor. The object, The Crown, is used to reconfigure Elizabeth's perception of reality through a woman's eyes and into a male construction of reality. Political influences must preserve values and traditions such as role models to follow for everyone without any doubts. The Crown must keep no matter who is in charge, and this is an absolute legacy of centuries rather than a social construction in modern times. The absence of control allows people to foster independent ideas, transform their concepts of body identity and expose a new consciousness in terms of auto-determinism; monarchy acts as a role model and agent of control that works such as advisors and influencers. Therefore, The Crown materializes God's power into a mortal world, allowing the receiver to consider such as his representation.

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