

POWER RELATION IN CATHERINE STEADMAN'S *THE FAMILY GAME*

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ABSTRACT

This study entitled Power Relations in Catherine Steadman's *The Family Game* is focused on analyzing power relations that happen in the novel, mainly among the characters. This study uses Michael Foucault's Power theory to find and examine power relationships, such as signs, causes, and effects of power relation among the main characters. This study uses extrinsic approach, that is a sociological approach. By using this approach, the study is conducted by analyzing power relations manifested in the novel. This study chooses the qualitative descriptive method, and the data source is the novel, *The Family Game* by Catherine Steadman. The data are collected by reading *The Family Game* thoroughly, collecting important parts such as words, phrases, and sentences to be used as evidence, finding journals and books to support the analysis, and organizing the evidence to arrange the analysis and connecting it with power relations. The findings show that the characters in the novel shows several signs of power, such as, authority, control, interest, gain, strategy, and communication. It is also finds that these power relations are influenced by status differences, personal goals, and family as a strong institution and cause resistance and knowledge. The results of the study indicate the power relations among each character and the shift of the dynamic, especially the main character, from powerless to the one who holds the most power in the novel. Through the characters, this study reveals how power can shape relationships, decisions, and the overall plot.

Keywords: *authority, control, power, power relation, strategy*

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning, humans are created as social creatures. This means that forming social ties and living in social groups become one of the most fundamental behavior from

human being (Sakman, 2019:1). From then, it is concluded that a person can't live on their own because humans can live only by relying on each other. This habit among humans creates the desire to have power in relationships. Królewski (2017:1) writes how by having power, people will be able to influence other people to help them succeed in their lives. The use of power is not very different between the real world and the fiction world. For example, Oprescu (2018:8) states that even Shakespeare, one of the most influential authors, uses his character as a way to describe how humans crave power throughout history. From this explanation, fiction works or literature works like novels can be used to analyze how power is exhibited through life.

This study focused on Catherine Steadman's *The Family Game*, as the novel introduces Harriet, the nickname of Harry, as the main character and the narrator as the novel from her point of view. Harry meets Edward Holbeck, a young man from an old money family, when she attends a gala in London. Edward and Harry develop a romantic feeling toward each other and they end up moving together in New York to support Edward's business. Harry begins to feel pressured as the Christmas holiday gets near because Edward wants to introduce her to his family. Seeing herself as an orphan and nobody with a dark past makes her believe that Edward's family will despise her. Strangely, Edward's father, Robert Holbeck, expresses that he will accept Harry as Edward's lover if only she can solve the mystery about one of their deceased family members, Edward's older brother. Harry feels intrigued, and as one of the best mystery novel authors, she tries to solve the case without alerting Edward, as one of the conditions Robert gives her. Without realising it, Harry's life begins to feel dominated by the pressure of acceptance from her lover's family and to keep her dark past from being exposed. At the end of the novel, Harry realises that the power of the Holbeck's family will haunt her forever as she solves the mystery.

The study will explore the dynamics of power relations, mainly among the Holbeck family with Harry, the main character and how these influence how each character acts. There are several studies discussed about power relation. The first study entitled *Social Issues in Jacques Lob's "Snowpiercer"* that is written by Pratiwi (2021) in their article published by Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, discusses the power relation among passengers in front sections to tail sections from the novel *Snowpiercer* by Jacques Lob. The study uses Michael Foucault's theory about power relation mainly about the characters that are involved in power relation. From this study, there are two types of power relations, the first is sovereign power and the second is disciplinary authority. This study also uses an extrinsic approach in analyzing the novel. This research shares the same focus as the previous study, which discusses how

power relations work among the characters. Unlike the earlier study, this research explores the signs, causes, and effects of power relations in the novel.

The second study is *Power Relations Reflected in Leo Tolstoy's Hadji Murad (1904): A Sociological Approach* by Mahadika (2018) from Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta who focuses on the power relations in the novel *Hadji Murad* by Leo Tolstoy and how each character depicts power relations with each other. The writer believes that the concept of power relation serves as a message on how people act to have a good relation in society. Just like Pratiwi's research, the second study also uses an extrinsic approach by including background information about the author in its analysis. The current study also applies the same theory in analyzing power relations and also searching for signs of power relations among character. However, this research focuses on a different novel called *The Family Game* by Catherine Steadman.

The third study entitled *Strategies in Power Relations in a Fictional Work: A Foucauldian Analysis* by Rahmasari et al. (2019) from Universitas BSI Bandung and Telkom University Bandung states that power relation can exist in a family, especially in the relationship between father and children. The study analyzes the power relations that happen between father and son in achieving what they want. The study highlights strategy as one of the ways to show power. The study shows that power relations among the family exist because of the need to dominate and to make the other person follow their decision. Similar to the previous study, this research also analyzes a novel using Michael Foucault's theory, the dynamics among the members of the family strategy, and identifying strategy as one of the signs of power relations. The difference is that this study focuses on the novel *The Family Game*, while the previous research analyzes *Family Matters*, a novel written by Rohinton Mistry.

The fourth study is *Power Relations in Two Contemporary Indonesian Novels with Political Themes* by Wardani (2020) from Sanata Dharma University. It compares two novels, Junaedi Setiono's *Dasamuka* and Arafat Nur's *Lolong Anjing di Bulan*. The study reveals that power relations have economic roots, reflecting Marxist view that economic factors are important for the class structure of society. It uses Fairclough, Bourdieu, and Gramsci's as its theoretical framework. Like Adji (2020), this study also elects power relations as its main topic. Unlike the previous study, this research analyzes power relations using Foucault's theory, while the others use three different theories. The previous study uses Indonesian novels for data, while this study uses a novel with the English language.

The main theory that will be used is Power theory by Michael Foucault, mainly about the theory of power relation. It is important to understand what power means before understanding power relation. According to Foucault (1997:340) power defines as some kind of force that make person or group act in a certain way that affects what another person or group can do. This means that power only exists when someone uses it on someone else. Foucault (1997:338) also explains that the exercise of power can be defined as power relation. As Balan (2010:57) states, power relations is not merely a relationship like master-slave or oppressor-victim relations, but they are productive relations, because they imply resistance. This can be defined that power relations are interactions among people where each side can influence the other. There are several signs, causes, and effects that is found from the theory. There are two signs of power relations, which are communication and strategy. For example, regulated communication that happens in the educational system is used to create and maintain power relations. Strategy is used when people want to excel in a power relationship.

There are two causes of power relation can be found from the theory. The first causes are status differences. People will likely create power relations to other people who are in the different status from them. This status difference may vary and range from social, economic, culture, and even knowledge. The second causes are institutions. Foucault (1997:344) describes how the institution of a family may have power in controlling and may mix traditional conditions, legal structures, matters of habit or fashion of the family members. There are also two effects of power relations, which are resistance and knowledge. Resistance, as Foucault says, become an unavoidable part of every power relation. Meanwhile, knowledge is recognized as something that are related or interconnected with power. This means that every time people use power, they will earn new knowledge and vice versa. Based on the background above, this study has three problems to answer, what are the signs of power relation portrayed in Catherine Steadman's *The Family Game*, what are the main causes or motivations of power relations in the novel, and What are the effects of power relations on the characters?

METHOD

This study uses an extrinsic approach, more specifically a sociological literary approach and a qualitative descriptive method to explore how power relations are portrayed in Catherine Steadman's *The Family Game*. The extrinsic approach is used to gather information outside of the data. The approach in this research is sociological because to analyze the data, Michael Foucault's power theory is used. Meanwhile, a qualitative descriptive is chosen because this

method allows finding the data by selecting important sentences, dialogues, and character actions that show signs about power relations. The main data source for this study is the novel *The Family Game* by Catherine Staedman. The novel is published in 2022 and has 298 pages. The data used in this research are quotations from the novel that relate to the topic. Additional books, journals, and articles are also used to support the analysis. In this study, the data are collected by reading the novel *The Family Game* by Catherine Steadman several times, understanding the story through the idea of power relations, and highlighting and taking notes on important parts of the novel related to the research. The researcher also finds journals and books to support the analysis, and then organizes and groups the data to help arrange the analysis and connect it with power theory. The gathered data is then analyzed through a data analysis procedure. The analysis is done by grouping data that show power relations, including their signs, causes, and effects on the characters. The data are analyzed using Michel Foucault's power theory and supported by other studies on power relations. Finally, the analysis is arranged into three parts, which are the signs, causes, and effects of power relations in the story, before creating a conclusion from the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Each character's actions and thoughts will be analysed as the main source in studying about power relation in the novel *The Family Game*. After reading the novel thoroughly, here are some findings that will be discussed on how it portrays power relation in *The Family Game* by Catherine Steadman using power relation theory by Michael Foucault.

1. Signs of Power Relation

From several data that already analyzed, there are six signs of power relation. This study chooses four signs from *Power Relations Reflected in Leo Tolstoy's Hadji Murad (1904) : A Sociological Approach* by Mahadika (2018:8) and the other two signs are from Foucault's theory. Here are the signs and also evidence from the novel:

1.1 Authority

Authority is an expectation that a command will be obeyed by the people who receive it. It is not only about giving orders, but also about believing someone has the right to give them and that others must obey. According to Demirtürk (2024:166), Foucault states that authority is not something openly coercive, but works in subtle and pervasive ways throughout different sub-structures within society.

Lt Hughley was keen to help, having recently retired, and was an invaluable resource on my first book, always sparking creative ideas and handling my layman knowledge with diplomatic kid gloves. During the final edit, I spoke with him regularly, running legal and sometimes infuriatingly granular procedural questions by him. (Steadman, 2022:122)

This quotation shows Lieutenant Hughley as a powerful figure who still holds authority even though he's already retired. They form a meaningful relationship and Harry relies on his knowledge and experience when she writes her book. The relationship that happens between Harry and Lt. Hughley clearly shows how power relation can be considered as a beneficial relationship rather than relationship that requires complete obedience. Nevertheless, Lt. Hughley shows authority in their relationship on how she still regarded as important person by Harry even though he's already retired as police. Even though he's retired, Lt. Hughley is still important to Harry, showing that authority can continue outside official positions. This shows how authority works not by force, but through knowledge, experience, and respect in relationships

1.2 Controlling

Controlling can be defines as having the power or influence to control other people's behavior.

While I of course knew that my publisher was in some way connected to the business interests of my future in-laws, the idea that they might ever use this fact as some kind of leverage had not even crossed my mind until now... I stand in silence in the hallway for a moment to let what just happened sink in. And the realization hits me that however weird this situation is, this is only the start of my dealings with the Holbecks. (Steadman, 2022:28)

This quotation explains how controlling the Holbeck's family can be, as previous dialogue shows Harry can meet Matilda because of her work. Controlling here means having the power or influence to direct someone else's actions. Matilda uses her relation to change Harry's schedule without her agreement to show the control she has over Harry's life. From the power relation between Harry and Matilda, it can be seen that Harry lacks of status because she comes from a mediocre family, which contrast with the Holbeck family, which is known as the old-money type of family.

1.3 Interest

Interest means that when a group of people share the same understanding or desire as the reason for action.

He squeezes my hand as the lift slows. ‘You doing okay?’ I nod and attempt a smile then watch as he straightens his collar in infinite reflections in the elevator mirrors. He’s nervous too, I can tell, though he’s hiding it well...— an almost imperceptible tell that I’ve picked up on over time an oddly comforting glimpse at his human vulnerability beneath. This matters to him, a lot. (Steadman, 2022:47-48)

From this quotation, it appears that both Harry and Edward feel nervous in introducing Harry to the Holbeck family for the first time. Both of them shares the same interest or expectation that Harry can be accepted as the new Holbeck’s family member. Interest here means having the same understanding or goal, which motivates their actions, such as supporting each other and behaving in ways that increase Harry’s chances of acceptance. The shared interest pushes them to act by strengthening and encouraging each other. The same interest motivates them to work together and stay focused on achieving that outcome.

1.4 Gain

Gain implies as something that values or the benefit that is earn by someone. In power relation, one party will receive gain from the other person if they succeed.

I can’t help but wonder if it’s ever crossed Edward’s mind how much his fiancée looks like this willowy figure from his childhood; I imagine it has crossed Robert’s. Samantha Belson. I have a name. Now I just need to and out if she’s still alive. My next move depends very much on the type of game we’re playing here, and I’ve got exactly three days in which to and that out. (Steadman, 2022:121)

This scene shows that after hearing Robert’s recording, it is now up to Harry to decide what her next move will be. From the recording and deep search on the internet, Harry gains the name of a woman with valuable information that will help her to understand better what game Robert plans for her. Her plan to gain the person’s name to interrogate finally works and it’s now up to her to find the person. Gain here means obtaining something valuable or useful from another source, which in this case helps Harry act strategically in the situation.

1.5 Strategy

Strategy can be viewed as sign when a person or a group use power in planned actions to weakens the other.

‘Because that’s part of the game,’ she tells me, her tone low. ‘You’re not supposed to tell new family members how to play; they have to and it out, like everyone else. It’s a test. Of character. Of working together, as a team, one generation with the next. Teamwork.’ She smiles. ‘And you won. You should be happy.’ Her tone is tight now, slightly irritated, as if she’d laid on the whole evening for me and this was all the thanks she’d got. (Steadman, 2022:152)

In this scene, Harry confronts Fiona about the absurdity and danger of the effect of the game on her, considering her delicate condition. In return, Fiona dismisses her by saying that it is a tradition and part of the test to know a new family member. Although it seems bizarre, the game serves as one of the strategies in the Holbeck family. Strategy here means a planned action to influence or control someone. The Holbeck family uses the game to test new members and see how they react.

1.6 Communication

‘No. But you were the only one who responded in the right way. You seemed concerned about being contacted in relation to the family at all, concerned about the questions being asked. The questions wouldn’t really have bothered anyone but you.’ She tenses as she realizes the truth of my words. Her own caution gave her away. (Steadman, 2022:160)

This quotation shows how communication is used as sign of power relation between Harry and Holbeck’s former nanny, Samantha Belson, who holds important information. Harry explains that her response clearly shows that she is weary to deal with the Holbeck family again and Harry wants to know the reason why. Communication here means sharing or keeping information. By deciding what response to tell Harry, Samantha tells Harry what she need to know, showing how communication can be a form of power.

2. Causes of Power Relation

According to Tobore (2023:1), most people want to have power, and there are many benefits of power. This means power has several strong causes that give reason for why some people desire to have power in their lives, especially power over other people. From the novel, it is found that there are several causes of power relations that can happen.

2.1 Status Differences

I shove my burning cold hands into my pockets and continue on, replaying Fiona’s words. My baby, the creature growing inside me, will inherit everything. Everything here, everything in New York and London and France and Italy and LA and Switzerland. All of it. Everywhere. Everything. The whole Holbeck empire. The idea is beyond real understanding. The weight of all that shouldn’t rest on one person. (Steadman, 2022:259)

Harry begins to think about her child’s future after Fiona’s revelation. Her child will be regarded as the heir to all of the Holbeck dynasty just because she is the first child of Holbeck’s firstborn. She thinks about how much pressure and weight will fall on the child and how all of

it seems absurd for her. In the end, Harry shows disagreement toward the demand in her child's future. According to Foucault, status difference is the difference in social or economic position that lets some people have more influence over others. Here, the child's position as heir gives them power and privilege, but also brings heavy expectations from the family.

2.2 Institutions

This research gathers that family is one of the institutions that appears most frequently in the novel.

'Now, Harriet, don't misunderstand me. I've made peace with that part of the story. My concern now is for my family. I want him back here. Eleanor wants him back with the family. Matilda spoke with you, I understand. We all want him back and we think this engagement is a good thing. You're good for him. I see that. (Steadman, 2022:72)

Robert's confession to Harry implies that he understands that Harry is the only hope to bring Edward back to the family business. Robert tells her that everyone in the family supports Edward and Harry's engagement as one of the ways to bring Edward back into the Holbeck family. This shows how the family functions as an institution, which according to Foucault is a structured system with its own rules. The Holbeck family acts together to maintain its traditions and rules. The family guiding their members' behavior and decisions, and using Harry and Edward's engagement as a tool to manage the family's goals in having Edward back in the family business.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that humans are social beings who depend on others from birth, and this dependence naturally creates power in relationships. Because people live, communicate, and interact with each other every day, power relations become part of social life. Power appears when one person or group can influence the actions, choices, or feelings of others. As explained by Foucault, power does not exist on its own but only exists when it is used in interaction, which is called a power relation. Based on the analysis, *The Family Game* clearly shows that power relations shape almost every interaction among Harry and the Holbeck family. By using a qualitative descriptive method and a sociological literary approach, this research analyzes Catherine Steadman's *The Family Game* by collecting and analyzing words, phrases and sentences and connecting them to power relation.

Power appears through many signs such as authority, control, interest, gain, strategy, and communication. These signs show how the Holbeck family uses their high status,

influence, and strong family traditions to affect Harry and Edward's lives. The causes of power relations in the novel come mostly from status differences, personal goals, and the strong role of the family as a social institution. The Holbecks' wealth, traditions, and expectations create pressure that forces other characters to react and adjust. The effects of power relations are also visible. Each character both show resistance when they feel controlled and these characters also earn new knowledge from each of them. This proves Foucault's idea that power and knowledge always influence each other.

In conclusion, the novel shows that power relations are complex and dynamic. Through Harry's experience, the story reveals how power can shape relationship and decisions among the character. In the beginning of the story, Harry, the main character, is shown as a "nobody," an orphan who feels lucky to be chosen by one of the most eligible men in the world. Many people would assume that Harry would not fit in, and that the Holbeck family would eventually push Edward to choose someone they believe is a more suitable wife to continue the family legacy. Almost every member of the Holbeck family tests her, wishing that she will crumble under the family expectation, but not only does Harry prevail from every test, she also stops the harmful power relationship by stopping the person responsible for it. At the end of the novel, she is regarded as the victor of the 'family game' and the one who holds the most power of the Holbeck family.

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