

Performing Power and Womanhood: A feminist analysis of Queen Charlotte in A Bridgerton Story

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Abstract.

This study analyzes the construction of power and femininity through the character of Queen Charlotte in "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story" (2023). Previous analyses of the series have predominantly concentrated on narrative resistance and gender stereotypes, with insufficient emphasis on the performative and intersectional aspects of identity. This study employs a qualitative interpretive methodology to examine selected moments from Episodes 1, 4, 5, and 6, focusing on verbal and nonverbal components, such as conversation, gestures, posture, and wardrobe. Butler's theory of gender performativity, Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality, and de Beauvoir's idea of the social construction of femininity all help shape the approach. The results indicate that Queen Charlotte's identity is not static but is perpetually negotiated through performative acts that concurrently convey authority and femininity. Her character exemplifies how power can manifest in emotional, relational, and embodied modalities rather than solely through conventional masculine paradigms. Additionally, her status as a Black woman in a royal setting underscores the intersection of gender, race, and class in the formation of intricate authority structures. This work enhances feminist media studies by offering a cohesive analysis of performativity and intersectionality, highlighting the significance of visual and embodied aspects for understanding female power in modern historical drama.

Keywords: feminist analysis; gender performativity; intersectionality; queen charlotte; womanhood

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The fast growth of global streaming services, especially Netflix, has changed how cultural stories are made and shared between nations in a big way. Streaming platforms differ from traditional broadcast media in that they are not limited by geography or institutions. This allows them to change how people throughout the world think about identity, gender, and power. In this framework, television transcends mere entertainment, serving as a cultural arena where gender identities and forms of power are actively formed and negotiated (Vivid, 2019). Recent research underscores that digital streaming platforms are essential to reconfiguring representational politics, particularly with respect to gender and diversity (Daalmans et al., 2024). One significant change in modern media is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to portray women. Women are no longer limited to passive or supporting roles; they are increasingly depicted as agents of political, social, and personal influence. This development is part of a broader shift in feminist discourse and media production, in which female characters are depicted as complex people who can navigate power within restricted systems (Glatt et al., 2020). Nonetheless, in the realm of historical drama, this change is still incomplete. Historically, these tales have perpetuated patriarchal standards by portraying women as subordinate entities, characterized mostly by domestic roles, romantic involvements, or emotional influence rather than political action (Ketchum, 2022). Recent productions endeavor to reinterpret the past from a modern perspective; yet the depiction of female leadership within historically patriarchal frameworks remains a significant area for examination.

In this context, *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023) stands out as an important cultural book. The series reimagines Queen Charlotte's ascent to power by portraying her as a Black woman in a position of authority, navigating both her royal duties and her identity. This depiction is significant as it intersects various facets of identity, such as gender, race, and class, within a historical context that has conventionally marginalized such intricacy. Tasker (2020) observe that contemporary media increasingly engage in "retrospective revision," reshaping historical narratives to address present issues of gender and identity. This study employs three principal theoretical frameworks to analyze this representation. Initially, Beauvoir (2011) posits that gender is a social construct, emphasizing that femininity is influenced by external conventions rather than intrinsic characteristics. Second, Butler (2016), posits that gender is performative, formed through recurrent actions such as voice, gesture, and physical manifestation. Third, Crenshaw (2018), presents intersectionality to elucidate the interplay of different identities, especially gender and race, in generating intricate experiences and power dynamics. These frameworks have been extensively utilized in modern feminist media studies to examine the construction of identity through discourse, embodiment, and social positioning (Butler et al., 2012). Earlier research on Queen Charlotte and the *Bridgerton* series has primarily focused on opposition to patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and the linguistic attributes of female characters (Fauziah et al., 2025). These investigations offer significant insights; yet, they are predominantly confined to narrative and verbal analysis. They do not pay enough attention to the performative aspects of identification, especially to how non-verbal elements such as gesture, costume, and bodily expression shape power and femininity. Furthermore, research in film and media analysis underscores that visual and corporeal components are integral to meaning-making and identity formation (Turner, 2024). Additionally, there is a lack of research that combines gender performativity and intersectionality as synergistic analytical frameworks to explore the dynamic negotiation of identity across various contexts.

This study examines how Queen Charlotte embodies power and femininity through verbal and non-verbal characteristics, thereby addressing this gap. It also examines how her ethnicity, gender, and class intersect to shape her identity as a Black woman with royal power. This research seeks to enhance understanding of female power in modern historical drama by integrating performativity and intersectionality, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse in feminist media studies.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Feminist literature has long contested essentialist conceptions of womanhood, asserting that femininity is not an innate biological state but a socially constructed identity shaped by cultural norms and institutional frameworks. (Barnaba, 2025) seminal assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" posits that female identity is constructed through socialization processes that align women with patriarchal norms. This viewpoint is especially pertinent in media studies, where femininity is frequently shaped by externally imposed roles that dictate women's behavior, appearance, and social duties. However, modern feminist media scholars argue that these depictions are becoming more complex, existing in what Butler (2009) calls a "double entanglement" in which empowerment and limitation coexist. Triagustina (2024) also emphasizes that contemporary media fosters a postfeminist worldview in which women seem empowered yet are subtly constrained by enduring gender conventions. De Beauvoir emphasizes the structural formation of femininity; nonetheless, her framework inadequately represents the enactment of gender in quotidian behaviors. Butler (2016) theory of gender performativity overcomes this constraint by framing gender as a construct perpetually generated by iterative actions, encompassing voice, gesture, bodily presentation, and style. Consequently, gender is not a fixed identity but a continuous performance

influenced by normative demands. It is important to note that performativity is not just a way to follow rules; it can also be used to break them, as each time gender norms are repeated, they can be changed and reinterpreted. Butler (2004) further elucidates that identity is perpetually fluid and subject to negotiation within social situations. This viewpoint is especially beneficial for examining how female characters in media both adhere to and contest prevailing gender stereotypes through verbal and non-verbal activities.

However, an exclusive focus on gender fails to capture the intricacies of female depiction. (Crenshaw, 2018) theory of intersectionality broadens the approach by illustrating that identity is formed through the interplay of several social categories, such as gender, race, and class. These dimensions do not function independently; rather, they interconnect to create complex perceptions of power and marginalization. Black feminist researchers assert that portrayals of Black women are influenced by overlapping systems of oppression that govern both visibility and validity (Collins et al., 2021). In media contexts, this indicates that female authority cannot be understood solely through gender; it is also imperative to examine how racial and socioeconomic positions affect access to power and the constraints on power dynamics. This intersectional viewpoint is crucial for examining individuals such as Queen Charlotte, whose identity is shaped at the convergence of gender, race, and class within a traditionally restrictive royal framework.

In audiovisual media, various theoretical views coalesce in the comprehension of representation as both a discursive and corporeal process. Media does not just mirror reality; it actively generates meaning through narrative, visual aesthetics, and performance posits that representation is a mechanism for constructing and disseminating meaning within a culture, whereas, underscores that meaning is negotiated through the interplay between text and listener. In this context, visual components such as attire, posture, gestures, and spatial arrangement serve as semiotic resources that shape identity and power dynamics (Motiejūnienė & Danilavičienė, 2025). contends that apparel in film and television is not solely ornamental but actively contributes to the construction of character identification and narrative significance. These viewpoints underscore the necessity of analyzing both discourse and the visual and corporeal aspects of performance to comprehend the representation of power and femininity (Hou, 2025).

Although there is a growing body of research on how women are portrayed in the media, there are still few studies on Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story. Most of them focus on narrative resistance, gender stereotypes, or the language of female characters (Fauziah et al., 2025) Although these studies offer significant insights, they frequently see identity as a static characteristic rather than a fluid process, and they seldom address the performative and visual aspects that contribute to identity formation. Additionally, there is a deficiency of research that combines gender performativity and intersectionality as synergistic analytical frameworks. Consequently, the intricate dynamics of power, femininity, and identity negotiated through both verbal and bodily actions remain insufficiently examined. To mitigate these constraints, this research employs a comprehensive analytical framework that synthesizes de Beauvoir's notion of the social construction of womanhood, Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Crenshaw's intersectionality. This synthesis provides a more thorough examination of how Queen Charlotte's identity is shaped by structural constraints and simultaneously enacted and redefined across various circumstances. This study analyzes both verbal and nonverbal components, framing identification as a dynamic, intersectional process, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of female power in modern historical drama.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative interpretative methodology to analyze the construction of power and femininity through the character of Queen Charlotte in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023). The study does not seek to quantify patterns; instead, it concentrates on evaluating how meaning is generated through both verbal and non-verbal elements within the series. This method works well for media research because it allows you to examine how audiovisual texts depict people, construct identities, and employ performative techniques. The data for this study were extracted from specific scenes in Episodes 1, 4, 5, and 6, intentionally selected for their pertinence to the research objective. These scenes show Queen Charlotte's authority, emotional expressiveness, and identity negotiation most clearly. The analysis focuses on her relationships with important people, including Princess Augusta, King George, the royal doctor, and her children. These relationships are important for understanding how power and femininity are shown and challenged in the story.

Data were gathered by watching the chosen scenes repeatedly and paying close attention. We looked at both verbal and non-verbal parts. Verbal data includes things like tone, conversation, and speech patterns. Non-verbal data includes things like wardrobe, gesture, posture, and facial expression. We wrote down and grouped these aspects to identify trends in their use and performance across different narrative scenarios. The analysis employs a theme and interpretative approach. The data were organized into three key areas of analysis: (1) the way gender is expressed through speech, (2) the way gender is expressed through body language and clothing, and (3) the way gender, race, and class come together to shape Charlotte's identity. These categories are not considered as discrete variables but as interrelated facets of identity formation. Three complementary theoretical frameworks help us understand the data. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is employed to examine the enactment of identity through recurrent verbal and physical acts. Crenshaw's (1989) notion of intersectionality offers a framework to analyze the concurrent influence of gender, racism, and class on Charlotte's status and power. De Beauvoir's (1949/2011) concept of the social construction of womanhood is used to analyze the external definitions and negotiations of femininity within institutional frameworks, such as the monarchy. These concepts provide a comprehensive investigation of the construction, performance, and contestation of power and femininity within the series.

To ensure analytical rigor, the study employs a systematic interpretive framework that correlates specific cases and textual data with the applied theoretical principles. The analysis does not rely on single cases; instead, it looks for patterns that recur across episodes to develop a logical, theoretically sound explanation. This method makes the results more credible by ensuring that both evidence and theoretical reasoning consistently support the interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that Queen Charlotte's persona does not represent a static conception of femininity or power; instead, her identity is perpetually contested through both verbal and non-verbal performances in various circumstances. The results indicate that power and femininity are not contradictory categories but are instead dynamically interconnected, shaped by

language, physical expression, attire, and emotional management. This corroborates Butler's (1990) thesis that gender constitutes a fluid identity formed through repeated actions and aligns with Butler's (2004) subsequent claim that identity is perpetually negotiated within evolving social circumstances.

1. Verbal performativity as a kind of strategic resistance

Charlotte's language serves as a strategic arena for negotiating authority under patriarchal limitations. Most of the time, she does not directly reject; instead, she uses controlled politeness and well-chosen words to quietly challenge what is expected of her. In Episode 1, for example, Augusta's framing of Charlotte's function as a reproductive "obligation" exemplifies what Butler (1990) calls normative regulation, in which people are forced to follow socially accepted duties. Charlotte's answer shows a kind of "citational performance," in which she follows expected rules while still making room to break them. Her acquiescence is not passive but strategic, indicating the potential for rebellion within constraints. This relationship exemplifies (Lamberg, 2023), concept of the coexistence of empowerment and limitation, wherein female autonomy functions inside, rather than outside, patriarchal frameworks.

2. Emotional Expression and the Work of Identity

Charlotte's negotiation of identity is more evident in her expression of emotional experiences. In Episode 4, her declaration, "I must hold myself apart," reveals the emotional effort required to maintain her position as queen. This statement does not indicate an innate condition; rather, it illustrates the ongoing effort necessary to conform to institutional standards of identity. In this context, vulnerability does not diminish her authority; instead, it underscores the manufactured essence of gendered power, so strengthening Butler's (1990) assertion that identity must be actively sustained. Simultaneously, this discovery aligns with (Gill, 2017) concept of postfeminist sensibility, which portrays women as self-regulating creatures who are required to continually navigate their emotions and identities within socially established standards.

3. Femininity as a Source of Power

The results also show that femininity and authority may coexist and work together. Charlotte's decision to fire the royal doctor in Episode 5 illustrates how power can be wielded through emotional and relational reasoning. Her power does not come from being against being a woman; it comes from being a woman. This challenges conventional beliefs that link power to masculine rationality, endorsing feminist perspectives that love and care can serve as valid forms of authority (Imray Papineau, 2025). Simultaneously, this depiction signifies a broader transformation in modern culture, in which female authority is increasingly framed as both emotional and authoritative, rather than solely confrontational.

4. Non-Verbal Performance: Body, Costume, and Authority

Nonverbal cues are very important to Charlotte's sense of self. Costume, stance, and gesture serve as visual indicators of authority and affiliation. Charlotte's extravagant European clothing in the first few episodes shows that she has a strong sense of identity and does not want to fit into the British royal system right away. Contends that costume actively influences character identification rather than simply embellishing it (Liu, 2025). From a representational standpoint, these visual components serve as systems of meaning generation rather than just aesthetic selections (Hall,

1997). In the same way, Charlotte's upright posture and controlled movements show the disciplined physique needed to maintain power. These bodily performances exemplify Butler's (1990) assertion that the body is a fundamental site for the production and regulation of gender, while also reinforcing Fiske's (1987) contention that meaning is generated through visual codes interpreted by audiences within cultural contexts.

5. Intersectionality and Identity Regulation

Charlotte's identity is further influenced by the convergence of gender, race, and class. Her restrained emotional reaction in Episode 6 exemplifies not only societal norms of femininity but also the racialized expectations linked to the "strong Black woman" archetype (Harris-Perry, 2011). In this framework, emotional restraint becomes a socially conditioned performance shaped by multiple forms of power. This conclusion corroborates Crenshaw's (1989) assertion that identity must be perceived as the outcome of interlocking systems of oppression. Black feminist researchers underscore that these overlapping dynamics govern both representation and legitimacy, influencing the performance and perception of authority (Varcoe, 2022)

6. Cultural Negotiation and Institutional Control

The intersectional aspect is also apparent during instances of cultural regulation. Augusta's insistence that Charlotte wear "traditional" English clothing is a type of institutional control that goes beyond gender to include race and class. Charlotte's body becomes a place where she has to fit into the most common societal norms. This corresponds with Collins' (2000) assertion that the identities of Black women are influenced by overlapping institutions that govern both representation and agency. These instances exemplify the functioning of power not solely through overt authority but also through nuanced forms of cultural regulation ingrained in quotidian activities.

7. Constructive Ambivalence in Women's Power

In general, Charlotte's character fits into what feminist media researchers call "productive ambivalence" (Ge, 2025). She both follows and goes against patriarchal conventions, showing both weakness and strength. This ambivalence is not a constraint but a vital locus of meaning, illustrating the intricacies of navigating power under constrictive frameworks. This dual posture corresponds with Gill's (2007) concept of postfeminist representation; wherein female empowerment is juxtaposed with persistent restriction. Instead of telling a simple story of freedom, the series presents a more complex picture in which power is constantly used, fought over, and reinterpreted across different situations.

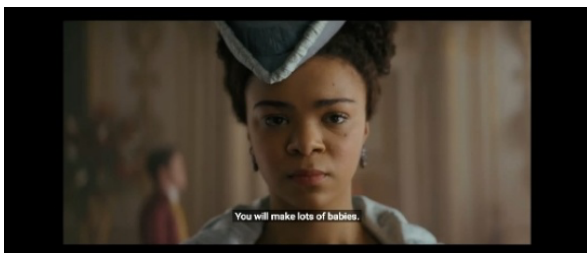


Figure 1 episode 1 Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (Netflix)



Figure 2 episode 4 Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (Netflix)



Figure 3 episode 5 Queen Charlotte: A bridgerton Story(Netflix)

Figure 4 episode 6 Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (Netflix)

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Queen Charlotte's character in Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023) challenges the old idea that femininity and authority are separate by demonstrating that they are always changing and contested. The analysis of verbal and nonverbal factors demonstrates that Charlotte does not merely embody power; she actively produces it through language, bodily discipline, wardrobe, and emotional regulation. This supports Butler's (1990) claim that gender is not a stable essence but a performative process, and de Beauvoir's (1949/2011) idea that womanhood is socially produced and shaped by external expectations. The study emphasizes that Charlotte's authority cannot be comprehended solely through the lens of gender. Her identity is shaped by the convergence of gender, race, and class, illustrating how power operates through interconnected regulatory systems. Utilizing (Crenshaw, 2018) intersectionality framework, this study demonstrates that Charlotte's status as a Black woman within a royal context generates a multifaceted kind of authority that is simultaneously facilitated and restricted by institutional and cultural norms. Her persona exemplifies what feminist media scholars refer to as productive ambivalence, simultaneously adhering to and contesting patriarchal institutions (Ge, 2025).

This study's originality stems from its integrated analytical framework, merging gender performativity and intersectionality to investigate both verbal and non-verbal aspects of representation. This research illustrates that identity and power are formed through a broader array of performative practices, encompassing visual and bodily components, in contrast to earlier studies that focus primarily on story or speech. This enhances feminist media studies by providing a more nuanced comprehension of the representation and negotiation of female authority in modern historical drama. In practical terms, the findings indicate that modern media portrayals of influential women ought to be perceived as intricate and negotiated rather than solely liberating. Even though these kinds of representations may seem progressive, they are often still part of the rules already in place. This underscores the necessity of critically analyzing media texts to reveal the nuanced mechanisms through which power, identity, and inequality are established and perpetuated.

However, this study is constrained by its focus on a single television series and its reliance on textual analysis. Subsequent research is thus advised to broaden this area of investigation in multiple avenues. First, studies on how different cultural and social groups respond to and interpret the portrayal of female power and intersectional identity could be conducted. Second, comparing different historical drama series would help us better understand how Black female authority is constructed and transformed in modern media. Third, future research may utilize multimodal or discourse-analytic methodologies to investigate the production of meaning through the interplay of visual, linguistic, and contextual components. Finally, longitudinal or cross-platform studies could examine how portrayals of strong women evolve over time across different media settings, especially in the fast-changing world of global streaming platforms.

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