

# "Females' Oppression and Revolt in the Power by Naomi Alderman: A Feminist Overview"

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## ABSTRACT

Naomi Alderman's novel *The Authority* is an enthralling exposition about a woman's capacity to shock her counterpart with a jolt of electricity and the next alteration in her society's power structure. This paper applies feminist critique on the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler. Alderman's study on the consequences of power struggle of a woman who gains prowess by shocking men into helplessness is framed in a fantasy reality and she contemplates the question: is there any empowerment in subjugation? The answer lies in the drive to subjugate women and the accompanied violence which this study tries to constrain within ethical boundaries of feminism. Notably this paper argues that *The Power* offers a critique of gender inequalities because, despite the oppression crafted within the narrative, equal acceptance is suppressed through exertion of violence. Alderman proposes the idealistic view that assertive domination and force are irrelevant to real power which is needed to shatter the systems mandating inequitable distribution of power. The analysis enhances debates on relationships between feminism sociological and Alderman's novel to highlight how modern discourse on the notion of empowerment is challenged.

**Keywords:** Alderman, *The Power*, feminist critique, Beauvoir, Butler, gender disparity, violence, sociopolitical inequity, feminism, empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

The fight for gender equality has been one of the most prominent issues in the literature and, at the same time, the cross-sections of social, political, and cultural scheme that afflicts women and their struggle for self-preservation. Literature functions as both reality and criticism, providing writers with an opportunity to break the rules of society and create alternative systems of power. Alderman's *The Power* (2016) is a novel that guesses what society would look like if women became socially, politically, and economically powerful after being subjugated to electricity generation and manipulation. Alderman's narrative, while evoking historical oppression's complex questions about power and corruption, also exposes the nature of power, corruption, and the ever-present cycle of dominion and subjugation. *The Power* serves as both a feminist account of historical gender oppression and a warning tale about the consequences of absolute power. This work will analyze how Alderman's novel engages with feminist questions of oppression, political power, and gender fluidity through the lenses of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler.

Feminist literary critic looks at text through the lens of sociocultural and systemic gender structures and their systems of oppression which is one among many reasons why feminist literary criticism is taught in schools worldwide. Feminist criticism is taught in schools worldwide. Simone De Beauvoir posits claims in her literature unlike other women. *The Second Sex* with published in 1949 is an eye-opening feminist piece that argues the essence of the woman has always been the 'other' therefore should not have existed in the first place because women in society are only put in 0 places. She further illustrates the argument "one is not in biology is their essence but culture and society She dominates the essences construct a womb. Simone uses powerful immersive language to portray women to be mere objects of society subordinate to all. The same can be said to hue low

interpretation of power where Alderman delves on the societal norms expected. It is when women have the capacity to the energy where people regard women to get rid of the mindless stereotypical feminism associated with caregiving. This is in fact the opposite sense of that the title gives. Women become men meaning of the term assuming control dominating nations, warfare and even aspect violence. Alderman combats so provide female enhancement context where woman and mother amore stronger essentialist structure is considered believed to exert violent gentile rule. Rather, that control sever, regardless of the claim a lens has been fed... through gender proposes dictions banded to essential IDs relations.

Taking from de Beauvoir, Butler deepens the exploration of gender as a societal phenomenon in *Gender Trouble* (1990) with the idea of gender performance. Butler articulates that gender is not an intrinsic characteristic; instead, "it is [only] a repeated stylization of the body, a set of enacted within a dramatically constrained regulatory apparatus" (Butler 34). In *The Power*, Alderman changes gender roles and depicts women who do not have to submissively obey men. These women can overturn systems of controls and strike dominion in other societies in manners akin to men. However, Alderman does not present this shift as entirely emancipating. She emphasizes how the systems of control remain in place, no matter what the change of oppressors and the oppressed. *The Power*, in considering gender as an act rather than an attribute, confirms Butler's assertion that gender exists therefore and is not a precursor of society (Moi 102).

Political issues profoundly inform her critique of feminism. Since time immemorial, women have been relegated to the politically inferior position of the 'head of the household' due to the politically invalid and 'feminine' reasoning, which said women 'do not have the capability to rule.' Political structures 'dover' suffrage and systematically 'sandwich' women in a governance role, which only a man is believed to have. Alderman depicts a reality wherein women seize power and reimagines the political structure for women to benefit. He inverts the scenario and proves that women have the capability to dominate and rule extractive structures. In some instances, female characters exercise their power to bring about justice and equality, while in other instances, the characters dominate yet another cycle of subjugation and exploitation.

This is an illustration of de Beauvoir's argument that saying freedom can be achieved merely by reversing the hierarchy is misguided; real change requires a fundamental reorganization of power dynamics. The reordering of such relations is fully possible with the quote, "the oppressed must in no wise define themselves by the criteria set forth by the oppressor" (Beauvoir 713). This paradox is what *The Power* seeks to resolve as women who, although wielding power, are often shown supplanting the cyclical patterns of control shaped by oppressive forces through the lenses of deep-seated historical subjugation (Barry 128).

Also, Alderman's novel interacts with feminist political theory by contemplating if the oppression of a people is not a consequence of one being 'gendered' but rather a question of power. The novel argues that power, by virtue of being held unequally, leads to exploitation and violence irrespective of the gender of the possessor. This is in line with Judith Butler's criticism of power relations. She argues that structural divisions must be removed for there to be true equality but does impose any form of gender order (Butler 52). In *The Power*, Alderman does not depict a dystopian society where women rule and live in peace; instead, she depicts a dystopia where oppression based on power and gender is simply reversed. Without systemic change, the same cycles of dominance and resistance are bound to occur repeatedly.

In other way, *The Power* politically problematizes the issues of revenge, justice, and moral obligation within the scope of feminist activism. Some of the female characters after undergoing years of subjugation seek vengeance against their former oppressors. This brings forth an important question: is any form of violence acceptable in fighting systemic injustice? On the one hand, some feminist scholars contend that radical elements are essential to dismantling oppressive systems. On the other hand, some feminist scholars warn of the violence and contradictions of replicating former patriarchal structures. This debate is fundamental to *The Power*, as Alderman brings to the fore the unsettling reality that not all revolutions bring about justice, and those who seize power often grapple with questions of the ethical exertion of that power.

In conclusion, the multifaceted analysis offered in *The Power* proves Alderman's critique of women's historical oppression through the lens of existential feminist de Beauvoir and Butler's gender performativity theory. The

story encompasses an essentialist approach of gender, norm politics, and social metamorphoses all at once. This shift focusses on Alderman's enduring philosophical inquiries of power, subversion, and defiance as she relates them to societal evolution. This novel further adds to women's discourse which aims to reframe patriarchal images of society. It does so by showing that dismantling misogynistic frameworks is not enough. There is a need to reconfigure societal structures.

These aims are based on two key assumptions: first, that the representation of female oppression and revolt in *The Power* corresponds with existing feminist activism, and second, that the novel has significant political feminist ramifications about the concept of power and resistance. The study engages the theories of de Beauvoir and Butler to provide a feminist critique of *The Power* that analyzes the connectivity between literature and social commentary.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) is a remarkable novel centered on the issue of gender relations and the paradox of power, oppression, and resistance. Alderman raises the crucial question of what it means to hold power and then goes ahead to answer it in the context of women's electric power generators in a dominantly patriarchal society. Such themes in the novel merit scholarly discussion in feminist literary criticism, particularly the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, who argue that gender is a product of social actions rather than biology. Moreover, Alderman's work is relevant to *The Power* in discussing the ethical dilemmas of power, resistance, and governance in the context of political feminist theory. This literature review focuses on feminist questions of gender performativity and Alderman's novel's dystopian cautionary elements paying special attention to the feminist discussion to Alderman's work.

The literature about feminist critique has seen that within a patriarchal system, women are socially constructed as subordinate and dominated. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) conquers this hierarchy by saying that women have been assigned the position of the 'Other', while men are the so-called 'universal subjects' of humanity (Beauvoir 283). She argues that this is a matter of socialization, not biology. Alderman's *The Power* supports this view by illustrating a reality where behavior is governed by power, not gender. Women, in this case, who physically overpower men, start to impose the same historically patriarchal systems of oppression. The novel, therefore, is an illustration of de Beauvoir's contention that oppression is neither masculine nor feminine but socialized all the same – it is power that dominates civilization.

Based on de Beauvoir's logic, Gilbert and Gubar concentrate on the representation of women in literature and their subservient and ogre-like characterizations, especially when women do not conform to the expectations of their society. In their book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar contend that in literature, women's roles are confined to being either passive devout women or dangerous subversive feminists (Gilbert and Gubar 34). This is also observable in *The Power*, where the female characters swing from being heroine revolutionaries to dreadful oppressors. Take Roxy, for example; Roxy starts off as a wronged woman, but later, she becomes bloodthirstily domineering. Gilbert and Gubar would suggest that women's attempts to break free from the patriarchal framework become the cause of their demonization, and thus, they suffer the very gendered constraints they are trying to flee from. Alderman's novel, on the other hand, appears to subvert this trope by constructing a world in which women are not demonized, but rather, willingly take on the position of oppressors. In doing this, the novel not only is a critique of patriarchal subjugation but also the wielding of power, regardless of the holder.

*The Power* includes smoothness of gender roles as one of its central features, which Butlers performs with gender theory. In *Gender Trouble* Butler argues against the notion that gender as an identity is "settled" is a stasis. Gender is a sequence of activities within, and bound to, a web of cultural phenomena (Butler 34). She argues that societies grow structured expectations of "doing" gender and so expect that these acts will be accepted as the norm, even though these practices are trivial. *Power* counters this notion by illustrating how social roles are acted out when the systems of power are altered. Aggression, dominance, and militarization are social male traits that women begin to 'do' when women are physically powerful. This addition to her theory reinforces her claim that gender is not a trait, but an act influenced by the surrounding culture.

Indeed, the way Alderman assigns power as corrupting illustrates Butler's point about identity being tangled in cultural constructs. In a more direct way Alderman's *The Power* states fundamentalist feminist approaches which suggest women are more caring or somehow morally superior are misguided. Power suggests the root of oppression is not in biology but in social structures that reward power and control. When women are afforded power, they reproduce the very violence and domination that has been turned upon them. Butler says, the structure of power runs through discourse whereby identity is narrated and perceived, and the control over conduct is social and relational' (Moi 156). Alderman's novel therefore goes disproving the belief in gender essentialism by showing the gender belief that power would be wielded in a benevolent manner.

Besides exploring theistic gender dynamics, *The Power* examines feminist political theory by focusing on the ethics of governance and resistance. In Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (2017) she recounts how women have been politically subordinated and argues that societies have systematically erased women's voices (Beard 41). Alderman, in *The Power*, tries to counter this historical neglect by envisioning women in a world where they have achieved political dominance. However, the novel does not illustrate feminist dystopia. Instead, it shows that power can corrupt. Women like Tatiana Moskalev, who gain power, start to wield it in the ways that have until now been reserved for male rulers. This does not aid in the development of any idealized concepts of feminist governance and strengthens Beard's assertion that power does not in itself lead to just outcomes.

In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984), hooks continue insisting that freedom cannot be obtained with a simple change of power structures. She emphasizes that feminism is about the rigid abolition of all forms of hierarchies (hooks 57). *The Power* illustrates this idea in the way that transferring power from men to women creates a different form of oppression instead of removing it. The novel also depicts female rulers who do not look to impose equality but look to set up novel forms of domination. Alderman's written work, thus, serves as a cautionary tale on the consequences of reproducing oppressive structures instead of cutting them.

Alderman's *The Power* takes a position somewhere in between. Utopian and dystopian views of feminism disposed of in left and right extremes. Scholars of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) discuss a theocratic dystopia where women are oppressed and controlled, and an all-female utopian society, respectively. Alderman describes a dystopian nadir of power, in contrast to the idealized feminist future, positioning herself between extremes. Like *Herland*, Alderman's novel does not idealize a world ruled by women, rather, it asserts the belief that power becomes corrupt, irrespective of the wielder. This aligns most closely with Atwood, who predicts unchecked power and authority.

Additionally, Alderman outlines the ethical clashes and the controversies surrounding the use of violence and aggression in feminist struggles. Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), advocates for the use of rational discourse and education in the attainment of equality (Wollstonecraft 88). Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (1984), who argues that anger and fury, as well as a strong wish for radical change, are necessary for the dismantling of oppression (Lorde 112). *Power* approaches this debate in a different direction by depicting characters involved in both liberation and vengeance fueled by the powers they have bought. For example, Allie tries to construct cults for the purpose of female empowerment, while others, like Roxy, are bloodthirsty agents of oppression. Alderman argues that unethical power is just a form of oppression.

*The Power* uses feminist literary criticism, political theory, and dystopian fiction to profoundly analyze gender and power relations. Alderman's inversion of the gender hierarchy shows essentialist views of femininity and masculinity are challenged—they are dominated by power, not by contour. *The Power* shifts the focus of discourse of feminist scholars like Beauvoir and Butler into the realm of a cautionary kaleidoscopic feminist novel that explores the moral complexities of the act of 'resistance.' *Power* does not provide a pose for an ideal world. Instead, it thrusts onto its audience the grim reality that oppression is not a gendered phenomenon, but an interwoven reality that supersedes the fabrications of contemporary equalist dogma.

## METHODOLOGY

The study examines the Naomi Alderman's novel "The Power" which approached the result and discussion whereby using different references regarding the topic of the papers, as well as by close reading texts that content

overall idea about the story and the feminist theory appeared in this study, the study also focused on genders roles in old generation and the same period of the time, that the events of each case happened.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Naomi Alderman's *The Power* shows that electricity has also serves as a weapon and a means of territorial control. Men no longer have the monopoly on violence but lose what is left of their humanity in the process. This study used feminist theory and the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler; it is evident that Alderman's novel is not in the business of correcting gender inequality. The author of these novel grants a woman the ability to deliver electric shocks. Such power drastically reconfigures the order of society. While criticizing the functioning of patriarchy and its 'empowerment' and 'oppression' facets, this book asks the subversive question: what does it mean to fully own women's power? The novel serves as a critique to the ever-so-rampant prevailing patriarchy, while providing a disturbingly vivid world in which gender dynamics are at the forefront of the narrative.

Alderman draws upon belief systems that aid in the upholding of patriarchal systems as claiming that these systems cannot be dismantled, even if one alters the positions of the captor and the captive. The analysis of women as another by Simone de Beauvoir is fundamental in understanding power. Beauvoir argues that women for ages have been reduced to being identified by a man as an 'other', someone who does not have a personal identity of her own, but possesses subordinate, passive, and inert characteristics and whose existence is merely as a recipient of some action being done to her (Beauvoir 283). Alderman's narrative does give women agency, but such agency is immensely constrained by social norms. The ability to generate electrical shocks, for instance, is a skill that many women are said to have and is regarded as a form of power. In truth, the power that women have is exercised through violence, coercion, and domination, which are male attributes.

Although there has been a change in theme, it cannot be achieved through biological determinism, which has been used as a justification for oppression in a patriarchal framework. The fact that women's subordination has been set up as a social construct is something that the novel's critique does not hesitate in confronting (Beauvoir 289). Although women may have the physical capability to dominate now, the real question is, does this now claimed power provide genuine emancipation? The change in *The Power* in the relations of dominances ascribed to women does not, however, explain the lifting of the burdens of oppression but rather, unveils the real essence of power. The moment women can deploy the physical power which the power of force is able to dominate, the violence of power inequality that is dominant in any social structure will still be there. The irony of so many social structures around the world has been overwhelmingly described as power. Butler's theory of gender performance certainly does not simplify the question. As said earlier, gender is not an innate characteristic, but rather something people 'do' to conform to the demands of the social order. Self-identifying gender, Butler's work strides against, is neither socially nor, let alone biologically constructed, and is capably assumed to be fixed. This performativity is illuminated in *The Power* when the women who buy the ability to generate electricity begin to transform their identities and ways of living. The performative ability to dominate others is, within the hands of women, rapidly and eagerly adopted. Yet, performative, as Butler posits, does not present an alternative or even a revolutionary model of gender. One is instead presented with the same, though different, type of performance. Margot, Roxy and Tunde, as an illustration, are an embodiment of a systemic shift, because of which, however, instead of friction with the male oppression paradigm, they gracelessly reproduce the very dominative systems to which they are subjected.

Butler's works on the consequences of performative gender roles on social actions explains the friction in Alderman's novel. The women in the story attempt to take control of whole societal structures, such as political power and the press. Even so, they too perform submission and violence as men have done in history. As Butler argues, gender performance does not result in subversion and liberation, only in the reproduction of dominating and subordinating power relations (Butler 49). Alderman's novel argues that the relations of gender are not simply a reversal of relations of power, but a reconfiguration of them, which is far more radical and complex that a change in gender relations would suggest.

In 'The Power,' the author looks to explore the dynamics of complex and intricate narratives that lie beyond dominative control, conveyed through the violent empowering of power. The argument set forth within 'The

Power' can readily draw from the thoughts of Foucault, who postulated that power is dualistic: it is both repressive and productive. Such a dualistic understanding of power serves to justify the consequences of the change in the power nexus. Power goes beyond domination and oppression: it bears, produces, and cultivates identities that influence self and other feelings, deeply intertwined with self-identity. In 'The Power,' the women are given the opportunity to practice corporeal violence empowering them to become the shock, domination, and control others. In 'The Power,' the women are given the opportunity to practice corporeal violence empowering them to become the shock, domination, and control others. Such changes are not only in the socio-political identity but dimensions of identity. This change should not be viewed as a succumbing emancipatory struggle from the chains of oppression, but rather a continuation of the existing cycle of coercive violence that is prevalent in patriarchal systems.

The Power paves the way to understanding the Spivakian philosophy surrounding the colonization of 'other' culture and the violence of postcolonialism. The Power allows us to understand that the power that comes to woman does not cut the social relations organized in terms of violence but rather reproduces them. 'Colonial violence does not cease with the change of the identity of the oppressor' (Spivak 79) is a sentiment that Alderman captures in her novel. While women have power, they do not. They enact the same ways in which they were subjugated. The shift of power relations in Power is a symbol of the most problematic threat of violence in empowerment: a type of power that subjugates in the name of empowerment, which does not offer equity or justice, but grounds violence in the social order, which is stripped of a gender.

Analyzing Alderman's narrative vis-a-vis the critique on feminism and post feminism by Angela McRobbie in *The Aftermath of Feminism* is equally illuminating. Alderman's narrative can be explained through McRobbie's concept of the fractured, individualized, and neoliberal character of contemporary feminist narratives that centers on the woman's agency in a contextually unequal (McRobbie 124). This limitation is perfectly captured in *The Power*, where the emphasis on women's ability to make others lose their shock towards them is the epitome of women's fractured individualism. In the novel, the resolution to the problem of patriarchy lies in the individual empowerment of women, however, the goal of reaching gender equality is indeed absent and that is a systematic structure critique which is utterly absent. Through McRobbie's lens, Alderman's focus on individual experiences, is set in stone by a patriarchal ally oppressive society that postulates the ability of women to reach power but utterly disregards the oppressive structures that are still.

Finally, Nancy Fraser tries to criticize Alderman's Power by how she describes Alderman's concepts of power. As Fraser puts it, there is no justice without recognition, and social relations do restructure (Fraser 98). The novel's concern about power as brute and as being fundamentally hierarchical seems to ignore the lack of societal redistributive justice. It shows how, paradoxically, physical subjugation cannot empower a society to be truly egalitarian. The women in the story may buy power, but to be truly egalitarian, more than the gendered social and political relations of control will need to be transformed. It will be necessary to change *Desigual Ades socioeconomics profunda*.

In short, it is *The Power* that holds a sophisticated critique of gender, power, and oppression. It is a book which asks the reader whether it is enough to try to reverse the hierarchy of power to achieve equality. Alderman's narrative, by intertwining feminist thought and power as violence, alerts the reader to the danger of constructing a system in lieu of dismantling it. The new systems that need to be created, as Beauvoir, Butler, Spivak and Fraser argue, cannot be brought about by a reproduction of masculine systems but by a transformation of the profoundly reductive binary frameworks of oppression.

## CONCLUSION

Naomi Alderman presents in *The Power* an unusual case study on a specific sociocultural phenomenon concerning women's ability to produce electric shocks, and the resultant power shifts of the gender. From the shocks, the concerns of the novel are focused on the consequences of an abrupt change in social hierarchies, along with social relations of control, violence, and subjugation. Alderman looks to show that the idea of patriarchy is turned upside down in a biosocial world in which women have the capacity to hegemonically subjugate men, and the paradox is that power, in any form, produces subjugation. Alderman's invention is not

simply the imagining of a world in which women dominate men, but rather the assertion that any form of power is utterly corrosive and destructive, no matter the power holder.

On the surface, *The Power* appears to have implemented a change to the status quo, as its inversion of dominance now has women taking on the male roles of power. However, as the novel shows, it becomes clear that the 'power' does not lead to a more just and fair society. Rather, it serves to deepen the systems of oppression it looked to eliminate. The women who can deliver electric shocks are not the architects of freedom. They, like the men, are relegated to the role of controllers whose primary aim is to dominate, intimidate, and subjugate. The command of power is not only likely to lead to oppression, but also a certain mode of oppression and violence, and this is terrifying, the possessor, of which, does not matter.

Although Alderman's suggestion of providing women power through physical means may solve some of the problems related to gender inequalities, it raises a graver concern. The problems of women's empowerment, without any other form, will remain issues of the deepest form of subjugation. The women in power do not escape patriarchal oppression, they exercise their positions as a means of subjugating the men, and in the process, they change the gender order to combine a vicious order of dominance. These women do not escape the system of violence of which they were victims. This cycle of violence supports a concept of power, which to many, is basic. Changing positions of the oppressed and the oppressor is not enough. A change in the underlying concept of power is necessary, which many have identifiable as a paradox in the social order.

To conclude, Alderman's account *Power* essays the most radical treatment on the issues of gender, power, and oppression. It depicted power as vicious, hostile, and controlling and elaborated the fact that power itself is never liberating. True liberation would need something completely different to the underlying principle of power. Alderman's world has women dominating and subjugating everybody else, and that reflects a world of deeply troubling paradox where to achieve true egalitarianism, all forms of control and particular hierarchical arrangements need to be eliminated.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The future researchers ought to use different theories and texts relating to the same issues to give a result to gain the aims which make the study clearer for equality between men and women.
2. Recommended modern writers and researchers to use postmodern works to build better understanding of the human nature by dividing the authority in equal ways.
3. Further studies or researchers may know and be aware of being in such a harsh situation to overall the aims of such a study.
4. Such a study shows its significance for the justice between the genders, and roles in the modern universal.
5. Researchers should also gain real sources by being close to some specific situations or reading points of view of social and cultural texts of the same period, in order to make clarity for his result of any topic.

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