

Dark Side of Close Relationships in “House of Cards”

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Frank and Claire Underwood’s relationship lies at the enchanting shady heart in the House of Cards. The radiant effectiveness of their marriage as the power couple that draws correlation coupled with admiration to the Macbeths, their rival tag team. This relationship is not without controversies and remarkably visible conflicts associated to it throughout the episodes of the series. Unusual things happen in the lives of the two partners that demonstrate that they may not be a perfect couple as it may have been thought. The first instance of something bizarre and blatantly out of the American norm in the Underwoods’ marriage appears in Episode 4. Claire comes back home after visiting her former lover in his hotel room and out rightly informs her husband that she had shared dinner with this man. Instead of the hot-tempered Frank receiving this news with curses and quarrels, since this is the woman that he loves dearly, instead there is a dinner theatre swap, implied and mannered. From what happens, it is a clear indicator that her husband has been aware, and he displays a sign of openness towards the sense that his wife could be having an affair.

The act of complaining does not happen directly between this couple but it happens amongst they people who they relate with and who are close to them. Frank relates to a female journalist, Zoe Barnes, who he uses in strategically leaking information to the public. This lady has an unpleasant tendency of complaining and it seems to be inherently her character. She could be described to be suffering from what can be referred to Newsroom Syndrome (smrosenbergblog, 2013). She has a character of abhorrently justifying herself for her actions and she never at any point in time admits committing any mistakes. She is of the nature that stages hissy fits, she is disobedient to directions, she is grouchy, and she whines all the time. Despite the fact that she is intelligent and possesses a talent in journalism, she takes advantage of them and uses them in justification of her childish behavior, while eliciting complaints that she has

been wasted and she has been assigned the wrong errands, and such like issues. In another instance, the president’s wife Claire, oversteps her mandate and forcefully takes over the roles of the Secretary of State Catherine Durant. After Durant standing her ground and insists that the plan by Claire to bring Russia and China to the negotiation table is unrealistic and unworkable, her warning is not heeded to in any way (Morrow, 2016). Claire, who has never been elected into any office is outrightly disrespectful to her and she completely locks her out. Durant is heard complaining that the presence of Claire undermines her authority as Secretary of State. As much as these ladies serving under the first couple complain, their reasons for complaining are varied, with Durant’s reasons being genuine while Zoes’ reasons are unjustifiable. Zoe complains because she has made it a habit to complain and be moody over everything, but Durant complains due to the disrespectful nature of Claire and her total disregard of her professional advice to matters that are important to the state.

The very first and most dominant relationship is the relationship between the Frank and his wife Claire. It seems to be a perfect relationship at the start of the series, but as it progresses the dark sides of it emerge. Instead of their relationship being based on the love that exists between spouses in marriage, “their connection is one forged on the battleground of politics and power” (Phoebe, 2014). A view on their personalities shows a pair of people who are equal in strength, intelligence and dedication, and above all they always regard each other as equal partners in their union. With this, it is only one of them who has the ability of ruining the other. They have teamed up to form a ruthless and ferocious force that seems indomitable (Phoebe, 2014). Even in their crudest forms, they have accepted each other leaving a question as to whether this is what marriages should be about. They have been turned into a formidable pair that is out to face the world by the devotion and full acceptance to one another, a factor that

enables them to deal harshly with anyone that dares stand on their way. Except those people who serve as political aides to the president, news men and a number of others, the rest are subjected to collateral losses at the expense of their speedy rise in might. Considering the case of Claire, she does not mind jeopardizing an Non-Governmental Organization that she pioneered so that the goals of Frank can be achieved. In a bid to salvage the reputation of Frank amongst the masses, she willingly pushes her lover Adam underneath a bus. For anyone who cannot be put under control like Zoe and Peter, he/she qualifies for assassination by Frank, a thing that he does without any regrets or remorse. For Frank on the other hand, he is seen to offer help Peter Russo, a congressman, to regain his sobriety and propel an almost successful gubernatorial race only for him to plan for his downfall. After successfully getting him back to his drinking habits, he ends up killing him and staged his death to be a mere suicide. This kind of manipulation is repetitive and it becomes characteristic of Frank all through the series. Frank and Claire team up in elevating their marks to great positions of power but they at some point in time turn against them and crush their dreams and hopes, turning them into dependence and desperation towards Frank and Claire. Their relationship turns out to be a disguise of love and marriage but in the real sense it is a political and power union that is aimed at benefiting just the two of them and trampling on others and using them as footstools as they rise.

As much as the Underwoods are together, the relationship between them is complicated. Both of them are power hungry, each looking for an opportunity to outwit the other and inflict some kind of pain or harm in addition. As Season 3 draws to a close, Claire takes a bold step of walking away from Frank, an act “which would majorly tarnish his campaign if the word got out” (Piwowski, 2016). Season 4 progresses as they engage each other in strife and try to outwit each other. Which Frank depended on luck to get Claire on phone, she decided to hit him

hard on his campaign through the KKK billboard that looked like the final step into her victory over their relationship. Unfortunately this was never to be due to the codependency that existed between them. None of them could survive without the other. As much as Claire has power, she is in need of the presidential power for her to successfully prepare her ground for launching a take over. As for Frank, an excellent public image was very crucial. He could not achieve that without having a woman on his side and that could not be anyone other than Claire. His greatest problem lies in the woman he needed having feeling for the novelist, Tom Yates. After Claire gets to a point that she gets intimate with Tom, she feels that it will not be right for him to continue to serve the Underwood camp as a writer, yet Frank needs him as his speech writer. In the real sense that will be a cover up since he is a lover and gives all the things that Frank is unable to give to Claire. Frank suggests that they should have an open marriage and maintain her affair with Tom on condition that they are careful about it not to let anyone be suspicious of what is really happening. Frank comes into terms with the fact that he is not able to give Claire what she needs and he gives her an opportunity to do what is right for herself (Piwowarski, 2016), as long as she remains in their marriage. They disguise themselves and do everything that a normal romantic couple could do and conceal what is really happening between them. All this is in a bid for them to gain what they need in terms of power after they realised that they cannot maintain their positions apart.

In short, as much as Frank could be the president, his wife Claire appears to be more popular among the people. She achieves this out of her “kindness, her gentle demeanor towards other, her one-on-one talks of apparent openness and honesty” (Mellisa, 2015), all which end up benefiting Frank. However, she happens to be a narcissist. As much as she is not of the nature of always boasting about how great she is or claiming for showers of praises like a normal narcissist

could, she clearly has a strong belief in herself. This is evident when she asks Frank to appoint her as an ambassador despite her total lack of experience with regard to that job. When she fails, she blames it on others and when Frank regrets appointing her to that position, she tells him, she should not have made him president, attributing his success to herself. As much as what she says is true, she displays her narcissistic qualities through the way she addresses her husband and demands of him to respect her more like an equal to him. The confidence she shows towards tasks she has very little knowledge about also strengthens this trait. These are the traits that make her ferocious and ambitious towards positions of power and authority and they also make her husband and companion in the bid for power to respect her not just as his wife but as an equal companion.



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