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CONSTRUCTING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AS RACIALIZED PATERNAL AUTHORITY: BLACK FATHERHOOD IN *KING RICHARD* (2021)

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Abstract
This study examines the representation of hegemonic masculinity in King Richard (2021) through the character of Richard Williams as a Black father. It aims to identify the forms of hegemonic masculinity represented in the film and analyze how they are constructed through Richard's paternal position. This study employs a descriptive qualitative design and theory-driven thematic analysis based on R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. The data consist of selected scenes, dialogue, actions, decisions, and character interactions involving Richard Williams. Five representative scenes are presented to demonstrate the principal analytical categories, while the construction of Richard's masculinity as a Black father is examined through an interpretive synthesis of these findings. The analysis identifies five interconnected forms of hegemonic masculinity: leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority. Richard's masculinity is constructed primarily through planning, rule-making, protection, decision-making, and negotiation rather than physical aggression. Racialized paternal authority emerges as the dominant finding because it connects Richard's power within his family with his racial visibility, working-class position, and marginalization within professional tennis. The study concludes that the film both challenges and legitimizes Richard's dominance by representing his hegemonic masculinity as a negotiated form of paternal authority that is simultaneously controlling and protective, dominant and marginalized, contested and socially legitimized.

Keywords: *Black fatherhood, hegemonic masculinity, King Richard, paternal authority, racialized masculinity*

1. Introduction

Film is not only a form of entertainment but also a cultural medium that contributes to shaping public understandings of gender through narrative, dialogue, characterization, and visual composition. Gender representation in film is not a neutral reflection of reality because it selects and organizes particular identities, practices, and social positions (Dhanesh & Marschlich, 2025). Masculinity can therefore be understood not as an inherent biological quality of men, but as a social practice shaped by cultural expectations, interpersonal relationships, and institutional structures. Film provides an important site for examining how masculine authority is represented, challenged, and legitimized.

The construction of masculinity is particularly visible in representations of fatherhood. Fatherhood is not merely a biological status or private family role, but a gendered practice associated with leadership, provision, protection, responsibility, and decision-making (Gao et al., 2025). Although contemporary fatherhood increasingly involves caregiving and emotional participation, fathers continue to negotiate these practices alongside traditional expectations of masculine authority (Roberts & Prattes, 2024; Wang & Keizer, 2024). Paternal care may consequently function as a source of

authority when discipline, control, and decision-making are justified as necessary for children's welfare.

These practices can be examined through (Connell, 2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not suggest that all men naturally possess authority or that masculine power is expressed exclusively through physical strength and aggression. Masculine authority may also be constructed and legitimized through socially valued practices such as leadership, responsibility, protection, and control. However, this authority is also shaped by race and class. Black fathers perform their paternal roles within racialized social structures that influence how their authority and legitimacy are perceived. Black fatherhood must therefore be understood through the intersection of gender, racial stereotypes, economic conditions, family responsibility, and institutional inequality (Matlon, 2022; Young, 2021).

The intersection of masculinity, race, class, and fatherhood is represented in *King Richard* (2021), a biographical sports drama directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green. The film portrays Richard Williams as a father who develops a long-term plan to guide his daughters, Venus and Serena Williams, toward professional tennis careers. His masculinity is represented through family leadership, discipline, protection, career management, and negotiation with professional coaches and sponsors. Nevertheless, Richard exercises this authority as a Black father from a working-class background within an elite and predominantly white tennis environment. His knowledge and decisions are frequently questioned, requiring him to establish and defend his paternal authority within both familial and institutional relationships.

Previous research has frequently associated masculine power in popular culture with aggression, control, and destructive domination. (Rizky et al., 2025), for example, identified misogyny, violence, and dominance in their analysis of Homelander in *The Boys*. Whereas their study examines toxic masculinity through an antagonistic character, the present study investigates a more ambiguous form of masculine authority embodied by a father. Richard's control produces conflict and limits the agency of other family members, but it is also connected to protection, sacrifice, racial awareness, and his daughters' future success.

Studies of hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood have generally examined male dominance and paternal responsibility as separate issues. Limited attention has been given to how hegemonic masculinity is constructed through the intersection of Black fatherhood, working-class experience, and negotiation with predominantly white institutions. This separation may overlook how paternal care can become a source of masculine authority and how that authority is simultaneously shaped by racial and institutional inequality. Richard Williams' masculinity should therefore not be interpreted merely as personal ambition, strict parenting, or conventional male dominance, but as a negotiated and racialized form of paternal power.

Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) What forms of hegemonic masculinity are represented in *King Richard* (2021)? and (2) How is hegemonic masculinity constructed through the character of Richard Williams as a Black father in *King Richard* (2021)? The study aims to identify the represented forms of hegemonic masculinity and analyze how they are constructed through Richard's position as a Black father. It argues that Richard's hegemonic masculinity is constructed through interconnected

practices of leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority.

2. Literature Review

Representation refers to the process through which meaning is produced and communicated using language, images, symbols, and other cultural signs. Media do not simply reproduce social reality but select, organize, and frame particular aspects of it. Therefore, representation in film is constructed through narrative, characterization, dialogue, visual composition, and ideological perspectives (Bäckström et al., 2021; Ouyang, 2024). These elements can reinforce, negotiate, or challenge culturally accepted understandings of gender, identity, and power. Masculinity in film should consequently be examined as a social position constructed through characters' actions, relationships, and placement within the narrative rather than as a fixed biological quality.

The principal theoretical framework of this study is Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. (Connell, 2005) defines masculinity as a configuration of social practices produced within gender relations. Masculinities exist in plural and hierarchical forms, allowing particular configurations to become culturally dominant while others are marginalized or subordinated. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally authoritative configuration that contributes to legitimizing men's dominant position within the existing gender order. It does not mean that every man possesses equal power or that all men directly embody the culturally dominant model of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity does not operate exclusively through physical force, violence, or direct coercion. It can also be sustained through social consent and cultural legitimacy. Masculine authority may appear reasonable or necessary when it is associated with competence, leadership, protection, responsibility, discipline, and decision-making. This understanding is relevant to the analysis of Richard Williams because his authority is constructed primarily through his roles as a father, planner, protector, trainer, and family representative rather than through physical strength. Nevertheless, practices presented as responsible or protective may still maintain a man's dominant position within familial relationships.

(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) further explain that hegemonic masculinity operates at local, regional, and global levels. The local level concerns everyday relationships and institutions, including families, schools, and workplaces, while the regional level concerns broader cultural patterns circulated through institutions and media. In *King Richard* (2021), Richard's masculine authority operates mainly at the local and regional levels. Within the family, he regulates his daughters' education, behavior, training, and career development. Beyond the family, he negotiates with coaches, sponsors, agents, journalists, and the predominantly white professional tennis establishment. These interconnected settings demonstrate that masculine authority is constructed through both personal relationships and institutional encounters.

Based on this framework, the study identifies five analytical categories: leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority. These categories were not directly formulated by Connell but were developed from recurring patterns in Richard's actions, dialogue, decisions, and relationships. They are interpreted through Connell's understanding of hegemonic masculinity as a socially legitimized configuration of gender

practices. The categories make it possible to examine how Richard's masculine authority is produced, contested, negotiated, and justified across familial and institutional settings.

Richard's masculinity must also be understood through his racial and socioeconomic position. Black masculinity is shaped not only by gender but also by race, class, historical inequality, and institutional exclusion. Racialized stereotypes have frequently associated Black men with aggression, irresponsibility, criminality, and absent fatherhood. Such representations affect how Black paternal authority is socially perceived and recognized. (Young, 2021) however, emphasizes that Black fatherhood should not be reduced to narratives of absence or deficiency because Black fathers construct their paternal identities through care, provision, emotional involvement, protection, and guidance. Similarly, (Ncayiyane & Nel, 2024) demonstrate that Black fatherhood is influenced by family systems, cultural expectations, sociohistorical conditions, and lived experiences.

An intersectional perspective provides supporting context for understanding these relationships. (Wojnicka, 2024) argues that masculine power cannot always be explained through gender alone because men occupy different racial, economic, and social positions. In this study, intersectionality is not employed as the principal theoretical framework but helps explain how Richard can occupy a dominant paternal position within his family while remaining socially marginalized within professional tennis. His authority is therefore relational: he exercises substantial control over his family's decisions but must repeatedly defend his competence and legitimacy within an elite and predominantly white institution.

The term *racialized paternal authority* is used in this study to describe fatherly authority constructed and exercised under racialized social and institutional conditions. Richard leads and regulates his family, but his authority is not automatically recognized outside it. He must demonstrate his knowledge, negotiate access to professional resources, challenge institutional expectations, and protect how his daughters are publicly represented. His paternal authority is racialized because its performance and recognition are influenced by racial difference, working-class conditions, and institutional power. This concept also explains the complex relationship between protection and control in Richard's fatherhood. His regulation of his daughters' education, training, tournament participation, and commercial opportunities may limit their agency, but the film also associates these decisions with protection from exploitation, psychological pressure, economic vulnerability, and racial discrimination. His authority is consequently represented as neither entirely oppressive nor entirely nurturing.

Previous research has commonly examined masculinity in popular culture through aggression, misogyny, violence, and domination. (Rizky et al., 2025), for example, found that Homelander's toxic masculinity in *The Boys* graphic novel was constructed through misogyny, violence, dominance, and unequal gender relations. Their study demonstrates the relevance of Connell's perspective to the analysis of masculine power in popular narratives but focuses on an antagonistic character whose masculinity is explicitly destructive. In contrast, the present study examines a father figure whose authority is simultaneously challenged and legitimized. Richard's control generates conflict, but it is also connected to responsibility, protection, sacrifice, racial

awareness, and his daughters' success. This study therefore extends previous discussions by examining how hegemonic masculinity may be constructed through socially valued paternal practices and positions racialized paternal authority as the central concept connecting fatherhood, race, class, and institutional negotiation.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the representation of hegemonic masculinity in *King Richard* (2021). This approach was appropriate because the study interpreted meanings, social practices, character interactions, and power relations represented in the film rather than measuring them statistically. The analysis was guided by Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which conceptualizes masculinity as a configuration of social practices constructed and legitimized within particular gender, familial, and institutional relations (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The primary data source was *King Richard* (2021), directed by Reinaldo Marcus Green. The data consisted of scenes, dialogue, actions, decisions, and interactions involving Richard Williams that represented masculine authority within familial and professional tennis contexts. Particular attention was given to moments in which Richard led his family, regulated his daughters' development, protected them from social and institutional pressures, made decisions concerning their careers, and negotiated with professional figures. Secondary data were obtained from books and scholarly articles concerning hegemonic masculinity, film representation, Black masculinity, fatherhood, intersectionality, and institutional power.

The data were collected through repeated viewing, observation, transcription, note-taking, and purposive selection. The film was first viewed repeatedly to understand its narrative, characters, conflicts, and social context. Scenes and dialogue involving Richard Williams were then identified according to their relevance to masculine authority, fatherhood, race, class, and institutional relations. Relevant dialogue, actions, timestamps, and situational contexts were recorded and classified according to recurring patterns. From the broader data set, five representative scenes were selected for presentation in the journal article. Each scene was chosen for its relevance to the research questions, clarity in representing an analytical category, and contribution to the central argument. Scenes expressing similar or repetitive meanings were not presented to avoid redundancy.

The data were analyzed using theory-driven thematic analysis. Relevant data were organized, reduced, coded, and grouped into five analytical categories: leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority. These categories were developed from recurring patterns in the film and interpreted through Connell's theory; they were not categories directly formulated by Connell. Each representative scene was examined by considering Richard's dialogue, actions, relationships, and narrative position to determine how his authority was constructed, challenged, negotiated, and legitimized. The findings across the five categories were subsequently synthesized to analyze how hegemonic masculinity was constructed through Richard Williams as a Black father. This interpretive synthesis connected his paternal authority with race, class, family relations, and institutional power rather than treating the second research question as requiring a separate group of data.

4. Results And Discussion

The analysis revealed five interconnected forms of hegemonic masculinity represented through Richard Williams: leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority. These forms were identified through Richard's repeated practices as the family's planner, regulator, protector, and representative in professional tennis. The selected data demonstrate that his masculinity is constructed not primarily through physical aggression, but through socially legitimized practices that place him at the center of familial and institutional decision-making.

4.1 Forms of Hegemonic Masculinity

The first is **Leadership**, represented through Richard's long-term vision and his position as the principal planner of Venus and Serena's future.

Data 1 (00:01:30-00:02:20)

Richard: "I wrote a 78-page plan for their whole career before they were born. Now that the plan is written, it is time for us to come to you and help them become champions."

The 78-page plan positions Richard as the architect of his daughters' careers. His authority is legitimized through planning, confidence, and his apparent ability to anticipate the steps required for success. From (Connell, 2005) perspective, hegemonic masculinity operates through practices that make male authority appear competent and necessary. Richard's leadership represents paternal commitment, but also centralizes power because his daughters' futures have been designed and directed by him.

The second form is **Discipline and Control**, expressed through Richard's regulation of his daughters' education and athletic participation.

Data 2 (01:34:08-01:34:20)

Richard: "They have to keep getting A's, or they cannot play tennis. I told you that is my rule."

The phrase "my rule" explicitly establishes Richard as the holder of regulatory authority. By making tennis dependent on academic performance, he exercises control while framing it as responsibility for his daughters' future beyond sports. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) explain that hegemonic masculinity is produced within local relationships, including the family. In this scene, Richard's control gains legitimacy because it is associated with education and long-term welfare rather than arbitrary punishment. Nevertheless, the rule confirms that he possesses the power to determine conditions and consequences within the family.

The third form is **Responsibility and Protection**. Richard repeatedly intervenes when he believes that professional institutions place excessive pressure on his daughters.

Data 3 (01:27:15-01:27:34)

Richard: "You have to understand that you are dealing with the image of a fourteen-year-old child. You are dealing with a little Black girl. Let her be a child. She already answered with confidence. That is enough."

Richard interrupts a reporter who repeatedly questions Venus' confidence. His intervention establishes a boundary around how the media may treat her and restores her identity as a child rather than merely a professional prospect. Protection becomes a moral foundation for his masculine authority because his control over the interview is presented as a defense of

Venus' dignity and psychological well-being. At the same time, Richard determines when Venus has spoken sufficiently, showing that paternal protection may also operate as a mechanism of control.

The fourth form is **Institutional Negotiation**, represented through Richard's effort to obtain professional support without surrendering authority over his family.

Data 4 (01:16:50-01:17:23)

Richard: "If you take our daughters, you take all of us, the whole family. We need a house, the best school, and a job for me as your employee. Do you believe in these girls or not?"

Richard uses Venus and Serena's talent as bargaining power to secure housing, education, employment, and professional training for the whole family. Although he does not possess formal power within the tennis industry, he constructs influence through persistence, confidence, and control over access to his daughters. His role as a provider is therefore performed through his ability to negotiate resources that wealthier tennis families may already possess. This expands his paternal authority from the private family sphere into professional institutions.

The fifth form is **Racialized Paternal Authority**, which connects Richard's fatherhood with his awareness of racial visibility and unequal institutional judgment.

Data 5 (00:58:28-00:58:31)

Richard: "all right, come on. We cannot be the only Black people here and be late."

This statement demonstrates Richard's awareness that his family is being observed within an elite and predominantly white tennis environment. Being "the only Black people" means that their behavior may be interpreted through racial stereotypes rather than judged only as individual conduct. Richard consequently uses punctuality as a form of racial discipline intended to protect the family's respectability and legitimacy. His authority as a father is therefore shaped not only by gender but also by the need to prepare his daughters for unequal racial scrutiny.

The five forms are interconnected rather than separate expressions of masculinity. Richard's leadership is maintained through discipline; his control is justified through responsibility and protection; his role as provider is performed through institutional negotiation; and all these practices are influenced by his position as a Black father from a working-class background. The findings answer the first research question by demonstrating that hegemonic masculinity in *King Richard* is represented through socially legitimized paternal practices rather than through aggression alone. However, identifying these forms does not fully explain why Richard's authority takes his particular shape. The following section therefore examines how his hegemonic masculinity is constructed through Black fatherhood, racial experience, class marginalization, and negotiation with predominantly white professional institutions.

4.2 The Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity through Richard Williams as a Black Father

Building on the five forms identified above, Richard Williams' hegemonic masculinity is constructed through the interaction of paternal authority, racial identity, working-class experience, personal trauma,

and institutional negotiation. His authority cannot be understood only as the power of a father within his family because it is also shaped by his position as a Black man entering an elite and predominantly white professional tennis environment. He occupies a dominant position in relation to his family, but a marginalized position in relation to the institutions that control access to professional tennis.

Within the family, Richard constructs masculine authority through leadership, discipline, responsibility, and decision-making. His long-term plan positions him as the person who determines the direction of Venus and Serena's development, while his rules concerning education and training strengthen his role as the family's regulator. These practices demonstrate that his authority is not based primarily on physical aggression. Instead, it is legitimized through competence, preparation, and responsibility. His leadership appears necessary because the film connects his decisions with his daughters' future success.

However, Richard's position as a Black father gives his authority a specifically racialized character. He is aware that his family is highly visible in professional tennis and may be judged through racial and class-based stereotypes. Consequently, his discipline is not directed only toward athletic success but also toward preparing his daughters to enter spaces in which their behavior, confidence, and legitimacy may be evaluated differently. His fatherhood therefore includes managing the risks created by racial visibility and protecting the family from disrespect, exploitation, and exclusion.

Richard's institutional negotiations further construct his masculinity as a struggle for recognition. Because he does not possess the financial resources or professional connections commonly associated with elite tennis, he must persuade coaches, challenge agents, negotiate family support, and control commercial access to his daughters. His working-class position does not eliminate his authority as a provider. Instead, provision is reconstructed through his ability to secure resources and opportunities strategically. This negotiation allows him to maintain paternal authority even while depending on professional institutions for training and financial support.

Personal experiences of racial violence also shape Richard's protective fatherhood. His memories of being unprotected during childhood influence his determination to remain present and defend his daughters from similar vulnerability. Protection becomes a way of distinguishing his fatherhood from the paternal abandonment he experienced. Young (2021) argues that Black fatherhood should be understood through the meanings Black men assign to care, presence, guidance, and responsibility within specific social histories. In Richard's case, protection is connected to racial trauma and fear of failing his daughters.

Nevertheless, protection also becomes a source of control. Richard frequently determines when his daughters are ready to compete, interact with the media, or accept professional opportunities. His decisions may limit their agency and produce conflict with his wife, daughters, and coaches. The film therefore does not present his

authority as entirely positive or uncontested. Instead, it reveals an ongoing tension between paternal care and male dominance. Richard's control is criticized when it becomes unilateral, but it is also legitimized when the narrative connects it to responsibility, sacrifice, and the protection of his daughters' future.

This construction differs from the toxic masculinity discussed by Rizky et al. (2025), in which masculine power is represented through misogyny, violence, and destructive domination. Richard also exercises dominance, but his authority is presented more ambiguously through socially valued practices of leadership, provision, protection, and resistance to institutional pressure. This comparison demonstrates that hegemonic masculinity does not always appear through openly harmful behavior. It may also be maintained through practices understood as responsible and caring, even when those practices preserve a man's central decision-making position.

Therefore, Richard Williams' hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a negotiated form of racialized paternal authority. His leadership, discipline, protection, and institutional negotiation acquire meaning through the intersection of fatherhood, race, class, and personal history. He is powerful within his family but vulnerable within professional tennis; controlling in his decisions but protective in his intentions; and challenged by other characters yet ultimately legitimized by the film narrative. This construction answers the second research question by showing that Richard's masculinity is not a fixed personal trait, but a dynamic social position continuously produced through family responsibility, racial experience, and institutional struggle.

5. Conclusion

This study found five interconnected forms of hegemonic masculinity represented through Richard Williams in *King Richard* (2021): leadership, discipline and control, responsibility and protection, institutional negotiation, and racialized paternal authority. These forms were expressed through his long-term planning, regulation of his daughters' education and athletic development, protection from professional pressure, and negotiation with coaches, sponsors, and the media. Richard's masculinity was therefore represented not primarily through physical aggression, but through paternal practices that legitimized his position as the family's principal leader, regulator, protector, and decision-maker.

Richard's hegemonic masculinity was constructed through his position as a Black father from a working-class background. His racial visibility, limited institutional access, personal experience of racial violence, and responsibility for his family shaped how he exercised and defended paternal authority. Although his decisions sometimes restricted his daughters' agency and generated conflict with other characters, the film also connected his control with protection, sacrifice, and their future success. His authority was consequently both dominant and marginalized, controlling and protective, contested and narratively legitimized.

The study concludes that *King Richard* represents hegemonic masculinity as a negotiated form of racialized paternal authority shaped by fatherhood, race, class, personal history, and institutional power. This finding extends discussions of masculinity in popular culture by showing that male dominance may be maintained not only through aggression or violence, but also through socially

valued practices of care, responsibility, leadership, and protection.

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