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Hegemonic Masculinity Aspect On Otto Anderson's In The Film *"A Man Called Otto"*

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ABSTRACT

This research, entitled *Hegemonic Masculinity in Otto Anderson's Character in A Man Called Otto*, aims to examine the representation of hegemonic masculinity through Otto Anderson's character and explain the cultural factors that contribute to its construction. The primary data were drawn from the 2022 film A Man Called Otto, focusing on utterances that reflect traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. The data were collected using documentation and systematic note-taking techniques and were analyzed through a descriptive qualitative method. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Wharton's (2005) cultural framework were applied to investigate how masculinity is constructed and performed. The findings revealed a total of 154 utterances categorized into four aspects of hegemonic masculinity: emotional suppression, aggression, competitiveness, and power. These findings demonstrate that Otto's behavior reflects socially constructed masculine norms shaped by cultural and generational values. The analysis further shows that masculinity is not an inherent trait but a performative identity regulated by social institutions. The study concludes that contemporary media, as exemplified in this film, plays a significant role in reinforcing and challenging hegemonic masculinity through character development and narrative structure.

Keywords: A Man Called Otto, Cultural construction, Gender norms, Hegemonic masculinity, Masculinity representation.

1. Introduction

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has become increasingly significant in contemporary gender discourse, particularly as traditional gender roles are being challenged and redefined. Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as the culturally dominant ideal of manhood that legitimizes male dominance over women and subordinates other forms of masculinity, while simultaneously imposing restrictive behavioral norms on men

themselves. Such expectations frequently result in adverse social and psychological outcomes, including emotional repression, aggression, and strained interpersonal relationships (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

In recent years, social movements such as #MeToo and the intensification of public debates around toxic masculinity have heightened awareness of the harmful effects of rigid masculine ideals. Research demonstrates that strict adherence to these norms not only limits emotional expression but also exacerbates mental health risks for men (Courtenay, 2000). Media representations play a critical role in sustaining these dynamics by glorifying hyper-masculine traits and marginalizing alternative forms of masculinity, thereby reinforcing stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality and social conformity (Flood, 2015).

Previous scholarship has examined hegemonic masculinity primarily through classical literature, such as Sholichah's (2020) analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Arrasyid's (2022) study of *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*. However, there remains a notable gap in analyzing contemporary media that offer more complex and counter-hegemonic representations of masculinity. The 2022 film A Man Called Otto, adapted from Fredrik Backman's novel, provides such an opportunity. Its protagonist, Otto Anderson, undergoes a narrative of transformation from emotional suppression to vulnerability and connection that challenges conventional masculine ideals and reflects broader cultural shifts.

This study employs Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, alongside Wharton's (2005) framework on cultural influences, to examine the construction and negotiation of masculinity in A Man Called Otto. By conducting a detailed character analysis of Otto Anderson, this research not only extends the application of hegemonic masculinity theory to contemporary film but also contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations about emotional authenticity, men's mental health, and the evolving configurations of masculine identity in modern media.

2. Methods

This research employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, especially pertinent for interpreting complex social phenomena such as hegemonic masculinity. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social and human issues. In this study, the approach enables an in-depth examination of Otto Anderson's character in *A Man Called Otto*, focusing on dialogue, actions, and behavioral patterns. Through this approach, the study explores how hegemonic masculinity is constructed and represented in relation to prevailing societal norms. Connell's (2005) framework of hegemonic masculinity and Wharton's (2005) perspective on cultural influences provide a systematic foundation for analyzing the character's traits and behaviors within broader gendered expectations.

The primary data source for this research is the 2022 film *A Man Called Otto*, a comedy-drama produced by Sony Pictures and directed by Marc Forster. Adapted from Fredrik Backman's Swedish novel entitled *A Man Called Ove*, the film follows Otto Anderson, a widowed man grappling with grief and isolation who gradually forges meaningful connections with his neighbors. The transcript, consisting of 84 pages and sourced from *www.subtitlecat.com*, served as the textual basis for analysis alongside repeated viewings of the film. These materials provided rich evidence of Otto's interactions that highlight traditional masculine traits such as emotional repression and self-sufficiency, while also revealing his underlying vulnerability and eventual emotional growth. This duality positions the film as a compelling case study for examining the negotiation and transformation of masculinity in contemporary society.

Data collection employed documentation and systematic note-taking techniques. The process began with watching the film, obtaining, and reviewing the transcript, and then rewatching the film while annotating the text for greater accuracy and contextual understanding. This iterative process facilitated the identification of key instances where hegemonic masculinity was expressed or contested. The analysis drew upon Connell's (2005) theory of masculinity and Wharton's (2005) framework on the sociology of gender, providing a structured theoretical foundation for critically examining the film's portrayal of gender dynamics.

The descriptive qualitative method emphasized the interpretation of non-numerical data, prioritizing exploring behaviors, experiences, and social contexts rather than statistical measurement. The film was watched, and the transcript was read multiple times, with a total of four iterations to ensure thorough engagement with the material. The collected data were then categorized according to Connell's (2005) principles of hegemonic masculinity. Accuracy was ensured through rigorous cross-checking, and conclusions were drawn from a comprehensive analysis of how hegemonic masculinity is manifested, reinforced, and challenged within the film.

3. Findings and Discussion

This chapter outlines the findings from the analysis, focusing on how hegemonic masculinity is depicted and the factors that influence it. The main character, Otto Anderson, exemplifies the hegemonic masculinity Connell (2005) defined through the four primary characteristics identified by George and Waltz (2021): emotional suppression, aggression, competitiveness, and assertion of power. Additionally, it considers the cultural factors that contribute to this trait, as Wharton (2005) described. His personality is heavily influenced by the social factors surrounding him, making Otto's characteristics a representation of genuine masculinity shaped by the environment. Consequently, the context of the analysis of hegemonic

masculinity increasingly focuses on the social aspects of Otto's life in the film. Each characteristic is analyzed in detail below.

a. Emotional Suppression

Data 1

(00:23:54 – 00:24:02)

Otto: *"I'm sorry I didn't get 'em here earlier. Got distracted. By some new neighbours."*

In this scene, Otto visits his deceased wife's grave and remarks, *"I'm sorry I didn't get 'em here earlier. Got distracted. By some new neighbours."* At first glance, this utterance appears to be a seemingly routine and emotionally neutral expression. However, beneath its brevity lies a significant reflection of cultural norms surrounding masculinity. Otto's restrained and transactional tone illustrates how emotional vulnerability is often suppressed in accordance with dominant masculine ideals.

Connell (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity emphasizes emotional stoicism, self- reliance, and the repression of vulnerability in men. Otto's reluctance to articulate his grief and affection in this deeply personal moment exemplifies these cultural expectations. Similarly, Levant (1992) introduces the concept of normative male alexithymia, describing how men are socialized to struggle with identifying and expressing emotions. Otto's swift redirection from a potential moment of intimacy to external and mundane concerns aligns closely with this framework.

At the same time, Otto's act of visiting the grave and bringing flowers should not be overlooked. While his verbal expression remains emotionally constrained, these actions represent culturally mediated forms of care and remembrance. This suggests that masculinity, while shaped by restrictive norms, also accommodates subtle and indirect ways of expressing attachment and vulnerability. Thus, Otto's behavior reflects the limitations imposed by hegemonic masculinity and the adaptive strategies men may use to navigate emotional expression within these constraints.

b. Aggression

Data 2

(00:14:55 - 00:15:01)

Otto: *"My God, a dog with one front paw and cataracts coulda done better than that."*

Otto's comment, *"My God, a dog with one front paw and cataracts coulda done better than that,"* is more bitter than funny. The comment is mainly intended for self-

aggrandisement and to uphold the felt-power status, but not to give support. This is aligned with Connell's (2005) definition of hegemonic masculinity, which positions manhood according to a focus on power, achievement, and emotional distance. Otto's words are savage as they are meant to shout at those around him that he is nasty and superior in other people's eyes, especially when his poor performance irritates him. This identifies a cultural conception of manhood, whereby verbal aggression is used rather than the need for a genuine connection or joint work.

c. Competitiveness

Data 3

(00:16:13 - 00:16:15)

Otto: *"Anyone who thinks they need to use radar to back up a car shouldn't be allowed to drive one."*

Otto's commentary extends beyond mere criticism of a technological gadget; it reveals a more profound prejudice against convenience and the perceived dependency it fosters. His rejection of features like backup radar symbolizes a broader cultural resistance to relying on external support, favoring the traditional masculine ideals of manual skill, independence, and self- sufficiency instead. For Otto, true masculinity is closely tied to practical aptitude and physical problem-solving, which he considers essential markers of a real man. This viewpoint upholds the belief that confronting challenges alone, particularly in areas traditionally associated with masculinity such as driving or mechanical repair, serves as a measure of masculine worth. In this context, hegemonic masculinity is expressed through displays of competence and autonomy, where rejecting modern assistance becomes a way to affirm strength and self- reliance.

d. Power

Data 4

(00:53:25 – 00:53:29)

Marisol: *"I'm gonna turn on the oven."*

Otto: *"You are not putting that cat in my oven."*

When Marisol says*, "I'm gonna turn on the oven,"* and Otto immediately replies, "*You are not putting that cat in my oven,"* His response focuses more on asserting control over his property than addressing the emotional needs of the moment. Even in this emotionally charged scenario, Otto feels the necessity to maintain dominance in his domestic space. This behavior reflects Connell's (2005) concept that hegemonic masculinity emphasizes authority over the home and physical environment, typically

viewed as male-controlled domains. Faced with potential emotional exposure, he reaffirms his masculine identity by reclaiming control, showcasing that masculinity can be preserved even in moments of emotional sensitivity through managing space and emotional detachment.

4. Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusions derived from the analysis of hegemonic masculinity as represented by the character of Otto Anderson in the film *A Man Called Otto*. The research employed Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Wharton's (2005) cultural framework as the principal analytical instruments. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examined the characteristics and behaviors displayed by Otto and their relationship to broader cultural and societal constructions of masculinity.

The analysis revealed that Otto Anderson demonstrates several traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, particularly emotional suppression, irritability, and tendencies toward control-seeking behaviors. These traits emerge not as isolated personal attributes but as products of social conditioning and cultural narratives that privilege emotional restraint, independence, and authority. Otto's difficulty in expressing vulnerability, his reliance on routines, and his resistance to external interference reflect a gendered script shaped by cultural expectations of masculinity. At the same time, his behaviors function as coping strategies for grief and loss, illustrating the complex ways in which hegemonic masculinity operates within personal and social contexts.

Wharton's concept of gender as a social institution complements Connell's framework by highlighting how masculinity is maintained and reinforced through cultural values and daily practices. Otto's mechanical expertise, emphasis on autonomy, and avoidance of emotional openness are individual traits and reflections of cultural norms that equate masculinity with logic, control, and authority. By situating Otto within this institutional context, Wharton's perspective deepens the understanding of how masculinity is socially reproduced and transmitted across generations.

Notably, the film also depicts a transformation in Otto's character as he gradually reconnects with his community and develops emotional openness. This shift suggests the possibility of alternative masculinities that value empathy, vulnerability, and relational connection without undermining strength or integrity. Otto's character arc thus demonstrates both the constraints of traditional masculinity and the potential for its reconfiguration in more inclusive and humane forms.

By focusing on a contemporary film, this study addresses a gap in research that often prioritizes classical literature or static portrayals of male identity. *A Man Called Otto* offers a

relevant depiction of masculinity in line with current cultural debates surrounding gender roles, mental health, and emotional well-being. Otto's journey highlights the tension between societal pressures and individual fulfilment, offering a narrative that encourages rethinking dominant gender norms. In conclusion, this study contributes to gender and media scholarship by underscoring the role of film in shaping and challenging perceptions of masculinity. Otto Anderson's story illustrates both the limitations imposed by hegemonic masculinity and the transformative potential of embracing alternative modes of male identity. These findings suggest that contemporary media can serve as a critical site for renegotiating masculine ideals, promoting healthier and more diverse representations of manhood. Future research may benefit from examining other media texts to explore how cultural shifts continue to reshape understandings of masculinity in society.

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