

# Ma vie en rose



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The competitive notion of hegemonic masculinity encourages men to personify their dominant versions of masculinity or maleness (Howson, 2005). This paper seeks to analyze the film *Ma Vie en Rose* for the purposes of discussing hegemonic and other forms of masculinity that challenge or negotiate a place within it. It also provides insights into how hegemonic masculinity is experienced by various men in particular positions in a hierarchical power structure as well as the participants who enforced and legitimized hegemonic masculinity in the film. Finally, the paper seeks to provide an explanation concerning whether the film offers a vision of meaningful change in the gender order that could subvert the hegemonic power structure.

There are several concepts of hegemonic and other forms of masculinity that challenge or negotiate a place within the film. Cornell suggests that hegemonic masculinity involves a set of communal norms that have been prescribed and are symbolically represented but form a significant part of various disciplinary or social activities (Cornell, 2005). For instance, Ludovic, a boy child who stars in the film *Ma Vie en Rose*, encounters several challenges in reinforcing his hegemonic masculinity. He is born a boy but believes he is a girl and does things that are solely reserved for girls such as wearing a dress. He even goes further to propose marriage to Jerome, a boy, thereby souring the relationship between his father and his boss who happens to be Jerome's father. In addition, Ludovic's actions are perceived as going against the norms of ordinary men. Under normal circumstances, a man should propose to a member of the opposite sex, but Ludovic instead goes against the basic norms (Blounde, 2007).

According to Cornell's definition of hegemonic masculinity, there are two different aspects that may be used for sustaining the dominative nature of men or women's subordination. The first claim states that hegemonic masculinity propagates the elevated positions that men hold over women (Cornell, 2005). However, his thinking has been criticized on the grounds that not all men may feel comfortable when acting in accordance with the ideals proposed via hegemonic masculinity (Howson, 2005). For instance, Ludovic is a boy by gender but is not proud of his masculinity. Instead, he wishes that he was as a girl (Blounde, 2007). In addition, being a man (gender) does not automatically guarantee that an individual will automatically achieve hegemonic benchmarks as exemplified by Ludovic (Kahn, 2009). According to Cornell, the rise of a vast majority of men can only be preconceived when it is assumed that their rise was guaranteed.

His second claim implies that hegemonic masculinity may be used for expressing answers that are acceptable for any guarantees that are given by the dominant masculine hegemonies (2005). In order to guarantee the dominance of men within gender politics, the dominant masculine hegemonies should ensure that their systems of oppression in finances, ethics, intellectual androcentricity and politics prevail (Howson, 2005). This implies that the masculine features should be emphasized while restricting any revolutionary aspirations from other genders (Kahn, 2009). For instance, in the film, Ludovic's mother goes to the extreme extent of beating up her son when she finds him wearing a dress that belongs to their neighbor, Christine, during her birthday party (where Ludovic and his mother were guests). However, the boy had to wear the dress out of peer pressure and

did not wish to have his musketeer's outfit taken away from him. Ludovic's mother does not want her son to get mixed up in gender issues and deeply hopes that her son will assume his true identity as a man (Blounde, 2007).

Cornell suggests that the act of being a man entailstaking on others or negotiating where necessary. Therefore, the identity strategies that are utilized by men are mainly constituted by their resistance stances to the recommended styles of masculine dominance (Cornell, 2005). In view of this statement, Ludovic fails in achieving hegemonic masculinity since he does not believe in himself and desires other different personalities instead of proving his worth and manhood (Kahn, 2009). However, Cornell's arguments are founded on the fact that masculine traits are not just given but are acquired through a variety of styles that come from different historical periods or cultures. Some of the styles that men should adopt have been classified as 'winning ways' and Cornell insists that these are the ways that men must use to attain hegemonic masculinity (Cornell, 2005). According to the film, Ludovic is unable to adopt any appropriate ways that would help him achieve hegemonic masculinity. Instead, he opts to wear women clothes and propose marriage to other boys in his neighborhood thereby creating animosities between his father and his boss who is also Jerome's father (Blounde, 2007).

Previous literature stipulates that hegemonic philosophies are meant to preserve, legitimize or naturalize the concerns of power individuals while subordinating or marginalizing claims put forward by other groups of people (Howson, 2005). The achievement of hegemony by a male involves constant struggles and contests and has connections that are central to women's

subordination (Kahn, 2009). The formulations of hegemonic masculinity and male resistance by Cornell present several advantages. This approach facilitates diversity and a greater understanding of the issues concerning gender power (Cornell, 2005). However, the film provides a picture that contradicts these statements since it is Christine who uses the influence of her peers in forcing Ludovic to give up his musketeer's uniform. If Ludovic had surrendered to Christine's demand, she would not have used her peers in order to obtain what she desired. Her demands brought a lot of consequential problems for Ludovic later on in the evening as he was beaten up by his mother (Blounde, 2007).

According to Cornell, there are various forms of hegemonic masculinity (Cornell, 2005). He provides examples like complicit masculinity which means attaining benefits without putting in any effort as exemplified by Christine when she got Ludovic's musketeer's attire (Blounde, 2007).

Subordinated masculinity concerns the relations that are gender-related like lesbianism though these issues are rarely addressed in films such as *Ma Vie en Rose*.

Cornell (2005) provides another form of masculinity which he asserts as the marginalized form of masculinity that focuses on the class or ethnic superiority by certain males (Cornell, 2005). These issues of ethnicity and class have not been wholly depicted in the film. The challenges encountered by Ludovic have been illustrated through his actions in the different circumstances he found himself in. For example, after a heated argument Ludovic attempts committing suicide by locking himself inside their freezer so that he can correct the mistakes he made on proposing to Jerome and

wearing his deceased sister's dress. These actions force his family members to allow him to put on a dress to a party, and the boy is received warmly due to his previous intentions to commit suicide. Ludovic fails in attaining hegemonic masculinity when he proposes marriage to another male instead of a female which is otherwise perceived as a negating event within his community (Blounde, 2007).

The film offers several insights into various ways that hegemonic masculinity is experienced by particular men in particular locations within the power structure (Howson, 2005). For instance, the relationship between Ludovic's father and Jerome's father becomes sour after Ludovic approaches Jerome and proposes to marry him. The behavioral tendencies exhibited by Ludovic forces his father to live a strenuous life, and he is looked down upon more. Thus, when working with Jerome's father, he is unable to cope with disagreements within his own family. Instead of staying calm, Ludovic's father decides to change jobs and move out of town instead of facing his problems like a man should. On the other hand, Christine is depicted as a female who vastly desires that she was born a boy. Through her peers, she forces Ludovic to swap clothes with her since she does not like the princess's dress she is wearing during her birthday. Christine turns to using force in order to attain hegemonic masculinity so that she may attain the status that is accorded to men in the society (Blounde, 2007).

The film also offers insights into the collective social construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity through various examples (Howson, 2005). Ludovic's mother is present in all the struggles that her son goes through in the film and their bond is a 'developed' rather than an 'innate'

one. When Ludovic enters Jerome's house and wears his deceased sister's dress, she, is horrified just like other members of their community. The community members have played a crucial role in enforcing and legitimizing the concepts of hegemonic masculinity. Ludovic's community does not tolerate the behavior that Ludovic exhibits at home or in school, so they end up requesting him being expelled. The clamor for his expulsion gathers pace when he appears in a school play as snow white, a role traditionally reserved for girls. In another instance, the community turns against the boy and his family when he wears Jerome's deceased sister's dress immediately after proposing marriage to his longtime friend, Jerome.

On the other hand, Ludovic's father does not play a crucial role in legitimizing and enforcing the concepts of hegemonic masculinity. This is due to the fact that he is depicted as lacking the ability to cope with stress and sour relationships. Instead, he ends up causing considerable conflicts and divisions within the family. The son, Ludovic, had previously spoilt his father's relationship with his boss by asking Jerome to marry him. The father only seems concerned when he finds graffiti that have been spray painted on his house regarding his son's actions. Obviously, the character depicted by Ludovic's father does not enforce hegemonic masculinity in his son. In fact, his behavior contributes towards his escape from the manhood and all duties and responsibilities traditionally reserved as a man's (Blounde, 2007).

The film does not offer a vision of a meaningful change in the gender order that could subvert the hegemonic power structure (Howson, 2005). It provides the instances of two young children who are confused about their genders. The first instance relates to Ludovic and his consequent actions. He

is depicted as a transgender girl who is a boy by birth. The boy acts and behaves in a manner otherwise depicted as feminine. He attempts to commit suicide because of the community's reprimand and discrimination of his behavior. On the other hand, Christine presents the second perspective on hegemonic masculinity. She is a transgender boy who is a girl by birth. Chris does not like wearing women's clothes and urges her friends to strip Ludovic off his musketeer's costume, a fact that annoys Ludovic's mother and forces her to give him a thorough beating (Blounde, 2007). Therefore, these examples are not sufficiently significant towards subverting basic hegemonic power structures because they are unacceptable by the society as depicted by the film (Howson, 2005).