

The Power of Believing in Yourself: *King Richard* Film Analysis

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Richard Williams believes, “The most strongest, the most powerful, the most dangerous creature on this whole earth is a woman who knows how to think. Ain't nothing she can't do.” This quote is a fantastic summary of the consistent theme present in the film. The movie *King Richard* is a prolific portrayal of the early life of Venus and Serena Williams. *King Richard* was released in 2021 and directed by Reinaldo Green. The overarching theme of the film is the idea that you have to believe in yourself and your abilities even when others do not believe you will be successful. This message resonates with me, which is part of the reason that I chose to view and analyze this movie. The biopic details the adversity that the sisters have had to overcome to reach their success. It is a poignant portrayal that displays all of the ways that the Williams family has defied the odds in order to achieve their goal. This success was achieved despite instances of stereotypes and discrimination throughout their life. The film identifies many elements of diversity in psychology. The topics of self-fulfilling prophecy, gender stereotypes, sexism, racism, prejudice, ingroups vs. outgroups, and reconciling self-concept and identity are present throughout the plot. It is a triumphant story predominately about defying the various stereotypes others hold of us in order to achieve success.

The movie *King Richard* is a biopic story about Venus and Serena Williams and the role that their father played in their life. Venus and Serena are modern-day superstars in the tennis world. They have won multiple national and world titles while competing with some of the most elite athletes in the sport. This is notable due to the fact that they are black women from a lower socioeconomic background, without much professional training, who have been able to defy negative stereotypes. The authors of *Understanding the Psychology of Diversity* textbook

explains, “Recent research suggests that female athletes are probably the target of envious stereotypes, where they are viewed as competent but not warm. Jennifer Pearson and her colleagues (2009) found that, compared with nonathletes, female athletes are much more likely to be academically oriented, and intellectual women are clearly stereotyped as high in competence and low in warmth.” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2021, pg. 118). This movie details how their father, Richard, played the role of both a warm caregiver and also a commanding coach. Richard takes on a paternalistic role and embodies the idea of a strong masculine father figure. The negative stereotypes of women and how they can affect men’s behavior, often treating women poorly, is seen in the film when a young man at the neighborhood park is sexist towards Venus during practice. The man verbally harrasses sixteen year old Venus and is derogatory towards the young girls. The man makes it clear that he views the girls as sexual objects and does not have respect for women. The situation escalates and there is a violent encounter between Richard and the man. The authors of *Understanding the Psychology of Diversity* textbook explain, “Hostile sexism is a set of attitudes that regards women as inferior to men, assigns women to traditional and subordinate roles, considers women as sexual objects, and believes that women are capable of and ultimately interested in controlling men through female sexuality or feminist ideology. Hostile sexists tend to support traditional gender role arrangements (e.g., wife as mother and homemaker, husband as wage earner) and tend to be openly derogatory of feminist ideals.” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2021, pg. 122). This act of hostile sexism is portrayed through his use of language. Furthermore the topic of gender roles is touched on. Brandy is Richard’s wife and is often portrayed in scenes where she is cooking and cleaning within the home. Although Richard has good intentions, there are moments of conflict with his

wife Brandy due to his tendency to make decisions for the family as a whole. This would be an example of benevolent sexism. There are instances when Brandy is frustrated that her efforts to help the girls succeed are often overlooked and unnoticed by Richard. In one scene he states, “When I say she's not playing, she is not playing. I call the shots. And I'm sorry if you don't like that.” The idea of gender roles and the stereotypes that are associated with these roles are displayed when the couple is forced to make decisions about what they feel is best for their daughters.

There also seems to be a fish out of water scenario happening with regard to the young girls trying to infiltrate a predominantly white sport. Tennis is considered to be a sport that has limited access for those with financial disparities or social barriers. The movie depicts the ways in which the girls were doubted by many within the tennis world based on the perception that it would be impossible for girls in their circumstances to achieve the success that they wanted. This is an example of the prevalent dynamics of in-groups and out-groups. The element of ingroups vs outgroups is best summarized by an assumption that all members of those groups not in your social parameter, or out-groups, are the same. Through context in the movie, I was able to understand that tennis is a sport that is frequently occupied by those that have access to financial resources for personal trainers, equipment, traveling, and tournament fees. Nearly 75% of players within the sport of tennis are white. Richard states to one of the coaches at a country club, “Now, I know what you thinking. 'This family is from the ghetto. How they gonna pay old me?' Well, don't you worry about that. We're not here to rob ya. We here to make you rich.” The concept of Richard feeling that the white man views him as part of an out-group and assumes that all black people are going to steal from white people is presented. This was also where it is depicted that

Richard is trying to reconcile his identity and self-concept as a black man operating in a society that has not respected or accepted him. He clearly wants better for his daughters and that is his ultimate goal. Later in the film, it is revealed that a traumatic event of racism is what has led him to this point. He explains, “When I was a little boy, I grew up in Shreveport. One day, my father took me to town. He give me this money to pay this White man for something. Back in them days, Black folks weren't allowed to touch White peoples. So I went to give the man this money, and I accidently touched his hand. And he start beating on me. He knocked me down, his friends come over, they all start stomping on me and beating on me.” It is revealed, through Brandy, that Richard’s ultimate fear is being labeled as “just another black man” in society.

The Williams family is based in Compton, California in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Despite their perceived unlikely chance to be successful, their father had unwavering faith that they would perform appropriately. Throughout the plot of the film, regardless of what hurdles the family runs into, Richard continues to instill in his girls that they will be “the best in the world”. Throughout all of the elements of stereotypes, sexism, and racism, there appears to be major components of the term self-fulfilling prophecy. The authors of the textbook *Understanding the Psychology of Diversity* states, “ A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when our expectations for an individual’s personality or behavior cause that person to act in ways that confirm our expectations for them (Merton, 1948). Hence, our prophecy (in the form of our expectations, assumptions, or beliefs for that person) is self-fulfilling—through our own actions, we bring out in them what we expected in the first place.” (Blaine & Brenchley, 2021, pg. 43).

In conclusion, the film is an inspiring representation of what it means to face gender and racial stereotypes in life and still believe in your own abilities. This story does a great job of demonstrating the avenues that must be taken to overcome the negative stereotypes and the obstacles or disadvantages that this type of thinking by society can create for minorities. I found that *King Richard* was a moving film that does an amazing job of accurately representing this phenomenon. The film does a great job of driving home the message that individuals should never doubt their own ability to be successful in whatever field they choose.

References

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