




## Call them by their name: Affective masculinities in *Call Me by Your Name*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the movie *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017), based on its homonymous novel (André Aciman, 2007), concentrating on the analysis of two young men (Elio and Oliver) as well as Elio's father. Our attempt is to elucidate whether these characters represent types of masculinities that we would like to describe as affective. The theoretical background is inspired by Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM) and its intersection with feminist and queer studies. This is followed by discussions of aspects of the film adaptation related to masculinities, particularly in regard to the interpretation and questioning of the 'gay' subgenre (in films and novels), as well as the representation of gender and sexual identities in popular cinema, including *Call Me by Your Name*. As a result, five scenes from the movie will be critically analysed in order to describe the three men mentioned above as examples of affective masculinities.

**Keyword:** Masculinities

### ***Llámalas por sus nombres: Masculinidades afectivas en "Llámame por tu nombre"***

**Resumen:** Este trabajo explora la película *Llámame por tu nombre* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017), basada en la novela homónima (André Aciman, 2007), centrándose en el análisis de dos hombres jóvenes (Elio y Oliver), así como también en el padre de Elio. Nuestra intención es elucidar si estos personajes representan tipos de masculinidades que se podrían considerar afectivas siguiendo un marco teórico inspirado en los Estudios Críticos sobre Hombres y Masculinidades (CSMM, la sigla en inglés) y su intersección con los estudios feministas y queer. Posteriormente, se debatirán los aspectos de la adaptación cinematográfica en relación con las masculinidades, particularmente sobre la interpretación y cuestionamiento del subgénero 'gay' (en películas y novelas). Asimismo, se abordará la representación de las identidades sexuales y de género en el cine popular, incluyendo *Llámame por tu nombre*. Como consecuencia, cinco escenas de la película serán analizadas críticamente con el objetivo de describir los tres hombres mencionados arriba como ejemplos de masculinidades afectivas.

**Palabra clave:** Masculinidades

## Introduction

Luca Guadagnino's movie *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) has achieved great mainstream success thanks to various nominations to the Oscars in 2018, where James Ivory won for best adapted screenplay. Ivory and Guadagnino managed to transform a story, which was originally written by André Aciman (2007) mainly in first-person narrative with a few dialogues, into a well-structured film adaptation, using some very effective techniques, which will be briefly discussed in this paper.

The fictional story in the film takes place in a villa in northern Italy and its surroundings, near Crema, during the summer of the early 1980s, where a Jewish family from the US spend their holidays. The protagonist is Elio (played by Timothée Chalamet, nominated as best actor for the Oscars in 2018), a precocious 17-year-old boy who transcribes music, speaks at least two or three languages and lives with his very well-educated mother and father. The story is told from Elio's perspective. Oliver (played by Armie Hammer), a 24-year-old US post-graduate student, arrives at the villa during a six-

week period to help Elio's father (played by Michael Stuhlbarg) with his anthropological research. Elio and Oliver slowly fall in love, although with some initial drawbacks, typical of two young men, who, at the surface, lead a heteronormative life.

Although the film adaptation changes the setting (in the novel the location is by the sea) the plot and the coming-of-age story apply to both the novel and the film. The following are other narrative techniques applied: while in the novel the first-person narration (that is, Elio's) advances through the use of 'diegesis' of thoughts and memories, the film adaptation resorts to 'mimesis', that is, showing and representing rather than telling. Guadagnino hence avoids voice-over direct telling and chooses alternative showing techniques instead. Among these alternative techniques are body language and background music, which Seymour Chatman (1990: 124) refers to as "cinematic narrator". The novel was originally set towards the middle-end of the 1980s. However, in the film, Guadagnino moved the setting back to 1983 before Silvio Berlusconi's rise to power in Italy and the movie ends earlier than the novel, leaving the spectator who enjoyed it with a craving for a sequel. It is our opinion that these techniques can bear meaning to our analysis of masculinities, as we will explore later on in this paper.

Our main objective is to analyse the masculinities of the three main protagonists (mainly Elio and Oliver, but also Elio's father), through Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM), in connection with feminist and queer studies. The word-play in the title of this paper is related to how we should refer to the masculinities represented in the film, calling them by their names: are they hegemonic, heteronormative, heteropatriarchal or, as suggested in this text, examples of inclusive and affective masculinities? In this paper, we will first discuss CSMM related to emotion and affect.<sup>1</sup> Then we will explore some aspects regarding the film adaptation techniques, which we consider important in order to analyse how the two young men and Elio's father are portrayed, opening up a discussion on how masculinities, as well as gender and sexual identities, are generally represented and perceived in the film industry. To conclude, we will concentrate on five specific scenes from the film, which could be considered examples of affective masculinities.

### ***Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities: Affect and Emotion***

In order to contextualise the masculinities that we intend to critically analyse in this paper, it is fundamental to understand when and why CSMM, and in particular the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', started to be problematised in gender social studies. CSMM appeared towards the end of the 20th century, through feminist-inspired multidisciplinary research. The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was first introduced in 1982 by Sandra Kessler et al., including Raewyn W. Connell,<sup>2</sup> in relation to the Australian educational system. All along the 1980s it was further explored particularly by Connell through their 'gender order theory', inspired by psychoanalysis, gay theory and structural sociology (e.g., Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985). It was later discussed in the 1990s by Sharon R. Bird (1996) and Lynne Segal (1993), to name a few. Moreover, in 2005 Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt published the acclaimed article *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*. According to Connell (n. d.):

To speak of masculinities is to speak about gender relations. Masculinities are not equivalent to men; they concern the position of men in a gender order. They can be

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<sup>1</sup> In this text, 'affect' and 'affection' are used as synonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Connell initially published under the name of Bob; afterwards she used the name Raewyn, sometimes followed by W. for references.

defined as the patterns of practice by which people (both men and women, though predominantly men) engage that position. (n. p.)

This can be related to 'hegemonic masculinity' where the gender order of certain types of 'men' (it is not our intention to give a universalised meaning of the concept of 'man') is considered as entitled to power in our society, that is, the type of masculinity by which some men feel strong and control their hegemonic power over other types of masculinities, women and LGBTIQ+ people. It is relevant to highlight that men who represent hegemonic masculinity do not usually problematise their power and privilege. Likewise, cis-heterosexual people do not tend to criticise heteronormativity, hence, due to this analogy, (trans)feminists and queer theorists have taken an interest in problematising masculinities too.

Hegemonic masculinity is demonstrated both externally, that is, physically, by men's performativity of (pre)determined behaviours (Butler, 1990), and internally, that is, by their expression of specific types of, often repressed, emotions. They must appear extremely tough: though they usually cannot overtly show their emotions (crying in public, for instance), they are allowed the open display of physical strength and even violence. Rage is often their predominant type of emotion, and anything related to softness or what might be considered 'feminine' is not manifested at all and often repressed.<sup>3</sup> Their homosocial discourses are usually based around drinking, sports and women (if they are straight), filled by sexist and homophobic jokes, often denoting a lack of emotional expression (Bird, 1996), as well as of emotional intelligence. These types of men are often shown in mainstream movies and TV series (also accessible on VOD - Video on Demand platforms) as the heroes and exemplars to follow by boys and men in general, especially in the past (e.g., Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis). Although they tend to represent the dominant interpretation of masculinity according to our sociocultural standards and stereotypes, we believe that they are in fact a minority, who often takes control of our lives in many different ways, such as in politics or through the media and arts. As stated above, this was more blatantly obvious in the past and although nowadays hegemonic masculinity is still very powerful, it appears to be more 'discreet' and perceived as less hegemonic (Azpiazu Carballo, 2017).

This means that many men nowadays tend to be, or at least appear to be, more sensitive, caring of their families and children and trying to distance themselves from the macho prototype that might have been imposed on them. This does not mean that they have lost their power and privileges. Rather, they have become more critical and have changed in order to adapt to new ways of expressing their masculinity (Demetriou's concept of "dialectical pragmatism", 2001: 355), condemning violence over women and children, although many still keep perpetuating it inside (and outside) their home walls. These masculinities are often labelled as 'new' or 'hybrid' in comparison to the hegemonic or 'toxic'<sup>4</sup> ones. It is interesting to notice that these 'new men' tend to participate in demonstrations against domestic violence and murder, for example, however, they do not usually contribute to other feminist social demands, such as the right to a free, legal and safe abortion (Azpiazu Carballo, 2017). These new types of masculinities are also labelled as 'inclusive' (Chvatík, Hardwick, & Anderson, 2021), 'alternative' (Carabí & Armengol, 2014), 'affective' (Vescio et al.,

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<sup>3</sup> This is verbally and physically expressed by primary school boys in the documentary *Gender Neutral Education* (Real Families, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Toxic masculinity is characterised by violence and domination over other types of masculinities and particularly women. It is often linked to misogyny, sexism (including physical violence), LGBTIQ+phobia, sexual assault, bullying and aggression. Like hegemonic masculinity, it is part of a social gender hierarchy dependent on (hetero)patriarchy. See Carol Harrington for a recent take on toxic masculinity (2020).

2021), 'healthy' (White, 2021), as well as 'dissident' or 'respectful', terms which are entering the debates surrounding masculinities with force.

Masculinities can be perceived differently depending on diverse sociocultural contexts and ethnicities. Most studies on inclusive or alternative masculinities are carried out with (usually young) western white men (e.g., Anderson, 2008), thus limiting the possibility of a more generalised and inclusive change towards new forms of masculinities. Therefore, the question remains whether an alternative model is really possible in our evolving, albeit not always progressively, current society. Connell (2016) reminds us that masculinities are affected by history, time, and place, and by the changing structures of power in our neoliberal globalised world, thus suggesting that men might become more emotional due to social and economic changes. In fact, in more recent years, sociological research based on feminist approaches (including postfeminism: Rumens, 2017) has explored how men are becoming more emotional (de Boise 2015; de Boise & Hearn, 2017; Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). Sam de Boise affirms that "men and women's emotions develop in different ways in different cultural contexts . . . they are patently not predetermined from birth" (2015: 45). We have all wrongly learned from birth in our culture that emotions and affection are related more to a so called 'feminine sphere'. As a consequence, girls are generally taught to express different types of emotions whilst boys are taught to repress the very same emotions. Such emotions include, for instance, affection, understood as a synonym of tenderness. However, men experience all types of emotions too, with the result that many cannot express their feelings in a natural and spontaneous way. In our view, affection is usually connected to a more positive type of feeling. We understand that this is debatable as emotions and affection could be considered synonyms depending on the circumstances and that is why in this text the two terms are sometimes interchanged. Yet we would like to point out that the use of affective masculinities in our title and in this paper refers to a vulnerable, sensitive and caring type of affection. In other words, in this study, we describe 'affective' as more positive, acceptable and definable than 'emotional', which could be more easily connected to all types of feelings, including 'negative' ones.

Some men can be emotional (and affective) in situations which most people would accept without social criticism: "If you have ever seen grown men at football games, or 50-year-old skinheads at Morrissey gigs, cry in a way that would never be acceptable in other situations, you will probably also sympathize with this point" (de Boise, 2015: 47). De Boise argues that some masculinities through history were considered more civilised than others: for example, white European men versus African men, who were considered "excessively 'angry', 'irrational', 'pugnacious' or 'uncivilized'" (ibid.: 51). Therefore, de Boise reminds us that emotional differences are interconnected with the 'dangerous' idea of a Darwinian evolutionary biology, which tendentially, but not exclusively, tells us that (heteronormative) men are more rational than women and other 'subordinate' types of men.

CSMM have often concentrated their interest on hegemonic masculinity versus women and homosexuality. Homosexuality is usually rejected by hegemonic masculinity because it considers it a 'feminisation' of masculinity. Therefore, gay men are read as submissive and inferior types of men compared to the hegemonic heterosexual ones. However, as de Boise (2005) reminds us, Mark McCormack and Eric Anderson affirm that homosexuality has become more acknowledged: "In a culture of decreased homophobia, physical affection and emotional intimacy between males is acceptable" (2010: 855). Moreover, Anderson (2009: 7) and McCormack (2012: 338) speak of a lower presence of 'homohysteria' (or the fear of being read as gay) in contemporary western culture. In *Call Me by Your Name* the appropriation of homosexuality is not

made explicit, but the physical affection, including sex, and emotional intimacy between Elio and Oliver is central to the film.

Some studies indicate that this new emotional openness among men is derived by gains achieved by the feminist movements, and because of this change, men are facing a social 'crises' within their masculinity (e.g., Benatar, 2012), often depicting men as 'victims' instead of 'benefactors' of this important switch in their emotional expressions. Nonetheless, even if men seem to express more emotions nowadays than in the past, this has not contributed to the disruption of gendered inequities (de Boise, 2015), meaning that women are still far from reaching the same social, domestic, and political rights, including power, as those enjoyed by men.

The gender binary system (men/women, heterosexual/homosexual) has been the pivotal argument in CSMM, often leaving other gender expressions, such as trans, intersex, nonbinary or queer, outside the debate on masculinities. As noted by Judith<sup>5</sup> Halberstam (2012), one does not need to 'pass' as a man to perform masculinity. In fact, the division between men and women as completely different entities has been problematised and contested by Judith Butler (1990), Raewyn Connell (2009) and Simone de Beauvoir (1953), among others. And there is the debate on 'female masculinity' as well, that is, of 'masculinity without men' (Halberstam, 1998). This is strictly related to butch lesbians, tomboys, trans-identified men, intersex or nonbinary people who might not fit into the binary woman or man but might be perceived as masculine (they 'pass' as men) externally, that is, physically. Possibly, these identities perceived as 'masculine' should occupy a space in the discourse of masculinities, even if they may not consider themselves as men in terms of a social construction. In fact, the majority of research on masculinities focuses on (usually white) cis men, contributing to the lack of inclusion of trans men (Gottzén & Straube, 2016). This is not the case of Elio, Oliver and Elio's father who represent typical examples of cis men, who 'pass' as masculine, even if their sensitive maleness blurs the image of hegemonic or toxic masculinity often portrayed in movies.

Through their reading of CSMM, Sam de Boise and Jeff Hearn ponder on whether men are getting more emotional:

Understanding men's emotions and getting men to understand emotions are vital in working with gender inequalities, as well as improving men's wellbeing and health outcomes. To this end, indispensable work has been and is being done on emotions in sociological research on masculinities. (2017: 46)

However, they point out that sociology studies are not often clear about their aims: do they try to understand how men communicate emotions or do they interrogate emotions related to men and masculinities? (ibid.). They believe that the treatment of emotions in CSMM should "engage with debates within the psychological and natural sciences" (ibid.: 47), including political economy. Nonetheless, they affirm that "this is certainly not to resort to a biologically determinist understanding of emotions but to expand the remit of what type of transdisciplinary research may be possible within the emerging field" (ibid.: 49). In fact, Todd W. Reeser argues that "the gendering of affect as masculine – whether implicit or explicit – may be problematic, but it can also offer a way to think about, to study, or to reimagine masculinities" (2017: 110). He also believes that affect is not static but always on the move and one of the strengths of (hegemonic) masculinity is its link to power, which might feel undermined by affect and therefore perceived as 'weaker', since it might disrupt normative masculinity.

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<sup>5</sup> That article was published under the name of Judith. Normally, Halberstam calls himself Jack and uses the masculine pronouns for himself. However, both works mentioned in this paper bear the name of Judith.

Interestingly and in relation to *Call me by Your Name*, Brian Massumi (2002: 26), reminds us that “once affect enters literature or film, it ceases to be affected itself as these texts can only depict intensity, often through absence of language”. On the same line, Reeser (2017) argues that in some films the male hero does not perform the expected and traditional masculine role, but resorts instead to affective ways of communication outside language, displaying vulnerability, like crying or feeling sad and impotent, thus opening up “the potentiality for a new gender inscription onto his body” (p. 112). However, Reeser also warns us that “affective intensity may propel a male subject into the realm of normative discourse .... In other words, the discursive recuperation of affect may serve to assert or reassert hegemonic or normative masculinity” (ibid.: 113). Through an analysis of the film *Dans Paris* (Christophe Honoré, 2006), he also claims that queer affect and same sex relationships may transform masculinity into non-normative, thus becoming a new or alternative form (ibid.: 115). This critic also refers to other films and novels where men get intimate with each other even if they are not gay (or at least not all of them), or they do not have sex, and their friendships or family relationships or acquaintances become a ‘bromance’, opening up “a space of gendered potentiality” (ibid.: 117); hence, once again, disrupting normative and hegemonic masculinity.

Todd W. Reeser and Lucas Gottzén (2018) confirm the above argument by stating that in some circumstances, like videos posted on YouTube, one can find men who perform typically heteronormative masculine activities, like showing who is the strongest or who can eat the strongest chili peppers between two men, and by achieving similar results they hug each other, and they even say to each other “I love you man” (p. 146). It is a brief moment of intimacy that expresses tenderness, which Reeser and Gottzén call “laddish homosociality” (ibid.). Had not been for such situations, these men would have never hugged or uttered the words ‘I love you’. The authors are here concerned with a switch in masculinity from ‘emotion’ to ‘affect’, and how to achieve it, commenting that “contemporary masculinity has frequently been understood as unemotional, emotionally impaired, or somewhat stoic, which is seen as a consequence of western gender norms” (ibid.: 148). They claim that this fear or anxiety related to demonstrating emotions has contributed to men’s loneliness and isolation (as suggested by Seidler, 1989: 162), often causing depression and even resorting to suicide without looking for medical and social support, which restrains them to form intimate relationships with other men (Courtenay, 2000, as cited in Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). This repression ends up in anger, as demonstrated by many examples in our contemporary society, perpetuated by hegemonic masculinities (racism, sexism, bullying, homotransphobia, etc.), which in fact can influence also women. “Individual men, then, may be portrayed as victims of a universalizing emotional regime of masculinity” (Reeser & Gottzén, 2018: 150). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze (1988), Reeser and Gottzén suggest “that we need to understand affective masculinities as not only embodied expression regulated by gendered emotion regimes but also as the action potential of human and non-human bodies” (2018: 152). They also remind us that, while feminist movements and queer theory embraced affect studies from the beginning, CSMM have started to do it only recently.

As a matter of fact, Massumi argues that affect is complex to discuss in academic papers since “there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect” (2002: 27), meaning, as we are claiming in this paper, that affect is always interpretive and debatable. Thus, it is possible that transcendent or indescribable affect may be used to justify men’s hegemony (Allan, 2016, as cited in Reeser & Gottzén, 2018). However, the affective masculinities we want to analyse in this paper are those that embrace diverse and sensitive states of emotions, including vulnerability, nonviolence, sadness and softness, which are rarely represented by men in mainstream cinema, and which we consider new ways of thinking about masculinity in CSMM. In this respect, Reeser

(2017: 115) attests that affect may indeed queer normative masculinities, revealing new non-heteronormative types of male representations. In Reeser and Gottzén's words:

Affect offers potentiality vis-à-vis gender studies: it allows for a model in which masculinity does not have to just become aware of its repressed or hidden emotions or 'get in touch' with the emotion that lies deep within, but rather affect may help produce some new kind of feeling male subject not yet culturally defined. (2018: 159-160)

### ***Representation of Masculinities and Gender Identities in the Film Adaptation***

Guadagnino's use of silence, body language, facial expressions, camera close-ups, gazes and particularly the use of a specific soundtrack could be interpreted as techniques for the representation of how masculinities either show or repress Elio and Oliver's feelings. For example, in a scene, we can hear the lyrics of the song 'Futile Devices' by Sufjan Stevens: "It's been a long, long time, since I mesmerized your face. / It's been four hours now, since I've wandered through your place". As Matt St. Clair (2018: n. p.) comments: "One would think it's sung from Elio's stream of consciousness based on these lyrics". Likewise, the movie main song, 'Mystery of Love' (Sufjan Stevens), starts with these lines evoking Elio and Oliver's relationship: "Oh, to see without my eyes, / the first time that you kissed me, / boundless by the time I cried, / I built your walls around me". Being two young men, the walls might represent a barrier or a kind of protection from showing their feelings to others. Therefore, it could be read as a masculine/same gender reaction, since they are both aware that publicly they cannot show their love, at least not initially.

Their struggle to find the words to tell each other their feelings is also expressed by the song 'Words' (F.R. David), in which we can hear "Words don't come easy", another cunning way to avoid dialogues in the film. These are the type of pop songs we could have heard off the radio in the early 1980s (St. Clair, 2018: n. p.). Furthermore, in the last scene of the film, we can hear these lines from Sufjan Stevens's 'Visions of Gideon': "I have loved you for the last time. / I have touched you for the last time". Clearly, Guadagnino was very accurate in choosing a specific soundtrack which could function as a narrative voice that helps overcome the difficulty of openly expressing the affect between two young men.

Regarding the sexual scenes, most of the vivid sexual fantasies expressed by Elio in the novel were omitted from the film and those sex scenes which do appear in the film are much less explicit than in the novel. Guadagnino possibly wanted to reach a universal spectatorship. However, was universality actually achieved in the film by not showing graphic sex scenes between two young men? According to Cláudio Alves (2017), the sexual scenes in the film between Elio and Marzia (his first 'girlfriend') are more explicit than those between Elio and Oliver, where, for example, at a moment of total intimacy and sexual contact, the camera moves away and points to the window and the trees outside. The absence of total frontal nudity and explicit sex between the two male partners has been also criticised by James Ivory. Is this a way of showing what is universally accepted between two young men who have sex in mainstream cinema? Basically, should the gaze over their naked masculine bodies be avoided simply because they are two men? That is possible and debatable. According to Alves (2017: n. p.) this is quite typical in mainstream cinema. In Alves's opinion, Guadagnino uses a lot of close-ups of the two protagonists, mainly their faces and gazes, probably to avoid voyeurism and to preserve emotional intimacy, away from the gaze of queer sex, an antagonist of normative masculinity.

On another note, the novel was generally well reviewed but, giving the nature of its story with two young men falling in love with each other, it seems to attract more queer readers, although some of them criticised it for not being 'gay enough', while for others it was taken as a universal coming-of-age love story. Moreover, in the film, homosexuality is never mentioned, nor is any other gender 'labelling', leaving the spectators to observe this type of tenderness between two young men who disrupt the image of a stereotypical heteronormative masculinity. Most importantly, Elio and Oliver are two cis young men who demonstrate a high level of affection between them, thus 'confronting' hegemonic men, who might have been surprised by the tenderness showed by a boy aged only 17 and another young man of 24.

In mainstream films (mainly Hollywood), LGBTIQ+ characters have rarely achieved acceptable forms of inclusiveness and positive representations; with a few exceptions in the last few years, possibly starting with *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), which was however filled with heteronormativity and fear of exposing a same gender relationship, including clear examples of violent homophobia and reflecting the reality of that precise place and time. Yet, in *Call me by Your Name* masculinities could be read as acceptable, healthy and affective models. As the film is possibly intended to suit a universal spectator, some people might have been surprised to notice that the three main characters (Elio, Oliver and Elio's father) are quite gentle and not typically normative; and, also, that two young men can fall in love with just the same intensity as a man and a woman would.

In fact, these three men are not engaged in typical heteronormative and hegemonic masculine social codes, such as discussing sport events, drinking, name-calling, teasing and physical aggression. Thus, their 'homosocial environment' (Bird, 1996) makes us categorise these three characters outside hegemonic masculinity. The fact that two young men fall in love and have sex with each other, all supported by Elio's father, clearly indicates that an initial apparent hegemonic masculinity was only a façade learnt throughout their lives as they had presumably been raised in heteronormative environments; although Elio grew up in a very open-minded family from whom he presumably received non hegemonic gender values. Yet Elio also feels the societal pressure. It must be noted that both Elio and Oliver are white and privileged young men, coming from relatively rich families, thus potentially representing a specific (as well as generic) type of masculinity. Yet their masculinity could be categorised as 'transgressive' or 'dissident', although these adjectives bear a strong political connotation of which, judging by their general social performances, the three men are not aware of.

As mentioned above, both the novel and the film do not make any reference to labelling a person for their gender and sexual identity, which raises the debate on what is generally considered a 'gay novel' or a 'gay film'. This story cannot be categorised within the usual tragic, so called (wrongly in our opinion) 'gay films/novels', where often gay and lesbian characters are depicted as sufferers and victims of all types of homophobic violence and abuse, even if sometimes these works may have a happy ending. If films with queer characters are named 'gay films', then films with straight characters should be labelled as 'straight films', which is never the case. Labelling it as just 'gay' is merely a way to cover up the deeper meaning of a film or novel. We would rather describe this (sub)genre as 'queer-themed cinema' (the main genre in this case would be a coming-of-age story), in order not to reduce it to another misleading label.

In relation to masculinities in the film, the choice of the two main actors was most likely not a coincidence and might represent a tendency in the film industry: that of employing straight actors to perform non straight (queer) characters. This is in fact a different



angle in the analysis of masculinities in the film industry. In mainstream cinema, actors (both women and men) are usually selected for their personal charm, beauty, charisma and for their acting skills, especially if they are already known to the general public. In the novel, both Oliver and Elio are described as good looking, and this is also reflected in the film. However, there are quite a lot of openly queer actors who could have taken Elio's and Oliver's roles, but this does not seem to be relevant to the mainstream cinema industry, and it was probably not important for Guadagnino, who might have chosen these actors for his own specific reasons.

In addition, in this case, these actors seem to follow specific and conventional masculine men (in contrast to being 'camp') to be accepted by a universal spectatorship. Was, therefore, *Call me by Your Name* made to reach a universal public? Probably yes. As Guadagnino commented a few times, the film should not be regarded as 'gay', since this first experience of falling in love and sexual attraction should apply to most people, regardless of their gender and sexual identity. This is understandable, but the story would have been totally different had the protagonists been straight. So, from our perspective, queerness should be recognised and celebrated in movies such as this one. *Call Me by Your Name* was written by a man (Aciman) married to a woman, who could be considered straight, just like Hammer (who was also married to a woman); whilst Guadagnino and Ivory are openly gay, although Guadagnino has repeatedly stated that there is no need to be 'labelled'.

As for Timothée Chalamet, he has become very famous especially after interpreting Elio. He is wanted in many major films as the protagonist (e.g., *Dune* by Denis Villeneuve, 2021). This opens up an interesting debate on the image of masculinity. Although Timothée has always been romantically related to women, his gentle facial traits, longish curly hair and slim body do not represent the typical macho man who is often portrayed in mainstream films, on the contrary, he could be considered a "hybrid" type of masculinity (German Press Agency, 2022: n. p). We consider this aspect important in terms of showing a different type of masculinity for a mainstream public who could recognise that gentle traits and affection can be easily shown in films nowadays even by men who do not openly identify as gay (as it was the case with River Phoenix and Leonardo di Caprio in the past decades), therefore, revealing the possibility of being affectionate for many men who could identify with Chalamet.

Therefore, we believe it is acceptable to cast straight actors to play these roles, and consequently, queer and, especially, trans actors should be able to play cis straight roles too (which is rare, unfortunately). Furthermore, the fact that Oliver and Elio lead a 'straight life' and they behave like conventional (but 'softer') men in the film implies that these types of masculinities can fall outside the heteronormative matrix, which can disrupt hegemonic masculinity, thus showing alternative ways of being a man.

## Results

### ***Examples of Affective Masculinities in Call Me by Your Name***

To illustrate affective masculinities, five scenes from the film will be subsequently discussed. Our analysis is similar to that conducted by Reeser (2017) that we have briefly mentioned in this paper. In the first scene that we have chosen to analyse,<sup>6</sup> Elio appears desperate because he misses Oliver, and he is waiting for him inside and outside the villa. He is alone and there is no interaction with Oliver. In the novel this scene is described through a very long stream of consciousness of Elio's thoughts,

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<sup>6</sup> These scenes are excerpts (previews/clips) from the film uploaded onto YouTube, available for free. This is the link for the first scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MMk-Pb8os0>

similar to what a teenager of his age would write in their diary. In the film, Elio's despair having to wait for Oliver to turn up is made perceptible by Elio's subsequent reaction. When Oliver comes back very late that night Elio just murmurs "traitor" to himself, as he suspects Oliver of dating a woman. Thus, with only some facial expressions, background music, and one hurting word, we get to understand Elio's frustration. Bearing in mind that nobody knows about the feelings they are building towards each other, it is interesting to understand their interactions and how Guadagnino manages to translate their feelings and 'disrupt' their constructed masculinity, which, in this particular scene we would like to describe as affective, since Elio shows his emotions, and these are totally disclosed to the spectatorship.

The second scene<sup>7</sup> is possibly the first moment at which there is homoerotic tension between the two. In this particular encounter, Elio and Oliver deal with their attraction to each other in a rather 'awkward' way. Oliver, who is playing volleyball with other boys and girls outside the villa, approaches Elio pretending to give him a massage on his shoulder, as he looks tense. Oliver seems patronising, he appears older (in fact Oliver was supposed to be 24, but Armie Hammer was nearly 30 in 2017), stereotypical and even hypermasculine. Elio (Timothée Chalamet, who actually looked 17 in 2017), on the other hand, being younger and still a teenager, is placed within the girls and thus seems to take a more 'feminine' role on the side-lines. Furthermore, Elio can be perceived as the passive subject who silently suffers Oliver's touch, but who also reacts rather angrily, as his personal space (and physicality) has been violated. Oliver's masculine demonstration of power is in fact a caress in disguise, resembling more of a gentle touch. In the same scene, Oliver uses one of the girls to cover up his touch and returns to the safe appearance of heteronormativity, of what is expected from him as a young man. He is perhaps tantalising Elio, trying to show that he is interested in him, without competing with him, and that he possibly likes him. Elio's great annoyance is a result of his embarrassment in public at being attracted to Oliver. As a consequence, it appears that Elio does not like Oliver. This scene sends a heteronormative message: an attraction between two young men cannot be freely manifested in public and therefore other strategies must be found. Towards the end of the film Oliver admits that that particular touch was used as an excuse to show affection for Elio, who, in return, did not understand and was quite annoyed by Oliver's perceived arrogance, having mixed feelings that only later were clearly related to his strong attraction. Therefore, what might appear at first as an arrogant move from Oliver, is then perceived as a way of getting closer to Elio. Both resort to typical expected 'masculinity behaviours' to deal with the situation. This is more noticeable in Oliver, but it also applies, to a lesser extent, to Elio's open display of annoyance and distance-keeping. However, this apparent show of hegemonic masculinity is, after all, an excuse to get closer to each other. It could, therefore, be a strategy learnt throughout their lives in order to cover up their more instinctive desires yet disclosing a 'gentle' kind of masculinity.

The third scene<sup>8</sup> is a special conversation between Elio and Oliver, where Elio shows his knowledge of Italian history and Oliver asks him nicely: "Is there anything you don't know?", to which Elio replies: "I know nothing about things that matter". Oliver wonders what these things that matter may be and soon discovers what he partially perceived but was not sure about: it is a sort of declaration of love on Elio's part. But how does Oliver react to this? And how does Elio approach this delicate subject? Do they behave in a hegemonic way as regards masculinity? Why are there no explicit words said? Can Elio talk to anybody about his feelings? Clearly no conversation related to homosexuality is permitted in society, especially between a young man of 24 and a teenager of 17, with an apparent heteronormative background and in 1983. Aciman

<sup>7</sup> There is no link (excerpt) available on YouTube about this specific scene.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ynv-EC8O0AI>

(2018) recalls that it took him five long pages to describe this scene, and he is very pleased to see that Guadagnino managed to reduce it to a few but absolutely striking minutes, admitting that he could not “measure pauses and breaths and the most elusive yet expressive body language” (n. p.).

From this scene, it seems that at only seventeen Elio has really nobody to talk to and is left outside traditional conversations. Moreover, he makes it clear that he wants to disclose his feelings to Oliver. In fact, Elio is very confident for his age and seems to be more open, but also more innocent than Oliver. On the other hand, Oliver’s own experience of life has taught him to shut up and keep quiet, in order to conform to heteronormativity and possibly also to hegemonic masculinity. Elio’s assertiveness on these issues places him outside masculine and heteronormative social gender roles.

The fourth scene that we have chosen from the film<sup>9</sup> refers mainly to Elio’s father. Perhaps this is the scene in the film (almost taken literally from the novel) that better describes an example of sensitive and affective masculinity and it is one of the most acclaimed by critics and public alike. Elio’s father tells Elio about the importance of his relationship with Oliver after the latter has left Italy. Elio is broken hearted, and his father advises him not to kill his feelings. He tells Elio that what they had was unique and should be cherished even with the momentary sadness and pain. This is probably not the expected reaction from a father in a situation like this. However, there are exceptions where fathers or other male figures are very understanding and accepting in a family setting, sometimes even more than their female counterparts.

Elio’s father acknowledges the repression of his own feelings when he was young, although whether they were towards a man or a woman is never revealed, and it is not relevant. He comments that he did never allow himself the possibility of having what Oliver and Elio have had, even though he admits having got close to it. Perhaps his imposed masculinity model is a barrier between father and son and the removal of such barrier can free Elio to really be himself in front of his father, to accept his desire (and possibly his sexual orientation and gender identity) towards Oliver, something which, according to his father, he should not deny. Elio’s father sees Oliver and Elio’s relationship as ideal and tells his son to embrace change in itself and not to see it as an ending. This is clearly another example of affective masculinity, mainly because it is demonstrated by an understanding and caring father to his teen son who suffers from the consequences of loving another young man who has just ‘abandoned’ him.

The fifth and last scene that we have chosen, which is in fact the last scene in the film,<sup>10</sup> is somehow similar to the first scene we have discussed in this section, since Elio is alone expressing his feelings and crying in front of the fireplace in wintertime, a few months after Oliver’s departure. This scene summarises all his thoughts and emotions: sadness, sorrow, loss, heartache, but also a certain type of satisfaction for having met Oliver. Here, silence and facial expressions replace words. This scene was filmed showing the final credits at the same time, which we find original and captivating, as it might force the spectator to stay on until the very end. This chimes in with Aciman’s final words in an interview in 2018:

The ending captured the very spirit of the novel I had written in ways I could have never imagined or anticipated, ... the final scene with Elio and Sufjan’s song stayed with me long, long after I walked out of the movie theatre and, as happens so rarely, into the next morning and the evening after that. (n. p.)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b26Qklu4Oi4>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOjzXPAuo6c>

We regard it as a very emotional movie ending, which shows a long scene about a boy freely expressing his feelings and vulnerability, thus revealing the emotional and affective side of his masculinity. Hopefully, this could be regarded by other men as a natural and alternative way of exploring and showing their emotions without being judged.

## Conclusions

The film adaptation uses a powerful aesthetic effect, contributing to the idea that suggesting or showing is sometimes better than telling, as some viewers might have felt 'disoriented' with extra scenes and characters (which instead were present in the novel), and this can be related to how masculinities themselves are portrayed in the film. In fact, by suggesting and by not being totally direct, especially in the sexual scenes between Elio and Oliver, the film has probably managed to reach a broader spectatorship, possibly including men who fit into hegemonic masculinity, perhaps disrupting the basic idea of what it means to be a man.

The choice of avoiding labelling sexual and gender identities in the film is appropriate if we think of a universal spectatorship (notably cis men), who might recognise themselves in this first love experience, regardless of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. By doing so, both the novel and the film escape the common 'gay' label and explore a type of love which could be referred to as universal. However, as we have discussed in this paper, this is a love story between two young men struggling with their sexuality and feelings towards each other, a storyline which would have developed differently had the protagonists been a man and a woman.

In relation to masculinities, the focus of this paper, we believe that this film is a great opportunity for all men, especially hegemonic and normative ones, to learn different ways of showing one's masculinity. The movie might help them undergo an introspective process, where they must confront themselves and face the way they perform their masculinity, hopefully learning that being emotional, affective and sensitive is actually part of any human being. They might also learn that their repressed feelings are a product of our sociocultural construct, of what it means to be a man, of the gender roles and the performativity that men are expected to 'act out' in order to be accepted as (hetero)normative and hegemonic. *Call Me by Your Name* shows us that there are alternatives to these patterns and that contemporary mainstream cinema can do much to promote them. Oliver's transition from an apparent hegemonic man to a tender lover, or Elio's father caring understanding, ultimately function as positive examples of affective masculinities.

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