



## Masculinity in Stephen Graham & Jack Thorne's Film *Adolescence*

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**Abstract:** *From past to present, masculinity has continuously shaped how men are expected to behave in society, especially in adolescence. The television series Adolescence highlights these expectations by portraying different male characters in their daily interactions, reflecting how masculinity operates in real life. This study aims to explore the types of masculinity displayed in the series based on R.W. Connell's theory (2005), which classifies masculinity into hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized types. The research applies a qualitative descriptive method to examine social realities through selected dialogues and scenes. The findings reveal that hegemonic masculinity (64%) is the most frequently represented form, where dominance, toughness, and emotional restraint are highlighted as masculine ideals. Subordinate masculinity (27%) follows, showing that expressions such as emotional openness or queerness are still viewed as less masculine. Marginalized masculinity (9%) appears in contexts involving race and class, while complicit masculinity (5%) is rarely shown, suggesting that most characters either fully embody or struggle against dominant norms. The data shows how the media continues to uphold hegemonic masculinity while only subtly acknowledging its alternatives, offering insight into the gender dynamics experienced by teenage boys today.*

**Keywords:** *Masculinity, Gender, Identity, Film, Adolescence*

### 1) INTRODUCTION

Literature is generally defined as any written or unwritten human work with artistic or aesthetic value. From this general definition, we can have the perception that literature is not only a work of art documented through writing, but it can also be literature in the form of stories whose key stories are only known by certain people. However, documentation techniques are very important for literary works because they are for historical and cultural preservation. According to Renne Wellek and Austin Warren, literature is a creative activity that is a work of art (2020: 3). This statement explains that all human endeavors capable of producing beautiful works fall under the category of literature, whether oral or written. From a different perspective, literature is defined as an imaginative work, and when an author reaches a state of intense enjoyment (passion), literature is seen as a product of human contemplation through high thinking. However, literature is not only the product of creative endeavors; it also contains elements of fact or reality. Literature encompasses various forms of literary works, including poetry, prose, and drama. Prose refers to any written work that follows a basic grammatical

structure, with words and phrases organized into sentences and paragraphs. In some cases, prose is adapted into drama.

Drama is a type of literary work that describes human life, which is staged live. Drama is an activity in the form of an illustrative work or a picture of life played by two or more people with a conversation or prologue, and is usually performed in front of an audience. According to Surastina (2020:116), drama is a type of literary work created to describe human life and character through action and dialogue, which is then performed. The focus on action and dialogue illustrates that drama does not tell stories through lengthy narratives like novels, but instead through direct interactions among characters. Each gesture, facial expression, and spoken word serves as the primary medium for communicating the message, conflict, and life values that the author aims to convey. Drama does not merely showcase a fictional tale, but frequently mirrors the social, cultural, and psychological realities of humanity. Regardless of the genre, whether tragedy, comedy, or any other, each drama offers a unique perspective. A good movie typically holds economic value, as it aims to reach a wide audience and generate profit. More importantly, dramas have the power to influence thoughts and shift perspectives, making them a significant form of modern storytelling. Drama performances bring this work to life and make it dynamic because they incorporate visual and performative elements that enable the audience to directly feel emotions, tension, and comprehension. Consequently, drama occupies a significant role in the realm of literature, not just as a source of entertainment, but also as a vehicle for reflection and understanding the intricacies of human existence.

Masculinity is a set of traits, behaviors, culture, and roles of men in their social activities. Masculinity emphasizes the construction of how men should behave and act in society. Men are not just born with natural masculine traits, masculinity is shaped by culture. Masculinity is often identified with characteristics such as strength, courage, rationality, dominance, independence, and assertiveness of a man in society. According to R.W. Connell (2005), Masculinity is a configuration of gender practices that shape men's position in gender power relations. Connell mentions hegemonic masculinity, which is the dominant form of masculinity that is considered ideal and places men as superior in a patriarchal system. Connell highlighted that masculinity is not an innate or biologically determined trait in men, but instead the outcome of social processes that dictate how men ought to behave, think, and fulfill their roles in society. He presented the idea of hegemonic masculinity, which represents the primary type of masculinity that is most esteemed and validated within a culture, placing men in a superior role over women and other men who do not adhere to this dominant standard. In addition to hegemonic masculinity, Connell also recognizes other types of masculinity

including subordinated masculinity (for instance, homosexual masculinity), complicit masculinity (men who do not hold dominant status yet gain advantages from the patriarchal system), and marginalized masculinity (masculinity that exists on the fringes due to race or class considerations). Therefore, Connell's perspective affirms that masculinity is diverse, intricate, and consistently linked to power dynamics in society

The movie *Adolescence* depicts a lot of masculinity that occurs in men. The plot is complex about the emotional journey, growth, and identity formation of men in contemporary society. It also illustrates how masculinity is in everyday life that can provide influence and learning for men and parents who have sons. This research was conducted to find out the different types of masculinity and their examples in the drama *Adolescence*. Due to the lack of understanding in today's society about the types of masculinity, we chose this movie as a medium to explore the types of masculinity and their examples.

*Adolescence* is a movie series that tells the tense and emotional story of a 13-year-old boy named Jamie Miller, who is accused of the murder of a teenage girl, who turns out to be not a stranger but his own best friend. Graham, the series creator, stated that the idea and inspiration to develop the story came after he saw two separate news reports of boys stabbing girls, which opened Graham's eyes to the growing issue of teen violence and misogyny. The film series is not only a suspenseful crime drama, but also acts as a social reflection on how an unchecked social environment and digital culture can damage the psychological development of teenagers. The movie specifically highlights the enormous negative impact that social media has on teenage boys' perceptions and understanding of masculinity, which is often shaped by public figures on the internet. In an interview on BBC Radio 5 Live's *Must Watch*, Hayley Campbell (2025) revealed that the play *Adolescence* keenly and realistically observes the alarming rise of misogyny, especially among teenage boys, which is often shaped and reinforced by influential yet controversial social media figures. She also added that the play clearly exposes the horrifying reality that many parents are losing control of their children, especially when it comes to what their children consume and do on their phones, and how this can trigger drastic changes in attitude and behavior without parents realizing it until it's too late.

- Jamie : “You’re fucking putting words in me mouth! Its a fucking trap in here! You are...”
- Guard : “Hey! Jamie!” [Jamie panting]
- Jamie : “What was that? Hey! What the fuck was that? **Signaling him away like a fucking queen, yeah?**”
- Briony : [calmly] “I need you to sit down.”
- Jamie : [shouts]  
(Episode 3, duration 33.25)

This dialogue is taken from the movie *Adolescence*, precisely in episode 3 at minute 33.25 during the scene where Jamie is consulting with a child psychologist. In context, the dialogue has a mocking tone, where Jamie comments on the psychologist's actions, which he considers excessive or arrogant, as if he feels she is an important or superior person. This dialogue contains elements of masculinity hegemony. Precisely in the dialogue spoken by Jamie “**Signaling him away like a fucking queen, yeah?**” Which implies that women are inappropriate for telling men off. He seems to be asking how it feels to be able to tell a man off that easily. Even though the cue that Briony, the child psychologist, gave to the guard was that she was fine, but Jamie caught something else from the cue. So in this dialogue, Jamie is being dominant by questioning how women can order men around so easily.

To strengthen this research, several accurate sources with established research backgrounds are included. Five articles serve as theoretical references, presenting similar theories and issues connected to the focus of this study. The articles used are as follows: (1) *Challenging Dominant Representations of Marginalized Boys and Men in Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities* by Steven Roberts and Karla Elliott, 2020. (2) *Deconstructing the concept of masculinity in Indonesian public service advertisements* by Yassar Hasan, Catur Nugroho, and Roro Retno Wulan, 2021. (3) *Challenging the Patriarchal Norms: Examining Hegemonic Masculinity in Dickinson TV Series* by Andieni Rahmawati, Alfi Syahriyani, 2022. (4) *From Hegemony to Inclusivity: Perspectives on Models of Masculinity* by R.W. Connell and Greg Anderson by Dr. Manjari Johri, 2023. (5) *Masculine, independent, and “not acting”:* *Hegemonic masculinity and femmephobia within an online community of queer men* by George Frederick Leeder, 2024.

## 2) REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature incorporates both written and spoken works that imaginatively investigate human encounters, culture, and society. One critical frame of literature is drama, particularly the kind told through screens, like TV series, which employments discourse and performance to specific strife, feeling, and social issues. In contemporary media studies, scholars recognize screen-based storytelling, particularly in serialized television, as a powerful cultural form that reflects and reshapes identity, gender, and power dynamics (Lotz, 2021). As Connell (2005) clarifies that our understanding of sexual orientation is created inside the broader context of considering sexual orientation relations, which makes screen narratives significant for analyzing how cutting-edge social orders are organized. Youngster or adolescent dramas act as social instruments that reflect and address real-world gender expectations and youth encounters. These appear to frequently depict the battles of growing up, showing how youthful individuals bargain with societal expectations, gender roles, and figuring out their identity. Connell (1995) depicts sexual orientation as “a way in which social practice is ordered,” which becomes particularly significant during the stage of adolescence. These stories tend to show how personality and gender construction are continually being formed, some of the time strengthening social standards, and other times pushing back against them.

Masculinity is a key concept in sexual orientation theory, molded intensely by feminist theory and sociological thought. It alludes to the social desires and behaviors that are tied to being male. Instead of being based in biology, masculinity is something formed by culture and society through media, institutions, relationships, and norms. As Connell (2005) explains, masculinity is "a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations." It is not a fixed identity but something performed and negotiated within a social context. Connell's conceptualization of masculinity was grounded in a critique of essentialist views that treated masculinity as innate. Her work drew heavily on the influence of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, applying it to gender to understand how one form of masculinity becomes dominant while others are marginalized. This theoretical shift provided scholars with a more flexible and critical way of analyzing how different masculinities are positioned within systems of power. Connell's influential model outlines four major types of masculinity that operate within gender hierarchies: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized. Each reflects a different relation to power, gender norms, and social institutions.

Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally dominant form that legitimizes male authority and subordinates both women and other masculinities. It is characterized by traits such as heterosexuality, stoicism, authority, physical strength, and emotional restraint (Connell, 2005).

This form of masculinity functions as an ideal, even if not all men embody it; they are often measured against it. For example:

Maverick: **"Don't think. Just do."**

Phoenix : "You really think that'll work up there?"

Maverick: "It has to."

In the film *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), Maverick coaches young pilots preparing for a dangerous mission. His instruction to **"Don't think. Just do."** reflects the cultural ideal that men must act without hesitation or emotional complexity. According to Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity reinforces control, rationality, and power—values that are presented here as essential to being a respected and successful man in a military context.

Complicit masculinity refers to men who do not fully embody hegemonic traits but still benefit from the social privileges granted by patriarchy. These men support the existing order, consciously or unconsciously, and thus share in the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 2005). They may not be aggressive or dominant, but they rarely challenge the dominant gender order. For example:

Nicholas: "I can't stop thinking about you."

Dylan: **"We have to be careful. They can't know."**

In *Moffie* (2019), Nicholas admits his feelings, and Dylan warns him of the danger. Dylan's response, **"We have to be careful. They can't know."** This reveals how both characters suppress their identities to avoid punishment in a violently homophobic, hyper-masculine military. According to Connell (2005), this reflects complicit masculinity: Dylan and Nicholas don't challenge the system or embody hegemonic masculinity, but by hiding their feelings, they protect themselves and indirectly support the very structure that oppresses them. Their silence allows them to blend in and benefit from the patriarchal order, even as it marginalizes who they truly are.

Subordinate masculinity includes traits or identities seen as opposite or inferior to the hegemonic ideal. This includes men who are perceived as "feminine," homosexual, emotionally expressive, or physically weak. These masculinities are actively devalued in the gender hierarchy. Connell explains that hegemonic masculinity maintains its power by

subordinating these alternative masculinities, positioning them as “failed” versions of manhood. For example:

Simon: "I'm gay."

Simon: "**And I don't want you  
guys to think anything different.  
I'm still me.**"

Jack: "So you're gay. Which one  
of your old girlfriends turned you?"

Nora: "Shut the hell up. It's not funny."

In *Love, Simon* (2018), in this coming-out scene, Simon reassures his family with “**I’m still me,**” showing how he anticipates being seen differently because of his sexuality. His father’s joke implies that being gay is unnatural, reinforcing how queer identities are viewed as lesser within dominant masculinity. According to Connell (2005), this is a clear example of subordinate masculinity, where emotional honesty and homosexuality are positioned below hegemonic norms. Simon’s masculinity is devalued not for weakness, but for diverging from heterosexual, dominant expectations.

Marginalized masculinity refers to men who may exhibit masculine traits but are excluded from the dominant model due to factors such as race, class, or disability. These masculinities are shaped by intersectionality, the overlapping of multiple systems of oppression. Connell (2005) points out that hegemonic masculinity is usually based on white, middle-class, able-bodied ideals, thus excluding many men from other backgrounds, regardless of their behaviors. Connell emphasizes that marginalization is not just about traits but the intersection of masculinity with other forms of inequality. For example:

Chiron: "**You're the only man who's  
ever touched me. You're the only one.**"

Kevin: "You're good. No matter  
what, you're good."

In *Moonlight* (2016), Chiron, a Black gay youth, struggles to find a space for his identity in a hyper-masculine environment. In one key scene, teenage Chiron tells his friend Kevin, "**You're the only one who ever touched me.**" This line exposes his deep vulnerability and the marginalization he experiences not just for his sexuality but also for being a young, Black man in a community that punishes emotional openness. Connell (2005) explains that marginalized

masculinity results from the intersection of gender with structural inequalities. Chiron's story powerfully illustrates this form of exclusion and vulnerability.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stressed that masculinity is not merely about personal identity but about patterns of social practice shaped by institutions, geography, embodiment, and resistance. Media, particularly teen-centered series, frequently portray multiple forms of masculinity, contributing to the normalization or critique of gender norms. These representations shape how young audiences perceive what it means to "be a man" in society. Connell (2005) asserts that gender relations are a major component of the broader social structure, and media serves as a key platform where these relations are negotiated. In teen dramas, characters often perform or challenge dominant masculine ideals, revealing the fluidity and contestation of gender roles.

While existing scholarship has explored masculinity in media, the application of Connell's multiple masculinities framework to contemporary teen television remains limited. Much of the prior research has focused on hegemonic masculinity or adult male representations, leaving adolescent narratives underexamined. As Connell (2005) noted, masculinity studies emerged from dialogues with feminism, which opens pathways for critical gender analysis of youth-oriented texts. This study aims to address that gap by analyzing the types of masculinity portrayed in the 2025 series *Adolescence*, using Connell's framework. By identifying and interpreting expressions of hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of gender construction.

### **3) METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method by collecting and analyzing documents to help answer the research questions. Qualitative research is a method used to understand people's behavior in a natural and contextualized way. This approach is especially useful when studying social topics like masculinity, as it allows for an in-depth look at how individuals act and interact within specific cultural settings. According to Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2020), qualitative descriptive research is effective for exploring themes in existing texts and documents, making it suitable for analyzing how masculinity is portrayed in adolescent dramas. The researcher also employs library research, gathering information from books, academic journals, and other written sources focused on masculinity, gender roles, and teenage behavior. The primary data for this study comes from selected scenes and dialogues in adolescent dramas that clearly illustrate expressions of masculinity among teenage characters. These scenes are

examined through the characters' words, actions, and relationships to identify patterns associated with hegemonic masculinity. The researcher uses theoretical frameworks, including those from Connell (2005), to interpret the findings and explain how masculinity is constructed and communicated in these media texts. This method provides insight into how media influences young people's understanding of what it means to "be a man."

#### 4) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Masculinity refers to traits, behaviors, and roles that are culturally associated with men. Actions that are considered masculine may vary depending on culture and social context, but in general.

Table 1. Kind of Masculinity

No.	Kind of Masculinity	Number	Percentage (%)
1	Hegemonic Masculinity	14	64%
2	Subordinated Masculinity	6	27%
3	Complicit Masculinity	1	5%
4	Marginalized Masculinity	2	9%
		22	100%

##### 1. Hegemonic Masculinity



Jamie: You're fucking putting words in me mouth! Its a fucking trap in here! You are..."

Guard: "Hey! Jamie!" [Jamie panting]

Jamie: "What was that? Hey! What the fuck was that? **Signaling him away like a fucking queen, yeah?**"

Briony: [calmly] "I need you to sit down."

Jamie: [shouts]

(Episode 3, duration 33.25)

Jamie was furious with Briony, the child psychologist, because he felt like she was setting him up, so he was angry that the guard was reprimanding him for making a scene. At that moment, Jamie asked what instructions Briony had done to move the guard, saying **“Signaling him away like a fucking queen, yeah?”** Even though the signal Briony gave the guard was that she was fine.

This situation shows Jamie's hegemonic masculinity. This dialogue is supported by Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity, which defines hegemonic masculinity as “a configuration of gender practices that embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of patriarchal legitimacy, guaranteeing (or perceived to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women”. In this dialogue, Jamie questions how it feels for Briony as a woman to order around a guard who is a man. Jamie thinks it is inappropriate for a woman to order a man around. Even though the signal was not to tell the guard off, but to say that she was okay.

## 2. Subordinate Masculinity



Briony: “What did... does your dad make of that?”

Jamie: “He, um... He didn't... [clears throat] He doesn't... He doesn't know.

**He knew I wasn't sporty or anything like that.”**

(Episode 3, duration 14.57)

Jamie answered Briony's question stammeringly when he was asked if his father knew that he didn't like sports. Jamie's father doesn't know that his son is not interested in sports, which is very much attached to a man's masculinity.

This situation shows Jamie's subordinated masculinity. This is due to Jamie's words that he is not interested in sports, and even his father does not know that his son does not like sports. This is shown in the dialogue **“He knew I wasn't sporty or anything like that.”** This is also

supported by Connell's subordinate theory, according to R.W. Connell (2005), within the framework of hegemonic masculinity theory, subordinate masculinity includes forms of masculinity that are considered weaker, less dominant, and often excluded by hegemonic masculinity. One of the characteristics of subordinated masculinity is physical weakness, so Jamie can be said to be a subordinate masculinity because he has a weak physique, so he doesn't like sports or anything like that, where sports itself is very attached to strong men.

### 3. Complicit Masculinity



Mr. Miller: "When I was his age,  
my dad use to fucking batter  
me. Sometimes he'd take the belt  
at me, and he'd fucking whack me."

Mr. Miller: "And I promised meself...  
I said, 'When I have my own kids,  
I'd never do that.' I'd never...I'd never  
do that to my kids. And I didn't, did I?"

Mr. Miller: "**I just wanted to be better.  
But am I?**"

(Episode 4, duration 44.45)

In this emotional reflection, Mr. Miller (Jamie's father) acknowledges the abuse he experienced growing up and his desire to break the cycle. His line "I said, '**When I have my own kids, I'd never do that.**'" shows a conscious effort to avoid repeating violent forms of hegemonic masculinity, like physical dominance and emotional suppression. However, while Mr. Miller avoids overt violence, he doesn't fully reject the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, he still exhibits emotional detachment and pressure to appear strong.

According to Connell (2005), this is a case of complicit masculinity: Mr. Miller does not embody hegemonic masculinity entirely, but by not fully challenging it and still reproducing some of its traits, he continues to benefit from and reinforce the gender order. His

internal conflict, "But am I?" reveals the tension between trying to be different and remaining bound to patriarchal expectations of fatherhood and masculinity.

#### 4. Marginalized Masculinity



Fredo: **"Give me £1.20 now."**

Teacher: "Fredo."

Fredo: "Nah. Give me £1.20."

Adam: "I don't have money."

Fredo: "Give me £1.20 now."

Teacher: "Fredo! Fredo, leave him alone."

Fredo: "I need £1.20, though, sir."

Teacher: "No, you don't. You're on free dinners."

(Episode 2, duration 03.18)

In this scene, Fredo pressures Adam, a Black student, by saying, **"Give me £1.20 now,"** for lunch money, despite knowing Adam doesn't have it. Adam is placed in a vulnerable position, targeted publicly, and humiliated. The teacher exposes Fredo's socio-economic background by stating, "You're on free dinners," stripping him of masculine pride tied to independence and self-sufficiency.

Adam, though not aggressive or confrontational, is caught in a power dynamic that reflects deeper social marginalization. As a Black student in a largely white or controlled institutional space, his masculinity is undermined not just by Fredo's behavior, but by a system that associates race and poverty with weakness or silence.

According to Connell (2005), this is an example of marginalized masculinity where men from disadvantaged racial or class backgrounds are excluded from hegemonic ideals, no matter how "masculine" they act. Adam's racial and possibly class-based positioning means he is denied access to dominant masculine status, even though he does nothing wrong. His silence

shows how marginalized boys are often denied both power and protection within school systems that privilege whiteness, dominance, and authority.

## 5) CONCLUSION

This research explored the different types of masculinity portrayed in the drama series *Adolescence* (2025) using R.W. Connell's (2005) theory of multiple masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized. The study aimed to understand how masculinity is expressed, negotiated, and sometimes contested in adolescent boys' daily lives through the series' characters and dialogues.

The results show that hegemonic masculinity appeared most frequently, with 14 instances (64%), making it the dominant type portrayed. This reflects how the media continues to reinforce traditional ideals of masculinity, such as dominance, aggression, and emotional suppression, as the norm for young males. Subordinate masculinity followed with 6 instances (27%), highlighting how emotional vulnerability and deviation from stereotypical male behavior are still treated as "lesser." Marginalized masculinity (2 instances, 9%) also emerged in scenes where race or class limited a boy's ability to perform traditional masculinity, while complicit masculinity appeared least (1 instance, 5%), showing that while some characters attempt to break the cycle of dominance, they often still benefit from or uphold hegemonic norms without fully resisting them.

The study confirms that *Adolescence* does not just depict masculinity as one-dimensional, but rather as a layered and often conflicted identity that interacts with power, race, family, and emotion. The high presence of hegemonic masculinity suggests that patriarchal values still dominate how masculinity is performed and perceived, even in youth-centered narratives.

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