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Hollywood "Artthrobs" and Masculinity: Things Timothee Chalamet Is and Is Not

Timothee Chalamet is: The lead star of the newest sci fi blockbuster, Dune. The curly haired, French speaking, former theater kid, current moody boy next door did quite well as the young prince/messiah Paul Atreides. No matter your opinions on the quality of the movie, the irony of a blockbuster retelling of an inherently anti-corporate story, or how well you thought the plot stuck to the book, most [critics](#) (me included) seem to like Timothee in the role.

I enjoy him in most roles. Like many, I fell in love with him in *Lady Bird*. Since then, however, I've viewed and reviewed his entire acting repertoire all the way from *Little Women* to *Hot Summer Nights* and even back to the 5ish minutes he's in *Interstellar*. I know that I'm not the only one with a bit of a crush on Timothee. Once a fledgling young star, Chalamet is now regularly headlining high profile movies like *French Dispatch* and the upcoming *Wonka*.

Part of his popularity derives from the vulnerability his characters share. Like Douglass Greenwood from *[Vogue](#)* states, "Chalamet's...roles have been varied, but carry a distinct through-line of off-kilter male characters." The instability of his characters in combination with their youth has shaped the public perception of Timothee.

Timothee Chalamet isn't: a fragile boy anymore. Out of his last 9 movies, at least 6 to 7 of them can be categorized as coming of age stories, even portraying highschool students (maybe 8 I haven't watched *French Dispatch* yet).

Every article seems to comment on how in touch Chalamet is with his emotions, or how delicate he looks. It seems that celebrity media has assigned him an air of fragility. [Saoirse Ronan](#), his co-star in *Little Women*, described him as "feminine and sensitive and sensual."

[Greenwood](#) dubs him a modern "artthrob," a phrase that alludes to a star's "intelligence and less masculine demeanors." Many [writers](#) seem to paint him as something to be protected, the misunderstood smoky loner, or the boy next door that's accidentally wandered into [stardom](#). In some ways he does stand out amongst other modern day stars.

Timothy Chalamet is: A contrast to the typical hyper masculine Hollywood star. In a silver screened landscape populated by super heroes, playboys, and Chris Pratts, Evans, and Hemsworths, Chalamet's smaller frame definitely stands out when you see him in the lead. In

that sense he is different from a lot of the men visible in Hollywood. He doesn't exude the same hypermasculinity that other male celebrities do. And his youth gives him a sense of innocence that people latch on to.

However, just because Chalamet doesn't post videos of himself throwing tomahawks shirtless, doesn't mean he's any sort of revolutionary image.

Timothy Chalamet isn't: The first or that much of a subversive representation of queer or alternative masculinity. Media and fans seem to be enamored by the idea of a gender warping Chalamet. In an article on him, *Vogue* includes this picture as proof of his subversive stardom that favours, "openness, feminism, and proud states of vulnerability."

But what is open about this picture, what is feminist, what sort of vulnerability does the writer see in Chalamet here? In what world have pretty rich white people kissing in public not been an accepted practice? They frame the picture with the caption,

"A man in red shorts clings with both arms to the hull of a yacht bobbing off the coastal waters of Italy. A young woman with gold hoop earrings wearing an animal print bikini stretches over him,

forcing his legs to splay as she clutches his face and kisses him with an open mouth. In this interaction, she is the dominant force."

Yet replace Chalamet's figure with any other Hollywood star, and this would just be a regular paparazzi photo.

Franesca Sobande critiques the abundant media praise for Chalamet labeling him one of many "Internet Boyfriends," describing how his marketed modern masculinity, Frenchness, and attractiveness has garnered him more of an insurgent reputation than he deserves. She writes, "Chalamet has been ascribed an 'emotional vulnerability' and praised for adorning clothes that are apparently part of a 'gender-fluid fashion'...despite his own style often being anything but dramatically dissimilar to conventional luxury 'menswear'."

Yet for some reason *Vogue*, *ID*, *GQ*, *Times*, and much more are convinced he is the next coming of new masculinity. Some articles even blatantly claim that Chalamet is "destroying toxic masculinity." But how can a system be destroyed by the primary representative of its ruling class?

Timothee Chalamet is: an attractive, skinny, rich, white, cisgendered, heterosexual movie star. Chalamet's privileges allow him a greater freedom of expression. The same dynamic arose when Harry Styles appeared on the cover of *Vogue* last December in a dress. Styles was far from the first man or even male celebrity to sport a dress, but he received massive praise for the same act plenty of BIPOC and queer people have been mocked or ostracized for.

In an interview with Styles, Chalamet said "You can be whatever you want to be. There isn't [anything] specific...that you have to take part in to be masculine." He's right, but that argument rings so hollow when Chalamet doesn't recognize his own privilege to have that freedom, or without recognizing the decades of people before him that have preached the same ideas.

Even aside from race, gender, and sexuality there is a sense of pretty privilege as well. Saioirse Ronan's comments on how Chalamet is "feminine and sensitive and sensual" are accompanied by the fact that "he's a guy that, you know, girls fancy." This is not to say that there is anything unattractive about those traits (trust me I'm plenty attracted), but they are only being praised because they're connected to the very conventionally pretty face and jawline of Timothee Chalamet.

Timothee isn't: Actually Elio (or Paul or Nic or Daniel, or Billy). And we shouldn't treat him as such. Anyone who's watched an interview of his knows that while his demeanor is charming, he's different from the emotionally vulnerable boys he plays in movies. And he's definitely not the young, queer Elio most people know him for. Sobande writes how his

"on-screen portrayal of teenage Elio...is [often] misinterpreted as reason enough to suggest that he embodies a non-traditional and non-heteronormative form of masculinity."

But there are actual queer representatives challenging gender norms in the celebrity world. There are big names like David Bowie and Prince who have been fluid with their gender expression, and of course there's actually gay and iconic rapper Lil Nas X who is regularly making headlines. But there are also people like Elliot Page, Billy Porter, Laverne Cox, Ezra Miller, and Eddie Izzard that serve as plenty of inspiration for different forms of gender expression. Yet not a sliver of the admiration given to Chalamet is attributed to these celebrities.

Timothy Chalamet is: proof of the double standard we hold for celebrities (and society). Many BIPOC, queer, and female celebrities deserve much more praise and respect for the actually subversive decisions they make in regards to their gender. The gender and sexuality of celebrities in the public eye(particularly female and queer ones) are heavily controlled and policed by the media. From Marilyn Monroe to Miley Cyrus, there is a long history of the sexualization of young stars, and strong backlash when they try to break out of those roles. There are also celebrities like Billie Eilish that receive criticism for simply attempting to avoid the scrutiny all together.

In the meantime there are men like Chalamet who don't necessarily self identify as paragons of gender fluidity, but they don't deny the claim either. They also fail to speak up for their fellow celebrities who are at the mercy of the media, nor do they highlight the real world people fighting for the expressional freedom the media claims they represent.

Roxanne Gay writes how there is a long history of celebrities co-opting social movements like feminism, restating the same things activist have said for years. The problem is not with their support of the movement, but, as Gay writes most people will not understand , "[the celebrity] is a gateway to feminism, not the movement itself." Additionally most celebrities that borrow the voices and ideas of people who have dedicated their lives to the movement do so without paying them the proper credit.

So when Harry Styles or Timothee Chalamet says that every boy should try wearing a dress, it is great if it inspires a young boy to put on one, but it is not okay to fail to acknowledge all the boys that have died for trying the exact same thing.

Timothee Chalamet isn't: completely at fault for this. Celebrities hold an immense amount of importance and influence over our culture and society. Still, Chalamet isn't singlehandedly taking the title of queer masculinity for himself. And while the media hands it to him, there are plenty of us onlookers letting it happen. There are plenty of fans on Twitter ready to defend him or other popular celebrities for their shortcomings.

We must question the headlines we read and research the ones we're suspicious about. As much as it should be the responsibility of the media to pay homage to the histories of the stories they're telling, it's clear that that's not the goal of magazines like *GQ* or *Vogue*. That doesn't mean it's our fault either for not knowing, but the next time a straight white male celebrity does something "revolutionary," perhaps look into if there's been a BIPOC, queer, or female celebrity who's already done it before, there probably has been.