

**HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THE FRAGILITY OF
MALE INTIMACY IN LUKAS DHONT'S *CLOSE* (2022)**

THESIS

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK
IBRAHIM MALANG
2026**

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THESIS

Presented to
Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
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2026**

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled “**Hegemonic Masculinity and the Fragility of Male Intimacy in Lukas Dhont’s *Close* (2022)**” is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

Malang, 2 June 2026

The Researcher



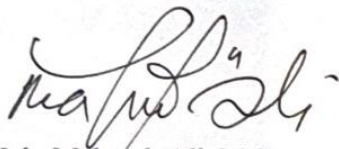
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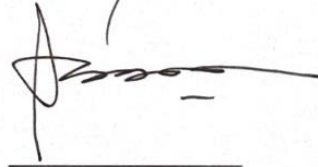
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MOTTO

“And He is with you, wherever you are”

Surah al-Hadid | Verse 4

DEDICATION

The greatest outpouring of gratitude belongs to Him, the One who is boundless in love and mercy. The One who remains ever-present without ever passing judgment. The One who continues to receive without conditions or restraint. Allah SWT by whose grace I am still able to stand here today, in this very moment, and by whose will I have been granted the strength to complete this small yet meaningful chapter of my long and unfolding life. This research. This thesis.

This thesis, I dedicate to my most beloved mother, Siti Hamidah. A woman of extraordinary resilience, who has never once acquainted herself with exhaustion nor surrender. She who has given everything, even in times when everything still felt without meaning. Thank you for continuing to believe in me, even when I have yet to learn how to believe in myself.

To my courageous father, Rudi Sukmalalana, this thesis, too, I complete in your name. A grown boy who never ceased to convince me that my feet are far stronger than I have ever dared to imagine. The one who introduced me to the unforgiving truths of this world. Thank you for always striving to give your all, even without a title to carry your name.

For this special person, my one and only sister, Sherin Aulia Sukma. She whose presence makes me feel, with quiet certainty, that everything will be alright. She who continues to open her wings for me, even when my presence must have felt

like thorns and burning steel pressing against her. Thank you for choosing to be my sister.

This thesis I also dedicate to my entire extended family, gathered there in my hometown, in the place where all of this first began. Most especially, to the Cucuk Entang Rosnah, those who have always had the rare gift of making me forget the dazzling illusions of city life, simply by being in it with me.

To my dearest friends here in Malang, Adil, Jagad, Galih, Dayat. Souls I never truly imagined, from the very beginning, would become some of my deepest reasons to keep going in a city that once felt so foreign and so far from home. Thank you for staying. Thank you for giving me things I never believed I was worthy of receiving.

And to my dear friends, Rani, Azis, Sonia. Thank you for teaching me that sincerity does not always require presence. Keep wandering. Keep moving forward. I hope that one day, God will allow us to sit together once more — and tell each other everything, all over again.

My heartfelt gratitude also goes to Alitha Natriezia, a stranger who has since become a sister to me, here in a city that knows little of the word “family”. Thank you for the trust you have extended, and for the laughter we have woven together, day after day.

And lastly, my deepest, most profound thank you, to a young man who keeps on trying, even when the world so often refuses to take his side. His name is Shandyka or simply Dika, as his mother calls him. Thank you for holding on, even when

letting go would have been so much easier. Thank you for choosing to see color, even when the world offered nothing but emptiness. The road ahead of us is still incredibly long. But at the very least, thank you, once more, for learning to take responsibility for your own self.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

An immeasurable gratitude to Allah SWT, for all His love and compassion that has never ceased toward me. His mercy that has continuously enveloped me since before I even came to exist, until this very moment. As well as prayers and peace always be upon our Prophet Muhammad SAW, a figure who continues to guide and inspire humanity.

Dear my mom, Mrs. Siti Hamidah, a woman full of love and strength, even though the world has often failed to truly see her. My father, Mr. Rudi Sukmalalana, a man who has never stopped trying to give his best, even when the world felt so harsh upon him. And my beloved sister, Sherin Aulia Sukma, the one who has always been the pillar of my faith that the world will keep being okay as long as she is here. This thesis, I dedicate especially for you all, the people whose support has continually encouraged me to persevere.

This thesis would also not have become completed research without the involvement of other wonderful people. A very big gratitude delivered to Dr. Muzakki Afifuddin, M.Pd, as the lecturer who first introduced me to a side of myself, I had never known before. To my thesis advisor, Moh. Mahrush Ali, M.Sn, I extend my deepest thanks for the time, attention, and encouragement that kept pushing me to move forward, until the completion of this thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Agung Wiranata Kusuma, M.A., my academic supervisor, who has continuously provided ease throughout this eight-semester

journey. Furthermore, I would like to thank Dr. Agwin Degaf, M.A., the Head of the English Literature Department, for his dedication, support, and motivation toward me.

Not least, my deepest gratitude I extend to my friends in Malang, and wherever else you may wander. Thank you for the color and the memories that have been woven together, making me feel capable of continuing to walk through life in a city that once felt so unfamiliar to me.

Finally, I hope this research can serve as a foundation of understanding and perspective for future studies, especially those built upon the same theoretical ground, the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Beyond that, I, as the author of this research, genuinely wish that this thesis can make a real contribution in giving voice to those who have continuously been silenced and are unable to defend themselves, so that they may have an equal right in living this life that is, indeed, only temporary.

ABSTRACT

Sukma, Shandyka Naraya. (2026), Hegemonic Masculinity and The Fragility of Male Intimacy in Lukas Dhont's *Close* (2022). Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor Mahrush Ali, M.Sn

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity; Male Intimacy; Emotional Repression; Adolescence; Film Studies

Men are often described as the stronger sex, yet they die by suicide at rates far exceeding women. According to the World Health Organization (2025), this is deeply rooted in cultural pressure demanding men to suppress vulnerability and emotional expression. This is not simply a mental health statistic, it is the lived consequence of hegemonic masculinity, a social construction that quietly shapes how boys learn to think, feel, and behave. It is precisely this reality that Lukas Dhont captures in *Close* (2022), a Belgian coming-of-age film following two thirteen-year-old boys, Léo and Rémi, whose intimate friendship slowly unravels under the pressure of masculine social norms. This study analyzes the representation of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on male emotional intimacy in the film, employing a qualitative-descriptive approach drawing on Connell's (1987) framework of hegemonic masculinity, Way's (2011) studies of adolescent male friendship, and *mise en scène* analysis as outlined by Bordwell et al. (2024). The findings reveal four forms of hegemonic masculinity represented by Léo, which systematically erode his emotional intimacy with Rémi. Rémi's suicide stands as the most devastating consequence of these social norms. This study argues that *Close* (2022) is not merely a story of lost friendship, but a cinematic critique of the norms that render genuine male connection increasingly impossible.

ABSTRAK

Sukma, Shandyka Naraya. (2026), *Maskulinitas Hegemonik dan Kerapuhan Keintiman Laki-laki dalam Close (2022) Karya Lukas Dhont*. Skripsi Sarjana. Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing Moh Mahrush Ali, M.Sn

Kata Kunci: Maskulinitas Hegemonik; Keintiman Laki-laki; Penekanan Emosi; Masa Remaja; Studi Film

Laki-laki sering digambarkan sebagai jenis kelamin yang lebih kuat, namun justru mereka meninggal akibat bunuh diri dengan angka yang jauh melampaui perempuan. Menurut Organisasi Kesehatan Dunia (2025), hal ini berakar dalam pada tekanan budaya yang menuntut laki-laki menekan kerentanan dan ekspresi emosional mereka. Ini bukan sekadar statistik kesehatan mental, melainkan konsekuensi nyata dari maskulinitas hegemonik sebuah konstruksi sosial yang secara diam-diam membentuk cara anak laki-laki belajar berpikir, merasakan, dan berperilaku. Realitas inilah yang ditangkap Lukas Dhont dalam *Close (2022)*, sebuah film coming-of-age asal Belgia yang mengisahkan dua remaja laki-laki berusia tiga belas tahun, Léo dan Rémi, yang persahabatan intimnya perlahan runtuh di bawah tekanan norma sosial maskulinitas. Studi ini menganalisis representasi maskulinitas hegemonik dan dampaknya terhadap keintiman emosional laki-laki dalam film tersebut, menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif yang berlandaskan kerangka maskulinitas hegemonik Connell (1987), studi persahabatan remaja laki-laki Way (2011), serta analisis *mise en scène* menurut Bordwell et al. (2024). Temuan mengungkapkan empat bentuk maskulinitas hegemonik yang direpresentasikan Léo, yang secara sistematis mengikis keintiman emosionalnya dengan Rémi. Bunuh diri Rémi menjadi konsekuensi paling tragis dari norma-norma tersebut. Studi ini berargumen bahwa *Close (2022)* bukan sekadar kisah persahabatan yang hilang, tetapi sebuah kritik sinematik terhadap norma sosial yang membuat koneksi tulus antar laki-laki menjadi semakin mustahil.

مستخلص البحث

سوكما، شانديكا نارايا. (٢٠٢٦)، «الذكورة المهيمنة وهشاشة الحميمية لدى الرجال في فيلم *Close* (2022) للمخرج لوكاس دونت». أطروحة البكالوريوس. قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية في مالانج. المشرف محمد مهروش علي، ماجستير في الفنون الجميلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكورة المهيمنة؛ الحميمية الذكورية؛ كبت العواطف؛ مرحلة المراهقة؛ دراسات السينما

غالبًا ما يُصوّر الرجال على أنهم الجنس الأقوى، لكن معدلات الوفيات الناجمة عن الانتحار بينهم تفوق بكثير تلك المسجلة بين النساء. وفقًا لمنظمة الصحة العالمية (٢٠٢٥)، يعود السبب في ذلك إلى الضغوط الثقافية التي تفرض على الرجال كبت ضعفهم وتعبيرهم عن مشاعرهم. هذه ليست مجرد إحصائيات تتعلق بالصحة النفسية، بل هي عواقب حقيقية للذكورة المهيمنة، وهي بناء اجتماعي يشكل بصمت الطريقة التي يتعلم بها الأولاد التفكير والشعور والتصرف. هذه هي الحقيقة التي جسدها لوكاس دونت في فيلم (٢٠٢٢) «Close»، وهو فيلم بلجيكي عن مرحلة البلوغ يروي قصة مراهقين يبلغان من العمر ثلاثة عشر عامًا، هما ليو وريمي، اللذين تنهار صداقتهما الحميمة تدريجيًا تحت ضغط المعايير الاجتماعية للذكورة. تحلل هذه الدراسة تمثيل الذكورة المهيمنة وتأثيرها على الحميمية العاطفية بين الذكور في الفيلم، باستخدام نهج وصفي-نوعي يستند إلى إطار الذكورة المهيمنة الذي وضعه كونييل (١٩٨٧)، ودراسة الصداقة بين المراهقين الذكور التي أجراها واي (٢٠١١)، بالإضافة إلى تحليل «المشهد» وفقًا لبوردويل وآخرين (٢٠٢٤). كشفت النتائج عن أربعة أشكال من الذكورة المهيمنة التي جسدها ليو، والتي قوضت بشكل منهجي علاقته العاطفية الحميمة مع ريمي. وكان انتحار ريمي النتيجة الأكثر مأساوية لتلك المعايير تدفع هذه الدراسة بأن فيلم (٢٠٢٢) «Close» ليس مجرد قصة عن صداقة ضائعة، بل هو نقد سينمائي للمعايير الاجتماعية التي تجعل إقامة علاقات صادقة بين الرجال أمراً مستحيلًا بشكل متزايد.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP	Error! Bookmark not defined.
APPROVAL SHEET	Error! Bookmark not defined.
LEGITIMATION SHEET	Error! Bookmark not defined.
MOTTO.....	v
DEDICATION	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....	ix
ABSTRACT	xi
ABSTRAK.....	xii
مستخلص البحث	xiii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xiv
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background of the Study	1
B. Problems of the Study.....	7
C. Significance of the Study	7
D. Scope and Limitation.....	8
E. Definition of Key Terms	8
CHAPTER II REVIEW ON RELATED LITERATURE	11
A. Gender Studies in Popular Culture	11
B. Hegemonic Masculinity	12
C. Emotional Intimacy	17
D. Film Studies	20
E. <i>Mise-en-scène</i> in Movie	21
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHOD.....	26
A. Research Design.....	26
B. Data Source	26
C. Data Collection.....	27
D. Data Analysis	27
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	29
A. The Forms of Hegemonic Masculinity Represented by Léo in Lukas Dhont's <i>Close</i> (2022).....	29
1. Emotional Suppression	30
2. Fear of Social Labeling.....	34
3. Rejection of Intimacy	37

4. Conformity to Peer Norms	43
B. The Effect of Forms of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Emotional Intimacy Between Léo and Rémi in <i>Close</i> (2022).....	47
1. The Fading of Physical Intimacy.....	48
2. The Loss of Emotional Expression.....	51
3. The Restriction of Self-Disclosure	55
4. The Collapse of Closeness	61
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION.....	66
A. Conclusion	66
B. Suggestion	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY	70
CURRICULUM VITAE	74

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the research, including the background of the study, the problems of the study, the objectives, the significance, the scope and limitation, and the definition of key terms used in this research.

A. Background of the Study

Men are often described as the stronger sex, yet they die by suicide at rates more than twice those of women globally. According to the World Health Organization (2025), the global age-standardized suicide rate among men is more than twice as high as among women, with the gap reaching as high as four times higher in certain high-income countries. This is not simply a mental health statistic. It is the lived consequence of a social construction that quietly shapes how boys learn to think, feel, and behave a construction known as hegemonic masculinity. Understanding this phenomenon requires examining how social norms, gender roles, and cultural expectations work together to silence male emotional expression from a very young age.

In social relationships, humans are consistently shaped by norms that arise from the culture of their particular social group (Swaan, 2013; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004). Among the most powerful of these norms are those related to gender. Social construction gives a "specific perspective" on certain genders in society, characterized by the dominance of particular gender concepts namely, masculinity

and femininity. Generally, masculinity is understood as a social construct that emphasizes values of strength, control, independence, and courage for men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), while femininity is associated with emotionality, attachment, and tenderness for women (Lutz, 2002). These constructions give rise to a belief that men, as the dominant gender, occupy a superior position, while women are considered the second group. These values and standards are often treated as natural something that must simply be met by men (Safira & Dewi, 2020).

Within this broader gender system, there exists a dominant form of masculinity known as hegemonic masculinity. This concept was first introduced by R.W. Connell in the 1980s and further developed with James W. Messerschmidt in 2005. In essence, so explains how domination occurs not only between men and women, but also among men themselves. Crucially, this concept is not an innate trait but rather a behavioural pattern one that is continuously practiced and reinforced through everyday social interactions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men are required to adhere to certain standards in order to be considered truly "masculine" (Way, 2011): being strong, rational, heterosexual, and emotionally stoic. Society often assumes that men should not cry, should not be too dependent on others, and should not show tenderness (Donaldson, 1993). These social standards tend to cause men to reject or distance themselves from intimate relationships in order to maintain their masculine image. Deeply, this idea of "masculine" makes men become emotionally closed repressing their emotions out of fear of not being "masculine" enough

The consequences of these pressures are not merely social they are fatal. The persistently higher suicide rates among men can be understood as a direct consequence of the pressure to conform to "masculine" ideals in patriarchal culture. This culture demands that men appear incapable of feeling, recognizing, or expressing their emotions. The symbols of male roles are reinforced across many aspects of society through religion, culture, and mass media, which consistently depict men as heroes, leaders, and breadwinners, while women are portrayed as supporters or followers (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These representations do not simply reflect reality, they actively produce and sustain it.

Film is a complex mass media that has its own expressive meaning on every part of it in a unique way (Amalia & Junaedi, 2024). According to Amalia and Junaedi (2024), film is a medium for conveying thoughts in the form of images that can create and lead the audience down the same path as the filmmaker's original thoughts. Through film, people can often see what social realities are like in real life. Soemarno (2006, as cited in Fakza & Tandyonomanu, 2020) a good film is one that can represent the social reality of its time.

The issue of hegemonic masculinity in film is precisely what Lukas Dhont captures in *Close* (2022). This Belgian coming-of-age film depicts the intimate friendship between two thirteen-year-old boys, Léo and Rémi, as it slowly unravels under the weight of masculine social norms. The film portrays how each boy gradually distanced himself from the other, driven by fear of being perceived as "weak," "girly," or "gay" among their peers. *Close* (2022) illustrates how the

demands of hegemonic masculinity have a devastating impact on the main characters most tragically, in Rémi's eventual suicide. It is not merely a story of lost friendship; it is a cinematic critique of the norms that make genuine male connection feel impossible.

Talking about the correlation between intimacy and gender perception, this certainly has many views. Men tend to have difficulty expressing emotions or feelings in relationships (Gaia, 2002; Hook et al., 2003). According to Patrick and Beckenbach (2009), studies on male perceptions of intimacy reveal that men see intimacy as a situation where they feel safe enough to show another side of themselves without accusation, a rare moment where they can remove the "mask" they have been wearing. Interestingly, the same study found that male participants connected their views on intimacy directly to their personal experiences with masculine social construction. The role of men, so often taught to be protectors and saviours, is frequently in direct conflict with emotional vulnerability, and vulnerability, in the masculine social order, is read as weakness (Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009).

Based on this, emotional intimacy becomes a critical concept for understanding close friendships among adolescent boys. While emotional intimacy generally refers to interpersonal closeness characterized by self-disclosure, emotional expression, trust, and mutual support (Gaia, 2002), this study examines it specifically within the context of a same-sex friendship between two adolescent boys. Therefore, the term "male intimacy" in this study refers to emotional

intimacy experienced between male individuals not as a separate theoretical concept, but as a specific manifestation of emotional intimacy within male friendship

At this point, to support this research, the researcher provides several studies to make it easier to understand. Several studies have examined how hegemonic masculinity is represented and constructed within film media, analyzing characters who embody or challenge patriarchal ideals of strength, dominance, and authority across various genres from satirical critiques to dramatic representations showing how cinema constructs, reinforces, or occasionally challenges the image of the "ideal male" (Gürkan & Serttaş, 2017; Hanke, 1990; Hatfield, 2010; Maria, 2023; Yakali, 2024).

Other works have focused specifically on masculinity among adolescent or young male characters, exploring how youth-focused narratives portray boys either conforming to or breaking away from conventional masculine stereotypes, reflecting shifts toward more "modern" expressions of masculinity marked by empathy and emotional openness (Kinssy, 2025; Pratiwi & Suharjo, 2025; Suratnoaji, 2021).

Studies on masculinity and emotional intimacy have further demonstrated that rigid masculine norms tend to restrict emotional closeness in same-sex friendships, that men often associate intimacy with a rare space of safety where the "mask" of masculinity can be removed without judgment, and that masculine ideals positioning men as protectors simultaneously reinforce emotional distance (Patrick

& Beckenbach, 2009; Safira & Dewi, 2020; Williams, 1985). At the level of media representation more broadly, research has shown that film plays a central role in shaping public understanding of "ideal" masculinity through narrative, dialogue, and semiotic elements (Alam, 2022; Rahmah et al., 2023; Syulhajji, 2017).

However, a significant gap remains across these bodies of work. Previous studies focused predominantly on the representation of hegemonic masculinity as a social form, without examining in depth its emotional impact on the characters who embody it. Furthermore, existing studies concentrated almost entirely on adult male characters none specifically addressed adolescent boys. Most importantly, no prior study has examined both the forms of hegemonic masculinity and their direct consequences for emotional intimacy between boys, as depicted through the combined lens of narrative and visual cinematic elements.

It is precisely this gap that the present study addresses. *Close (2022)*, as the research object, offers a uniquely rich perspective a film that does not simply represent hegemonic masculinity, but traces its quiet, devastating effect on the emotional bond between two boys. Through the lens of Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), alongside Gaia's (2002) concept of emotional intimacy, Way's (2011) work on adolescent male friendship, and *mise-en-scène* analysis as outlined by Bordwell et al. (2024), this study seeks to uncover how masculine social norms are represented in the film and how they systematically erode the emotional intimacy between Léo and Rémi.

B. Problems of the Study

Based on the explanation of the background of the study, the researcher intends to take at the focus of the study by dividing it into two research questions.

1. What form of actions of hegemonic masculinity are represented by Léo in Lukas Dhont's *Close* (2022)?
2. How does hegemonic masculinity affect the emotional intimacy between Léo and Rémi?

C. Significance of the Study

Particularly in the context of cultural and film studies with a focus on adolescent narratives, this study offers a meaningful contribution to the broader understanding of hegemonic masculinity and its emotional consequences on male relationships. Drawing on R. W. Connell's (1987) foundational framework, further refined by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), this study explores how dominant masculine norms become represented and internalized through the lives of adolescent male characters, and how such norms gradually dismantle the emotional intimacy between them.

To deepen the analysis, Way's (2011) and Gaia (2002) research on adolescent male friendship are brought in to highlight the particular emotional risks boys face when navigating closeness under social pressure. *Mise-en-scène* analysis following Bordwell et al. (2024) is also applied to uncover how visual elements such as; staging, lighting, and costume give shape and texture to the emotional

consequences of these norms as rendered in Lukas Dhont's *Close* (2022). Beyond its academic scope, this study ultimately invites a broader reflection on how cinema can function as a powerful medium for giving voice to those most silenced by rigid constructions of gender.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on analyzing the representation of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on the fragility of male intimacy among the characters in Lukas Dhont's film *Close* (2022). The scope of this research is limited to the analysis of characterization, dialogue, narrative structure, and selected visual elements of the film, including *mise-en-scène* aspects such as setting, lighting, costume, and staging, particularly in scenes involving the two main characters, Léo and Rémi. The study does not extend to the broader social or cultural context beyond the film's narrative. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity (1987), further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), serves as the primary theoretical framework for examining how hegemonic masculinity is represented and internalized, and how it influences emotional expression and weakens intimate relationships between the main characters as depicted in *Close* (2022).

E. Definition of Key Terms

The researcher found a few key terms in this research. The purpose is to avoid misunderstanding and to help the readers to understand the definitions of terms easily.

1. Hegemonic Masculinity

A form of masculinity that is dominant over other masculinities and that has the highest social legitimacy related to the image of the "masculine" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This can also be understood as a social construction that continues to be cultivated, which makes a certain group of men have a more dominant and powerful position among other men (Donaldson, 1993). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) said, hegemonic masculinity is not static, but dynamic and continues to change along with the social and culture changes.

2. Masculinity

A form of expression that refers to men themselves. More deeply, masculinity can be understood as the way a man is shaped by his social construction that suppresses dominant positions so that he can truly be called a man and is seen as having greater dominance and power (Connell, 1987).

3. Hegemonic

A social construction, where all aspects of social reality are dominated and influenced by a particular class (Gramsci, 2003). This concept was developed by Antonio Gramsci who is a political expert where the purpose of this hegemonic is about the domination between one social class to another. In short, it can be

understood as a situation where a particular social class influences other social classes.

4. Emotional Intimacy

Emotional Intimacy refers to a form of interpersonal closeness involving self-disclosure, emotional expression, physical expression, support, mutual relationship closeness (Gaia, 2002).

5. Male Intimacy

Gender plays an important role in shaping how an individual expresses their emotions (Gaia, 2002). Based on that, this term understood as the study refers to the emotional bond shared by male individuals.

6. Patriarchy:

A social construct that does not exist naturally but is a culture that is continuously passed down that positioned men with more power over women (Facio, 2013; Hill, 2009). In addition, Facio (2013), stated the concept of patriarchy itself is a social system that creates a hierarchy among men themselves. In fact, often in some regions of the world, the male at the top of the patriarchal hierarchy is identified with wealth, heterosexuality, and able-bodied (Facio, 2013).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW ON RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, the discussion focusses more deeply on the information related to understanding, various concepts in theory, and also several studies from previous experts that are presented to support this research.

A. Gender Studies in Popular Culture

Culture and popular culture are fundamentally inseparable (Leavy & Trier-Bieniek, 2014; Milestone & Meyer, 2020; Trier-Bieniek, 2020). Culture itself is understood as a process through which a group of people continuously develop and produce themselves (Phillips, 2006). Within this process, popular culture functions as a medium that presents symbols and narratives, framing a society's perspective on shared values and meanings (Leavy & Trier-Bieniek, 2014). At its most basic, the word "popular" refers to cultural practices that are widely adopted or favoured by many people (Milestone & Meyer, 2020). It is also precisely this wide reach that makes popular culture a powerful force in shaping social norms, including those related to gender.

Gender is among the most significant issues produced and reproduced through popular culture. It is important to first clarify that gender and sex are distinct concepts: sex is innate and biological, typically characterized as male or female, while gender refers to a social construct that shapes how individuals are expected to act or behave according to their biological status (Trier-Bieniek, 2020).

Masculinity, in this context, is not a fixed or natural characteristic inherent in men it is a practice that is continuously perpetuated and reinforced through social interaction and cultural norms. Masculine domination itself can be observed across many dimensions: performance, status, representation, sexuality, profession, and behaviour (Alam, 2022), and is sustained through agents such as family, education, religion, and especially the media (Trier-Bieniek, 2020).

The media's role in this process is particularly significant. As Stuart Hall (1982, as cited in Milestone & Meyer, 2020) argued, popular culture is a political platform containing collections of ideologies and discourse a space where meaning is produced and exchanged through language, images, and symbols. In this framework, representation is not a neutral act, yet it is a process through which certain ideas about gender are constructed, disseminated, and normalized. According to Khunou (2013), the media functions as watchdog, guide, informant, and messenger and through these roles, images of the "ideal man" have spread globally, particularly through advertising and entertainment. The way media portrays and interprets gender, therefore, directly impacts how society understands and expects individuals to perform their gender roles. This makes popular culture and film specifically a critical site for examining how hegemonic norms are both constructed and challenged

B. Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept introduced by R.W. Connell in the 1980s. R.W. Connell herself is an Australian sociologist who first put forward this concept in her book, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual*

Politics (1987). This concept was further developed in further research in 2005, with James W. Messerschmidt in their work, “*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*”. In a simple concept, hegemonic masculinity is the peak of the gender hierarchy in the masculinity system (Jefferson, 2002; Connell, 1987). This type of masculinity is considered the form that has the greatest impact on existing masculinities (Connell, 1987). In other words, this form of masculinity is the most socially respected, thus exerting "influence" on other forms of masculinity to position themselves relative to it (Connell, Messerschmidt, 2005).

Returning to the initial definition of hegemonic masculinity, proposed by Connell in the 1980s, this concept emerged from the social concept that gender plays a special role in shaping the power system. According to Connell (1987), in society, there are various forms of masculinity, not all of which have the same status. According to Jefferson (2022), of the various existing concepts of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is the concept of masculinity that is most considered "appropriate" in showing the figure of the "ideal man". Connell (1987) also emphasized that the concept of "being a man" in this context, is not an innate form produced from birth, but rather is merely a social construction or culture that is continuously formed and practiced in everyday life. Furthermore, this concept continues to marginalize or corner other forms of masculinity, which can be characterized by men who display gentleness, affection, and emotionality as a form of "Subordinate" masculinity. According to her, the concept of hegemonic masculinity itself is not a static concept, but

rather a dynamic one that follows cultural developments and social conditions in society.

Before the more recent concept was introduced, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, proposed by Connell in 1987, received some criticism. This was because the initial concept was considered not to really answer who the hegemonic man really was (Martin, 1998; Edley, 1999; Whitehead, 1998, 2002). In their follow-up research, Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (2005) developed a new concept of hegemonic masculinity, addressing various criticisms of the previous concept. However, in this formulation, the basic concept of hegemonic masculinity remains. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) later argued that hegemonic masculinity should be understood as a dynamic process of ongoing negotiation rather than a fixed and singular form. Responding to previous criticisms, their latest research also divided the levels of understanding the concept of masculinity.

1. Local Level, which encompasses personal interactions and relationships between individuals in everyday life and within relatively small circles (family, school, or friendships).

2. The Institutional Level, which illustrates this concept as it manifests itself in institutions and media in everyday life. In other words, this level can be said to have a moderate scope (media, religion, economics).

3. The Global Level, which encompasses a relatively broad scale and often plays a role in creating a universal image of the ideal, strong, and powerful man (capitalism, colonialism, and international media).

It's understandable that hegemonic masculinity itself isn't just about individual men, but rather a social system that's continuously cultivated. This creates stigma and certain norms that consistently project a certain image of what men should be like. In addition to examining this concept from various perspectives, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also detailed a classification of the concept of masculinity that exists in today's society. They divide masculinity into four main forms:

First, hegemonic masculinity, a dominant form of masculinity that is simultaneously considered the most ideal and most in line with the standards of "what a man should be." It is often depicted as strong, rational, and powerful, while rejecting emotional vulnerability (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity has the peak of position in the power of men in social strata. In the other hand, it is understandable that hegemonic masculinity has the most superior type of masculinity among other masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Second, marginalized masculinity, men who are categorized as marginalized due to social factors (race, social class, or economic status). Marginalized Masculinity is the one of the simplest types among other masculinities. In this category, they may possess masculine traits (strong, tough, etc.) but still cannot be classified as "ideal" due to their social status (Connell,

1987). In this field, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), also provides the example to the sport field. Such as the example of athletes who have black skin in American group, which has not received much attention even though he has contributed many times.

Third, subordinated masculinity, a form of masculinity that is considered weak and does not conform to dominant standards, often associated with feminine attitudes. It is also often depicted as gentle, sensitive, and open to emotions (Connell, 1987). This type of masculinity often get resistance because the social usually see it as a “bad” side. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), also mentioned that this type of masculinity is vulnerable to violence and harassment both verbal and non-verbal.

The fourth, complicit masculinity, a category of men who are not directly classified as hegemonic but still benefit from patriarchal concepts. This type of masculinity can be said as a “safe path”, because it takes advantage of the hegemonic masculinity side and also feminine side. In other words, men in this category are not actively dominating but still benefit from the patriarchal social system (Connell, 1987). It can happen because Connell herself said that it is still difficult for everyone to apply the existing hegemonic masculinity in patriarchal society.

The four main forms introduced by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) demonstrate the complexity of the concept of masculinity itself. According to Hearn (2004, p. 51), male dominance can be structural or interpersonal, public or

private, or even implicit or explicit. The persistent practice of cultural concepts places significant pressure on men regarding their roles within the social structure. This means that hegemonic masculinity itself is not static but can also change depending on the prevailing gender hierarchy. A man who is considered hegemonic in one situation can become subordinate in another (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). More specifically, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize that these concepts and classifications are not static or fixed, but rather dynamic, constantly changing according to the diverse cultural, social, racial, and historical contexts of a given society.

From the definition of hegemonic masculinity presented, in “*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. Gender & Society*” by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), is that it is a dominant form of masculinity within the gender hierarchy of several existing forms of masculinity. This standard is not an innate trait but rather a social construct that is continually practiced and cultivated in society and is dynamic in nature following cultural consensus.

C. Emotional Intimacy

Human identity is deeply shaped by close relationships, and much of this shaping occurs through friendships with those similar to us (England, 1947, as cited in Strikwerda & May, 1992). Intimacy, in its broadest sense, refers to a form of mutual closeness built on self-disclosure, emotional expression, trust, support, and physical affection (Gaia, 2002; Lewis, 1987; Patrick & Beckenbach, 2009). Gaia (2002) specifically identified seven dimensions of emotional intimacy: self-

disclosure, emotional expression, support, trust, physical intimacy, mutuality, and closeness. These dimensions are not always equally accessible to everyone and for men and boys, cultural norms often severely restrict which of these dimensions they are permitted to express.

Research consistently shows that men are less likely to be emotionally open than women (Lewis, 1987). Furthermore, men also less likely to share personal information with others (Jourard, 1971; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Jourard & Landsman, 1969; Jourard & Richman, 1963). Komarovsky (1974) observed that cultural prohibitions within the social system often prevent men from forming close friendships in adulthood, and from offering affirmations without fear of social judgment. Olstad's (1975) research found that while men acknowledge having close male friends, they tend to feel more emotionally open with female friends suggesting that the very presence of another man triggers the performance of masculine reserve. Importantly, Gaia (2002) found that men and women share a similar conceptual understanding of intimacy but differ significantly in their application of it a gap produced not by nature, but by the constraints of masculine social norms.

This dynamic is especially significant during adolescence, the developmental stage at the center of *Close* (2022). According to Way (2011), boys across early to late adolescence consistently express a deep desire for close, intimate friendship with other boys. In her longitudinal study, adolescent boys described sharing thoughts and feelings with peers as essential to their

psychological well-being. Bonser (as cited in Way, 2011) even argued that intimate friendship is the most powerful factor in supporting a young man's development in society. Yet the social environment in the twenty-first century consistently frames same-sex intimacy between boys as "girlish" or "gay" (Way, 2011), creating powerful external pressure to suppress precisely the closeness that boys naturally seek.

This suppression is sustained by what Pollack (as cited in Way, 2011) terms the "boy-code" a set of unspoken social rules that equate emotional stoicism, invulnerability, and physical toughness with being a "real man." Sociologist Kimmel (as cited in Way, 2011) extended this observation, noting that young men between the ages of 16 and 26 adhere to the same code. The result, as Way (2011) argued, is that boys and men are effectively socialized to shut down emotionally not because they lack the capacity for feeling, but because they are never given the tools to manage it (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Boys and men are thus perceived as emotionally illiterate (Frosh et al., 2002), when in reality they are emotionally constrained.

The consequences are serious. Boys in Way's (2011) study were acutely aware that they could "go wacko", use drugs, or even commit suicide if they are unable to express their feelings or secret at least to one friend. Erdley et al. (2001), similarly found that adolescence without close friendship significantly raises the risk of depression, early pregnancy, drug use, and gang membership. The broader scholarly consensus holds that cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being are

all deeply tied to the quality of one's friendships and social-emotional intelligence (Schnall et al., 2008). Emotional intimacy, in other words, is not a luxury it is a developmental necessity, and its suppression carries real costs.

For the purposes of this study, emotional intimacy is understood as a form of interpersonal closeness involving self-disclosure, emotional expression, trust, support, and mutual understanding (Gaia, 2002). Since this research focuses on two adolescent boys, emotional intimacy is examined specifically within the context of male friendship. The term “male intimacy” throughout this study therefore refers to the emotional bond shared between male individuals not as a separate theoretical category, but as a specific manifestation of emotional intimacy shaped and constrained by masculine norms (Way, 2011).

D. Film Studies

Film studies is a comprehensive study focused on studying film not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a historical, artistic, and social phenomenon (Villarejo, 2013). Furthermore, according to Villarejo (2013), film studies focus not only on linguistic aspects but also on film history, genre, and even the actors within a cinema. Furthermore, Villarejo (2013) points out that film is dynamic, or can be understood as a work closely tied to its era. This means that films are not static but constantly changing with the times.

Films generally have several constituent elements, such as narrative and cinematic elements (Sya'Dian et al., 2021, p. 155; Usman & Harini, 2023, p. 50).

Discussions of film studies will naturally be closely linked to important terms used in film. Related to the previous statement, Buckland & Warren (2003) stated that the cinematic aspects of a film include "*mise-en-scène*," or various things in front of the camera, both in terms of editing, cinematography, and sound, while narrative elements are more closely related to the plot and story. Therefore, the definition of "*mise-en-scène*" can be understood as the process of arranging various things on the stage.

According to Asri (2020), in her research on drama films, the presentation of text in a film, if properly understood, will convey a meaningful message. In her research, she also mentioned that aspects of a film, such as imagery, plot, dialogue, characterization, setting, and audio, can effectively serve as a medium for disseminating visions or ideas to the public (Asri, 2020, p. 82). *Mise-en-scène* in film also operates as part of the narrative (Bordwell et al., 2024). From the explanation above, it can be understood that the process of reading "text" in a film involves our memory as a foundation, as well as new information that can provide insight into the film we watch.

E. *Mise-en-scène* in Movie

As previously explained, *mise-en-scène* plays a crucial role in the filmmaking process. Returning to its basic meaning, *mise-en-scène* is a French term that can be interpreted as "putting things into the scene" (Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 113). This term initially emerged in the drama directing process, but over time, it has also developed in the world of cinema. More deeply, in the context of film,

mise-en-scène is used to indicate the director's control over what appears in the film frame (Bordwell et al., 2024). Furthermore, Sya'Dian et al., (2021), stated that *mise-en-scène* is one of the crucial elements in a film's success in conveying its “reality” to its audience. Referring also to the book by Bordwell et al. (2024), it explains that *mise-en-scène* aims to provide a depiction of the situation as realistically as possible to fulfill the audience's fantasies. Considering that film is a work of art that can influence the audience's emotional thoughts through its elements (Usman & Harini, 2023, p. 49; Asri, 2020), a film's *mise-en-scène* focuses not only on the setting and storyline but also includes the movement of actors and objects within the frame (Sya'Dian et al., 2021, p. 156). *Mise-en-scène* highlights four main components: setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and stage design (Bordwell et al., 2024).

1. Setting

Since the development of the world of film, critics and audiences' views on settings have considered them to have a greater role in the context of film than in the world of theater. This is considered to play a crucial position in conveying a message or feeling that will become a reality in each scene (Bordwell et al., 2024). According to Bazin (as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024), Humans have a large role in theater, while in cinema, a sense of drama can be conveyed even without actors in it. This is characterized by the frequent conveying of messages or atmosphere in scenes, only depicted with flying leaves, deserted streets, and so on. Reality is usually too complicated (Craig, as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024). This encourages

many filmmakers to make their films in studios because it is considered simple and remains within their control. According to Stuart Craig (as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 121), the best set is the simplest and most appropriate. All aspects must support the story and the feeling being conveyed. Overall, the setting has a very big role in cinema, in conveying the story and a sense of drama to the audience.

2. Costume & Make-up

In filmmaking, costumes can play a causal role. Like setting, costumes can serve a specific function within the overall film (Bordwell et al., 2024). In certain films, costumes serve as motifs, enhancing the characterization of characters. On the other hand, costumes also serve as supporting elements of the setting, creating a more cohesive feel. According to Harrison Ford (as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024), costumes are a crucial component; they speak before the actors. Costumes provide context and a sense of what the film is trying to convey.

Next is actor makeup. In today's cinematic era, actor makeup is a crucial aspect, as the actor's face won't register well on film stock (Bordwell et al., 2024). Makeup is the most noticeable component in horror and sci-fi films. The use of fake mustaches and wigs also emphasizes the actor's character in portraying the hero. The portrayal of a character in a film depends heavily on the actor's appearance. Even small details like blemishes, wrinkles, and sagging skin can be a contributing factor to the reality of a film (Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 124). In this ever-evolving era, actors' makeup is often assisted by computers, as in the film *Avatar*, which is closely tied to technology.

3. Lighting

Lighting plays a significant role in conveying a film's message, ideology, emotion, color, style, and depth (Fellini, as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 125). In cinema, lighting is not simply a means of enhancing the clarity of action; brighter or darker areas can convey a message and influence the viewer's focus. For example, a spotlight on an object can hold the viewer's gaze, while darker areas can create a sense of tension and drama. Lighting, combined with the setting, influences and controls how we perceive a scene in cinema (Bordwell et al., 2024). Lighting positioning also plays a role in creating a film's feel and atmosphere. In other words, it supports the film in conveying visual information in each scene.

4. Staging

An actor's performance consists of visual elements (appearance, gestures, facial expressions) and sound (voice, effects). The performance displayed or created by an actor is part of the overall *mise-en-scène* (Bordwell et al., 2024). Actors are always part of the visual design (*mise-en-scène*) in a film. It's important to emphasize that conveying meaning and emotion isn't solely through dialogue. Every movement, gaze, and expression must remain true to the character, even when not speaking (Bordwell et al., 2024). The face is the actor's primary tool in conveying the message of each scene. Expressions of happiness, sadness, fear,

disappointment, and anger can be clearly understood. Therefore, close-up techniques in recent films require actors to maintain their expressions to stick to the character.

According to Bordwell et al. (2024), the eyes, mouth, and eyebrows are the most expressive parts of the face. These three parts can be said to work together to convey the message through each actor's expression. This is characterized by actors often having a sharper and more intense gaze, indicating focus, strength, and anxiety. Overall, acting in films is a visual art (Bordwell et al., 2024). Facial expressions convey a character's emotions and also serve as a driving factor in the story throughout the film.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter presents a discussion of the methods and overall design of the research. This section further explains how the research data was collected and analyzed. This will help readers understand the research process.

A. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the representation of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on emotional intimacy in Lukas Dhont's film *Close* (2022). The study uses Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), as the primary framework for identifying and interpreting the forms of hegemonic masculinity represented in the film. To examine the characters' emotional relationships, the study also draws on the concept of emotional intimacy proposed by Gaia (2002) and the discussion of boys' friendships and emotional expression by Way (2011). In addition, selected *mise-en-scène* elements, such as setting, costume, lighting, and character positioning, are considered to support the interpretation of how masculinity and emotional intimacy are visually represented throughout the film.

B. Data Source

The data source of this study is *Close* (2022), a coming-of-age drama film directed by Lukas Dhont and co-written with Angelo Tijssens. The film stars Eden

Dambrine as Léo and Gustav De Waele as Rémi and focuses on the close friendship between two adolescent boys. Released in 2022, the film won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film. The primary data consists of dialogues, character interactions, narrative events, and selected visual elements relevant to the representation of hegemonic masculinity and emotional intimacy.

C. Data Collection

Data were collected through repeated viewings of the film to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative and character development. The researcher identified scenes, dialogues, character interactions, and selected *mise-en-scène* elements that reflect hegemonic masculinity and emotional intimacy. Relevant scenes were documented using screenshots and note-taking techniques. The collected data were then organized according to the research questions and categorized based on their relevance to the theoretical frameworks employed in the study.

D. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through a qualitative interpretative approach. The researcher first identified scenes relevant to the representation of masculinity and the relationship between the two main characters. The selected data were then examined through dialogue, characterization, narrative development, and supporting visual elements. Particular attention was given to

scenes that illustrate emotional expression, vulnerability, interpersonal closeness, and emotional distance.

To support the interpretation, selected *mise-en-scène* elements, including setting, lighting, costume, and character positioning, were examined alongside the narrative and dialogue. These cinematic elements were treated as visual evidence that contributes to the construction of meaning within the film. The findings were then interpreted using Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), as well as the concepts of emotional intimacy proposed by Gaia (2002) and Way (2011). Finally, the results were synthesized to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion in response to the two research questions of this study. The analysis examines how hegemonic masculinity is represented through Léo's character in *Close* (2022), and how these representations affect the emotional intimacy between Léo and Rémi. The analysis draws on visual data including *mise-en-scène* elements such as setting, lighting, costume, and staging alongside dialogue, to demonstrate how masculine norms are not only depicted but actively performed and negotiated throughout the film.

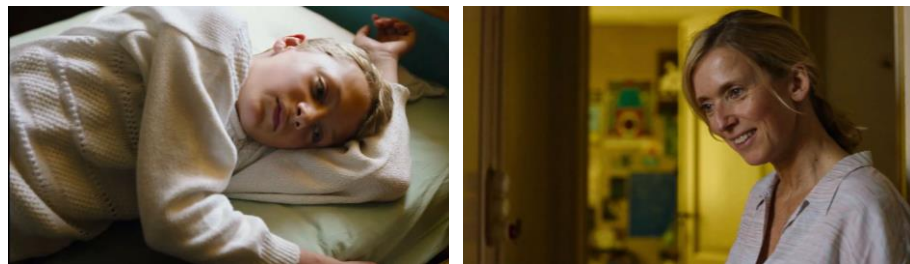
A. The Form of Actions of Hegemonic Masculinity Represented by Léo in Lukas Dhont's *Close* (2022)

The forms of hegemonic masculinity identified in this study are organized into four thematic patterns: emotional suppression, fear of social labelling, rejection of intimacy, and conformity to peer norms. These are interconnected mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity operates as a social practice. Following Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), masculinity is understood here as a dynamic and relational construct one continuously shaped through social interaction, particularly within peer environments. Each category therefore represents a different dimension of Léo's negotiation within the masculine hierarchy, and together they form a cumulative picture of how social norms reshape a boy's identity and relationships.

1. Emotional Suppression

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally characterized by the rejection of emotional vulnerability a social demand that requires men to distance themselves from any expression associated with weakness or femininity. In *Close* (2022), this demand is not depicted as a single dramatic moment, but as a quiet, consistent pattern that Léo internalizes in response to the social pressure surrounding him.

Datum 1



(1)

(2)

Figure 1.1 Léo laying on his bedroom after school (*Close*, 2022, 00:13:58 - 00:14:19).

Figure 1.1 captures the moment when Léo lying on his bedroom after returning from his first day of school. Figure 1.1 (1) shows Léo lying on his bed with a blank expression, heavy breathing, and an unfocused gaze. Figure 1.1 (2) shows his mother entering and asking about his day. This scene occurs after Léo faces a stressful social situation at school, where his friends begin to question and suspect his closeness with Rémi as something romantic. Marked by one of his friends asking for clarity on their relationship with the question, "*are you guys couple?*".

Through the *mise-en-scène* elements, particularly in terms of setting, the bedroom as a personal space that should be a "safe space" instead becomes a space where emotions remain suppressed, indicating that social pressure has been internalized. The setting is an important component in conveying the reality of the authenticity of the message in the film, and it guides the attention of the audience (Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 117). The choice of colors in the setting, which tends to show neutral and pastel colors, indicates that the director directs the audience to focus more on Léo's expression, who was feeling anxious. This is in line with Bordwell et al. (2024), stated that the choice of color in the setting also serves as an index in showing the character's psychology.

Turning to costume, the clothes worn by Léo and his mother follow the same color palette as the setting soft, pastel, and understated. This visual harmony between the two characters speaks about the intimate relationship they share. According to Ford (as cited in Bordwell et al., 2024, p. 122), the costume speaks before the actor does, and it provides context about the other characters and their relationships. The softness of their clothing suggests a space of warmth and openness yet it is precisely in this intimate context that Léo chooses to remain emotionally closed.

While in terms of lighting, the soft and low lighting in this scene creates a melancholic and lonely atmosphere, reinforcing Léo's emotional state as he withdraws and hides his feelings in front of his mother. As Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 121) argued, lighting expresses ideology, emotions, color, depth, and style.

Interrelated with the setting, the lighting plays a role in controlling the audience's sense of the emotional weight of each scene and here, it communicates that Léo's inner world exists in shadow, even within his own home. In terms of body lying on his side, eyes unwilling to meet his mother's gaze, shows how he is actively concealing his feelings. As Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 134) stated, the glance away from a conversational partner in film indicates the act of evasion. In this context, Léo's deliberate avoidance indicates not shyness, but active concealment his gestures show a passive attitude and a tendency to withdraw from interaction, even with the closest person in his private space. This visual analysis is further emphasized by the dialogue between Léo and his mother:

“Did everything go well?”
“Was it fun at school?” (minute 00:14:02 – 00:14:12)

Instead of giving an open verbal response, Léo offers only a brief nod and averts his gaze. This is followed by his mother asking, "Do you want to eat something?", to which Léo responds with a nonchalant "No thanks. I'm not hungry." According to Stuart Hall (1997), meaning is produced through visual signs and representational practices. In this context, Léo's silent gestures, avoidance of eye contact, and minimal verbal response symbolize social norms that associate masculinity with emotional control even in the most private of spaces.

Furthermore, Léo's behavioral pattern in Figure 1.1 can be understood more deeply through Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity at the local level, that is, hegemonic masculinity as it is negotiated and reproduced through interpersonal interactions. Léo is faced with questions

regarding his relationship with Rémi, which functions as a means of enforcing social norms within his peer group. As a form of response, Léo internalizes the norms of hegemonic masculinity, marked by verbal and emotional closure even in private space with his own mother despite being in a state of clear emotional instability. This is in line with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who stated that masculinity is a social construct that emphasizes the values of strength, control, independence, and emotional restraint for men.

This finding is not only shown in that scene. At minute [00:53:48 – 00:55:02], Léo again shows a passive expression and does not show any reactions at Rémi's funeral, which visually emphasizes the pattern of emotional repression, even though he is feeling sad. A similar pattern also shows at [00:54:58], shortly after Rémi's funeral, Léo shows a silent attitude while staring at the road with a blank stare, which visually emphasizes that Léo is still trying to keep his feelings, even in a car containing his own family and nobody strangers were there.

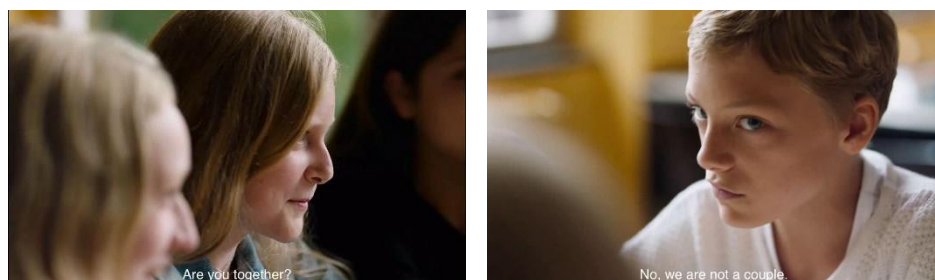
From the explanation above, it can be seen that emotional suppression is not only a personal response, but also the result of social constructions that shape how men are expected to feel and express emotions. The pattern represented through visual and dialogue data illustrates Léo's inability to openly express his emotions, even in the most private spaces and with the closest people in his life. The attitude that Léo presents is not merely a personal tendency, but a form of internalization of hegemonic behavioral patterns a survival mechanism for

maintaining his masculine identity in a social environment that actively suppresses vulnerability.

2. Fear of Social Labelling

The next classification point is the fear of social labelling, particularly being labelled as deviant, weak, or not “masculine enough”. This operates, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, through social norms that actively penalize any expression of masculinity that deviates from the dominant standard.

Datum 2



(1)

(2)

Figure 2.1 Léo confronted by his friend about his friendship (*Close*, 2022, 00:12:40 - 00:13:41).

Figure 2.1 captures the moment Léo is publicly questioned by his peers about his relationship with Rémi on his first day of secondary school. Figure 2.1 (1) shows the moment of direct questioning. While Figure 2.1 (2) shows Léo's immediate defensive response.

In the visual data displayed the scene takes place in the open public space of their school, and Léo is positioned at the center of the group visually enclosed by his peers. Unlike the previous datum, where the confrontation occurred in a

private bedroom, this scene takes place in a social space that allows for free observation and judgment. As Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 115) stated, the setting does not solely function as a background but also provides context and messages that guide the audience's attention in understanding the character's position in society. The school space here functions not merely as a location but as a site of social surveillance, a space where Léo's masculinity is put under public attention.

In terms of body language, Léo shows a distinctly defensive reaction to his friend's question, uneasy glances, a change in posture, and an expression of barely concealed anger as he clarifies his relationship with Rémi. Rather than laughing off the question or responding casually, Léo's body language communicates the full weight of the threat he perceives. According to Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 134), the glances away and blinks of an actor suggest reactions of anxiety and here, Léo's reaction far exceeds what a simple misunderstanding would warrant. His gestures and glances convey crucial information about his character: a defensive positioning of his masculine identity in front of the group.

The lighting terms in this scene, contrasts sharply with Datum 1. Rather than soft and intimate, the lighting here is flat and naturalistic, replicating the open visibility of a school environment. This technical choice carries a clear thematic implication: Léo's emotional state is fully exposed, with nowhere to hide. The even, realistic lighting highlights Léo's peers as agents of surveillance making clear that no retreat into shadow is possible here. This representation is further reinforced by the following dialogue:

“No”
“Are we holding hands? Are we cuddling? No.”
“we are best friends.”
“No. we're not couple” (minute 00:12:40 - 00:13:41)

The speed and firmness of this denial offered without a pause reveals the depth of the threat Léo perceives. He does not give himself time to think or to counter his peers' arguments calmly, instead, his defensiveness is a direct manifestation of the social danger he feels. In Connell's (1987) framework, subordinated masculinity is closely linked to homosexuality and habits associated with femininity, including emotional closeness and physical affection between men. In firmly rejecting the label his peer assigns him, Léo is not simply clarifying a misunderstanding he is actively repositioning himself within the norms of hegemonic masculinity, distancing himself from Rémi in the very act of defending their friendship.

The same pattern is also shown at minute [00:32:25 – 00:33:21]. The scene shows the moment when Rémi takes the initiative to visit Léo while he is practicing ice hockey. The scene clearly shows Léo's attitude, which tends to be afraid and uncomfortable with Rémi's presence at the ice hockey rink. Through gestures and verbally, Léo shows an attitude of fear of social labelling, especially the ice hockey rink where Léo and his other male friends gather.

The fear of social labelling, as represented in these scenes, is not merely about reputation, it is about survival within a social system that punishes any deviation from hegemonic norms. Both elements of analysis visual and dialogue show how hegemonic masculinity operates as a result of social demands, and how Léo

internalizes these norms under the pressure of his peers. This is in line with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who stated that masculinity is practiced and negotiated under social pressure.

3. Rejection of Intimacy

According to Connell (1987), one of the defining mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity sustains itself is the deliberate withholding of intimacy particularly physical and emotional closeness between men, which the dominant masculine order systematically frames as feminine or deviant. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further emphasize that peer groups function as agents of surveillance, continuously pressuring men to present themselves in ways consistent with hegemonic norms. In *Close* (2022), this rejection is not portrayed as a sudden or conscious decision, but as a gradual behavioural shift that Léo enacts in direct response to social pressure.

Datum 3



Figure 3.1 Léo lean on Rémi in class (*Close*, 2022, 00:11:53).

Figure 3.1 captures the moment Léo naturally leans on Rémi's shoulder in class before the confrontation happened. This scene depicts how Léo without any

discomfort, shows his physical closeness to Rémi, despite it was in the public space.

In terms of setting, the classroom functions as a public social environment where interactions among students are constantly visible to others. Similar to the public setting discussed in Datum 2, this space is not merely presented as the background of the scene, but also as a location where social judgment may potentially occur. However, despite being surrounded by his peers, Léo demonstrates no hesitation or anxiety regarding his closeness to Rémi. The setting therefore emphasizes that, at this stage of the narrative, Léo has not yet internalized the social pressure associated with masculine expectations. This supports Bordwell et al. (2024), who argue that setting guides the audience's understanding of a character's position within a social environment.

From the terms of body language, Léo shows a relaxed and open attitude toward Rémi. The gesture of leaning on Rémi's shoulder appears natural and unforced, reflecting a relationship built on comfort, trust, and mutual affection. There is no indication of embarrassment, self-consciousness, or concern about how others might perceive their interaction. Instead, the staging presents a form of intimacy that both boys experience as normal within their friendship. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, actors' gestures and physical expressions communicate personality, attitude, and emotional states. In this scene, the actors' performances visually reinforce the emotional closeness shared by the two characters.

Datum 4



Figure 3.2 Léo refused to let Rémi lay on him (*Close*, 2022, 00:15:42 - 00:16:46).

In contrast, Figure 3.2 captures the moment one day after Léo was confronted by his peers regarding his relationship with Rémi. Figure 3.2 (1) depicts Rémi leaning his head toward Léo, while Figure 3.2 (2) shows Léo physically refusing the gesture. Unlike Figure 3.1, where physical closeness appears natural and comfortable, this scene presents a significant shift in Léo's behavior. His reaction suggests discomfort toward a form of intimacy that had previously been accepted within their friendship.

In terms of setting, the scene takes place in the schoolyard and in the middle of crowd of many of his schoolmates. Similar to the earlier confrontation scene, the location functions as a public social space where interactions are visible and potentially subject to peer judgment. Therefore, the setting is not merely the background of the action, but a social environment in which masculine norms are

actively observed and reinforced. As Bordwell et al. (2024) argue, setting contributes to the overall meaning of a scene by shaping how characters are positioned within their environment. In this case, the schoolyard becomes the space where Léo begins to perform the behavioural expectations associated with his peer group. Furthermore, the positioning of Léo and Rémi near the center of the crowd creates visual emphasis on their interaction. According to Bordwell et al. (2024), the activation of space within the frame can direct the audience's attention toward the central action. The setting therefore reinforces the social visibility of Léo's behaviour and highlights the pressure associated with being observed by others

Meanwhile, in terms of costume, both characters continue to wear clothing with similar color tones, reflecting continuity with the earlier scene in Figure 3.1. However, despite this visual similarity, their interaction has changed dramatically. The costume design therefore creates an important contrast between visual continuity and behavioural transformation. As Bordwell et al. (2024) explain, costume contributes to narrative development by providing information about character relationships and story progression. In this scene, the similar costumes suggest that the boys themselves have not fundamentally changed, yet the social meaning attached to their relationship has shifted. The contrast between the costume and Léo's behaviour further emphasizes that the distance emerging between them is not caused by personal conflict, but by Léo's changing response to social expectations.

In the terms of body language, Léo's attitude clearly communicates withdrawal and rejection. When Rémi attempts to lean on him, Léo deliberately moves away and refuses the gesture. This reaction directly contrasts with Figure 3.1, where Léo himself initiated physical closeness. According to Bordwell et al. (2024), actors' movements and gestures communicate emotional states and psychological conditions. In this scene, Léo's physical avoidance functions as a visual expression of emotional distance. More importantly, the staging suggests that Léo has become increasingly self-conscious about how his relationship with Rémi may be perceived by others. His gesture is therefore not simply a rejection of physical contact, but a defensive performance of masculinity within a public social environment.

Meanwhile, in terms of lighting, the moment that occurs in their schoolyard, depicted with the presence of natural sunlight, directly highlights both characters. This indicates how the director of this movie tried to highlight the actions of Léo and Rémi. In specific ways, the direct lighting implicitly highlights the pattern of Léo's withdrawal from Rémi. In addition, in line with the setting aspects explained previously, the lighting here also further emphasizes or specifies the direction of the audience's attention. This representation is further emphasized by the following dialogue:

“what are you doing now?”
“Rémi, I’m hot”
“I’m hot” (minute 00:16:12 – 00:16:31)

The dialogue reveals how Léo attempt to justify his physical withdrawal through a seemingly practical excuse. However, his response remains brief and

emotionally detached. Rather than openly expressing discomfort or explaining his feelings, Léo avoids meaningful communication. His explanation therefore functions less as a genuine reason and more as a protective strategy that allows him to distance himself from Rémi without directly addressing the underlying issue. At this point, intimacy begins to be treated as something socially risky.

Within Connell's (1987) theoretical framework, the scene illustrates how Léo has started to internalize masculine norms that discourage emotional and physical closeness between boys. Connell (1987) argues that behaviours associated with vulnerability, affection, and intimacy are frequently positioned within subordinated forms of masculinity. Consequently, boys may distance themselves from such behaviours in order to maintain a socially accepted masculine identity. Léo's rejection of Rémi therefore represents more than personal discomfort. Instead, it reflects his attempt to reposition himself within the masculine hierarchy established by his peer group. His withdrawal becomes a visible performance of conformity to hegemonic masculine expectations.

A similar pattern of rejection is also shown by Léo at [00:22:38 – 00:23:33]. Which depicts how Léo shows a passive response when playing with Rémi. This shows a very clear contrast compared to their previous play scene, which shows how Léo is so active both verbally and non-verbally. Not only that, the pattern of rejection is also shown again at [00:24:02 - 00:24:16]. In that scene, when Léo has a sleepover at Rémi's house, he refuses to sleep next to Rémi, which also contrasts with the depiction in the previous scene, where it is not a strange thing for him.

The rejection of intimacy represented through the visual elements and dialogue demonstrates that Léo's behaviour is not merely an individual decision. Rather, it reflects the internalization of hegemonic masculine norms that frame male intimacy as socially problematic. Through setting, costume, staging, lighting, and dialogue, the film illustrates how social pressure gradually transforms physical closeness into emotional distance. In line with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), the scene shows that masculinity is continuously negotiated under social pressure, and that this negotiation often comes at the cost of emotional intimacy.

4. Conformity to Peer Norms

The following is the next classification point, namely conformity to peer norms. According to Connell (1987), masculinity is not simply an individual trait, but a social practice that is continuously produced and reproduced through participation in culturally approved social norms. This is also in line with Gramsci (as cited in Connell, 1987, p. 184) that hegemony is not a type of social ascendancy achieved through direct force, yet through the social consent where individuals willingly participate in reproducing the norms that surround them. Related to this point, the researcher found the evidence presented by Léo which shows how he actively conforms to the masculine expectations of his peer group.

Datum 5



(1)

(2)

Figure 4.1 Léo joins ice hockey for the first time (*Close*, 2022, 00:21:52 – 00:22:22).

Figure 4.1 captures the moment when Léo joins ice hockey for the first time after the earlier conversation with Baptiste where he asked about the sport. These scenes take place after the series of social pressures Léo experienced. Figure 4.1 (1) shows how Léo stands between his teammates in full ice hockey costumes. While Figure 4.1 (2), depicts how Léo starts to show the expression smiling and laughing alongside his teammates.

In terms of setting the ice hockey rink functions as a cultural space associated with masculinity. The sport itself is commonly linked to physical strength, competitiveness, toughness, and endurance, characteristics that are often socially associated with dominant masculine ideals. Bordwell et al. (2024) argue that setting not only establishes where the action takes place but also contributes to the meaning communicated by a scene. In this context, the setting carries symbolic significance because it reflects the type of environment valued by Léo's male peers. This interpretation is reinforced by the earlier classroom conversation in which several boys expressed their interest in ice hockey. Therefore, Léo's presence

within the rink can be understood as more than participation in a sport. Rather, it signifies an attempt to position himself within a social environment that embodies the masculine values recognized by his peer group. The setting is strengthened by the presence of properties, particularly the ice hockey stick held by Léo in Figure 4.1 (1). According to Bordwell et al. (2024), properties contribute to the authenticity of a setting while also conveying information about a character's identity and psychological condition. In this scene, the hockey stick serves as a visual marker of participation and belonging. Through the property, Léo is visually presented as part of the group rather than an outsider observing from a distance. The setting and property therefore work together to communicate Léo's gradual integration into a masculine social environment.

In terms of costume, the uniform worn by Léo plays a significant role in depicting his conformity. Bordwell et al. (2024) explain that costume can function as a motif that enhances characterization and traces changes in a character's attitudes and social position. In this scene, Léo wears the same uniform as his teammates, creating a visual sense of similarity and collective identity. The costume therefore functions as a marker of inclusion, indicating that Léo is beginning to align himself with the norms and values represented by the group. Unlike previous scenes in which he is primarily identified through his relationship with Rémi, here he is visually defined through membership within a male peer collective. The sturdy and protective uniform reinforces conventional associations between masculinity, physical strength, and athletic competence. Consequently,

the costume symbolizes not only participation in a sport but also participation in a particular masculine identity.

Furthermore, the terms of body language shows Léo's gestures and facial expressions reveal an important shift in behaviour. In Figure 4.1 (1), his expression appears cautious and observant, suggesting that he is still adjusting to the unfamiliar environment of the ice hockey rink. According to Bordwell et al. (2024), actors' gestures and expressions communicate a character's emotional and psychological condition. At this stage, Léo appears to be assessing his position within the group. However, Figure 4.1 (2) presents a noticeable transformation. Léo begins to smile, laugh, and physically engage with the boys around him. His body language becomes more relaxed and participatory, indicating a growing sense of acceptance and belonging.

Within Connell's (1987) theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity, Léo's decision to join the ice hockey team can be understood as an attempt to align himself with the masculinity practiced in his peer group. This is intended as a form of protection or even resistance against the threat of being perceived as subordinate masculinity. Given that the visual in Figure 4.1 shows Léo's position, which has gone through many series of social pressures, this indirectly strengthens the indication that Léo's decision to join ice hockey is not merely a form of genuine interest, but rather a strategy to defend his masculine identity. This is in line with Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who stated that masculinity is continuously practiced and negotiated under social pressure.

The same pattern of action also shows in [00:16:50 – 00:17:19]. The scene depicts Léo attempting to join a group of male friends of his age to play soccer. This occurs exactly one day after the confrontation. Next, a scene showing a similar pattern of behaviour is shown again at [00:40:50 – 00:41:24], which depicts Léo playing with his friends on the beach with great joy. In this scene, Léo demonstrates his position as part of a minority group.

Overall, Léo's behavioural patterns, as represented through the visuals above, clearly indicate that Léo's attitude is not merely a form of genuine personal choice, but rather a form of identity defense behaviour. In other words, Léo's decision to join an ice hockey team, join a group of men to play soccer, and similar activities indicate that these behaviours are a form of response to social demands in maintaining his masculine identity. From the data above, it is illustrated that the pattern of internalization of hegemonic masculinity norms occurs not only through language or verbally, but also in the form of non-verbal actions. Which is in the context of Léo, his decision to join something new that is considered a social pattern is a form of negotiation that he does with the norms of masculinity around his peer group.

B. The Effect of Forms of Hegemonic Masculinity on the Emotional Intimacy Between Léo and Rémi in *Close* (2022)

To address the second research question, this section examines how the forms of hegemonic masculinity identified above affect the emotional intimacy between Léo and Rémi. Drawing on Gaia's (2002) framework, emotional intimacy

is conceptualized across seven dimensions: self-disclosure, emotional expression, support, trust, physical intimacy, mutuality, and closeness. While all seven dimensions are relevant to a comprehensive understanding of emotional intimacy, this study focuses on the four most visibly affected within *Close* (2022): physical intimacy, emotional expression, self-disclosure, and closeness. Together, these four dimensions trace the arc of Léo and Rémi's relationship from warmth to silence to tragedy.

1. The Fading of Physical Intimacy

According to Gaia (2002), physical intimacy within close friendship is not romantic or sexual in nature, but refers to the comfortable, affectionate physical closeness that communicates trust, security, and mutual belonging. In adolescent male friendships specifically, Way (2011) emphasizes that physical closeness is a natural and psychologically important expression of deep connection.

In the film *Close* (2022), Léo and Rémi's friendship is depicted with a warmth that is both physical and unguarded. As established in Datum 3 (Figure 3.1), Léo leans freely on Rémi's shoulder in class without hesitation. At minutes 00:07:24–00:08:45, Léo verbally soothes an anxious Rémi with calm, gentle affirmations a gesture of emotional attentiveness that requires no justification between them. Their physical closeness at this stage communicates not romance, but the deep comfort of a friendship built on trust.

This changes completely after the peer confrontation. As shown in Datum 4 (Figure 3.2), when Rémi attempts the same gesture of physical closeness, Léo withdraws visibly, deliberately, and without explanation. What is most significant here is not simply that Léo pulls away, but the contrast between who he was before and who he has become: the same boy, in the same kind of space, with the same friend, now treating an entirely natural gesture as a threat. Rémi receives no explanation only distance where warmth used to be. As Way (2011, p. 402) found, boys become distrustful and less willing to be physically close to male peers when they believe such closeness puts them at risk of being labelled feminine or gay. Léo's withdrawal is not personal rejection it is the internalization of a social norm but Rémi has no way of knowing this, and the effect on him is the same.

Datum 6

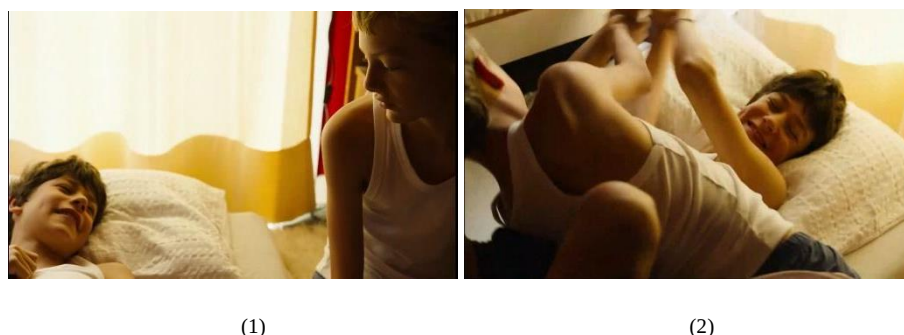


Figure 5.1 Léo moved away from the bed (*Close*, 2022, 00:24:52 – 00:26:32).

Figure 5.1 captures two sequent moments during the sleepover at Rémi's house. Visually, both images indicate Léo's deliberate physical withdrawal. In terms of setting, Rémi's bedroom has been established throughout the film as one of the warmest and most private spaces the two boys share a place where they sleep side by side without hesitation. Its reappearance here therefore carries immediate

narrative weight. That the same room now becomes the site of Léo's withdrawal communicates, as Bordwell et al. (2024) argue about setting, the development of the story's emotional reality: even in their most intimate shared space, the closeness between them is slowly crumbling.

In terms of costume, the plain white t-shirts worn by both characters simple, without attributes indicate that this moment occurs without any social audience. There are no external markers of peer pressure in the frame; the boys are simply in their familiar, private environment. Yet the norms of hegemonic masculinity still apply to Léo here. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, costume speaks before the actor does and provides context about the character's psychology and relationships. If we recall the early scenes of the film, where their friendship is depicted with such closeness and they share the same room, Léo and Rémi also wore similar costumes. This implicitly indicates that the distance now created between the two characters is not born from social differences, but from a construction of masculinity already embedded within Léo. The costume and setting serve as parallel aspects in conveying the narrative development.

The scene focuses not only on Léo's actions, but also on how Léo's behavioural pattern impacts Rémi. Figure 5.1 shows Rémi consistently showing an open and trusting attitude toward Léo still unaware that anything has changed between them. This is in line with Way's (2011) argument that when one person in a close male friendship begins to distance themselves, the other is often left without the language to articulate what they are experiencing. After Léo moves away from

the bed, Rémi entirely unaware of the shift, moves back toward Léo the next morning. The moment that follows shows Léo visibly unsettled but unable to articulate his feelings, leading to a physical fight that functions on the surface as playful boyhood behavior but underneath carries the full weight of Léo's inner emotional conflict. As Way (2011, p. 413) noted, anger and frustration are ways for boys to express sadness, and here, physical aggression becomes the only acceptable language. When Rémi asks, "*Why are you attacking me?*" with a smile, Léo responds, "*It seems I like it.*". The fight escalates until Léo accidentally strikes Rémi's head hard enough to cause genuine pain, and the scene closes in heavy silence and heavy breathing between them.

The data presented above clearly demonstrates how deeply the internalized forms of hegemonic masculinity impact Léo and Rémi's friendship, even physically. The physical closeness at first portrayed as a form of comfort and trust transforms into something Léo can no longer express without conflict. Instead of speaking about his feelings, Léo channels them through aggression. This directly reflects Way's (2011) finding that anger and frustration are often the only ways boys are permitted to express their sadness. In conclusion, Léo's withdrawal is not simply a form of indifference, but a direct consequence of masculine norms that pressure him to suppress the very closeness that defines his friendship with Rémi.

2. The Loss of Emotional Expression

As identified by Gaia (2002), the loss of emotional expression refers to the erosion of the capacity to communicate inner emotions openly within a close

relationship. It is not simply about speaking, but also encompasses gestures, facial expression, and the willingness to let another person know what one truly feels. In the context of adolescence, Way (2011) argues that boys both desire and are capable of intimate emotional expression with close friends yet are consistently framed by society as unable or unwilling to do so.

In *Close* (2022), the loss of emotional expression between Léo and Rémi does not happen in a single moment but accumulates gradually across several scenes. One of its earliest manifestations is Léo's increasing emotional withdrawal not only from Rémi, but from everyone around him as the cost of the hegemonic norms he has internalized. This action pattern is not simply Léo staying quiet, but the result of a deeper suppression that affects his capacity to be emotionally available to anyone, regardless of context.

This behavioural pattern becomes even more significant when viewed in terms of its impact on his friendship with Rémi. Their friendship is depicted as very close and warm through playfulness, physical comfort, and verbal affection. Rémi is portrayed as a teenager who relies heavily on Léo's emotional presence, and vice versa. However, as hegemonic masculinity slowly shapes and changes Léo's attitude, this emotional availability disappears. This is in line with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) argument that the rejection of emotional vulnerability is one of the defining mechanisms of hegemonic masculinity, driven by the need to avoid being perceived as weak or feminine.

Datum 7

Figure 6.1 Léo approaches Rémi on the school field (*Close*, 2022, 00:29:26).

Figure 6.1 captures the moment Léo approaches Rémi and questions whether his own behaviour is the cause of Rémi's withdrawal. The two characters are depicted sitting close together on their school field during recess. Rémi keeps his head down while Léo sits beside him.

In the terms of setting, the scene takes place on the open school field, in the midst of a crowd of their peers. The presence of their friends as a backdrop is not merely a supporting element, it provides the context that their conversation is still under the social gaze. The open space emphasizes that neither Rémi nor Léo can be fully honest about their feelings. This is in line with Bordwell et al. (2024), who argued that the setting plays a role in emphasizing the authenticity and drama of the film. The property that Rémi holds, the handphone here, functions as an object that communicated a deliberate distraction, a way of filling the silence that Rémi cannot otherwise address. Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, as a window into the character's psychology.

From the terms of body language, according to Bordwell et al., (2024), stated that the crucial story information is conveyed by the directions of characters glance. The two characters are sitting close together, yet Rémi does not actively respond to any of Léo's questions and does not look at Léo at all while he speaks. As Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 135) noted, how a character sits, stands, or positions themselves conveys a great deal about their personality and inner attitude and here, Rémi's body language communicates the weight of what remains unspoken.

From the dialogue, Léo asks: "*Is it because of me, you act like this?*", while Rémi responds with a flat and directs "*No.*". This scene shows a contrasting attitude towards the warmth that once defined their friendship, which has now turned into an interaction filled with caution and deliberate restraint. Léo's question is not simply an inquiry, it is an avoidance of confrontation about his true feelings. Léo needs Rémi to say no, so that he does not have to confront the impact of his own withdrawal. From Rémi's perspective, his short and direct response is not simply a lie to Léo, but a way of ending a conversation that would have required both of them to open up. By doing that, Rémi strongly indicates the consequences of Léo's behavioural pattern, one that ultimately forces Rémi to silence his own feelings. As Way (2011, p. 403) found, boys want intimacy despite being afraid of being labelled girly, immature, or even gay and in this moment, Léo is depicted exactly at this crossroads.

This is also what Way (2011) describes when she argues that boys are not simply unable to speak about how they feel they become unable to receive honesty

from others either. Léo cannot face the truth that Rémi is hurting because of his decision to create distance, and Rémi cannot tell Léo his actual feelings, because admitting that could risk Léo distancing himself completely. This aligns with Way's (2011) findings that a boy who initially valued his friendship turned into a boy who would rather become defensive about his feelings.

Based on the analysis above, the loss of emotional expression operates not only through dramatic confrontation, but through the accumulation of moments where feelings emerge but cannot be spoken. Léo knows Rémi is hurting, and Rémi knows Léo is the reason, yet they both choose silence. This illustrates what Way (2011) found in her research, that boys may try not to care or feel, yet they isolate themselves precisely in response to caring deeply about how their friends are treating them. In the context of Léo and Rémi, the loss of emotional expression does not disappear clearly or immediately but exists as an accumulation of events continuously held back and never communicated.

3. The Restriction of Self-Disclosure

In this stage of classification, the restriction of self-disclosure refers to the act of sharing personal thought, feeling, and inner experiences with others in the context of intimate friendship. As defined by Gaia (2002), this trait refers to the willingness to share one's inner emotional world, thoughts, feelings, fears, and vulnerabilities open within a close relationship. It is important to distinguish this classification from the previous one, the loss of emotional expressions. While the previous section examined how emotional expression, related to showing of feeling

through gesture, tone, and physical response. This section turns to a deeper stage, in which emotional expression is about whether one individual chooses to reveal what they know to be true. In the simple way of understanding, a character may still experience emotions internally yet choose not to articulate or share them within a relationship.

In the context of *Close* (2022), the restriction of self-disclosure does not occur in a single moment, but develops from the accumulation of small lies, deflections, and deliberate silences creating a void in their relationship that even they themselves cannot fully understand. Boys are perceived as emotionally inarticulate, lacking the capacity to "name" and even experience feelings and emotions (Way, 2011, p. 18). This becomes the basis for the progressive destruction of Léo and Rémi's friendship, as described in the following data.

Datum 8



Figure 7.1 Léo and Rémi on their way back home (*Close*, 2022, 00:33:22 - 00:34:21).

Figure 7.1 captures the moment when Rémi and Léo are on their way back home, after Rémi took the initiative to visit Léo who was practicing ice hockey with his other male friends.

In The setting terms, this scene takes place in the middle of a quiet road just the two of them, on their way home, away from any peer audience. Logically, this should be the safest possible space for honesty between them. Yet Léo still holds back and chooses not to open up, even though Rémi tries hard to reach out at that moment. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, the colors of a setting provide special focus to the particular actions of the characters. In this context, the setting's faded, muted colors make Rémi stand out even more clearly in his red t-shirt visually emphasizing Rémi's effort to connect against the quiet, empty backdrop of their surroundings.

While the terms of body language, Léo's position slightly ahead of Rémi's bike, accompanied by a gaze that continues to look forward, strengthens the indication that Léo is deliberately turned away from Rémi. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, the glance away gesture of a character conveys distraction or evasion. Meanwhile, Rémi continues to face Léo while asking several questions. Rémi's gestures and expressions in the scene are depicted as hurt and holding back tears marked more deeply by Rémi showing a silent gesture and blinking repeatedly as if suppressing his emotions. These staging choices together convey the position of each character within their relationship at this critical moment (Bordwell et al., 2024).

As explained above, Rémi, who continues to ask Léo questions, receives only flat and blunt responses. Specifically, when Rémi offers to join ice hockey so they can share the same activity "*Maybe I should try too?*", Léo responds with silence and an annoyed look. Rémi interprets this silence as rejection and asks, "*Why not?*". Léo displays an evasive answer: "*I didn't say anything.*". Through his tense, cold expression and deliberately passive response, Léo seems caught in an in-between situation, he does not truly want to reject Rémi, but he is also afraid of re-entering the same social circle as Rémi and receiving the same labelling as before. The actual truth is not expressed by either character. Their inability to articulate their feelings leads once again to silence. The scene concludes with Rémi expressing anger and disappointment without saying a word.

Datum 9



(1)

(2)

Figure 7.2 Rémi confronts Léo at school (*Close*, 2022, 00:24:52 – 00:26:32).

Figure 7.2 captures the moment when Rémi verbally and physically confronted Léo at school. This happened because Léo had done something he had never done before.

From the setting terms, this scene takes place in the school field, amidst a crowd of their peers the exact space where Léo has been most committed to performing his new masculine identity. Rémi's decision to confront Léo here is not coincidental, it is the place Léo most carefully guards as a space of masculine performance, and it is here that Rémi refuses to allow that performance to go unchallenged. The school yard setting also emphasizes the dramatization of Rémi's confrontation of feelings toward Léo the fact that Léo is joking with his new circle of friends when Rémi arrives only reinforces Léo's position as a boy who has conformed to the norms around him, and rejected the Léo that Rémi has always known. This is in line with Bordwell et al. (2024), who stated that the setting guides attention and emphasizes the dramatic sense.

Meanwhile, in terms of body language, Rémi's expression and body language shows the most significant shift of any scene in the film. As Bordwell et al. (2024, p. 134) argued, facial expression can develop a character's characterization across the film. Here, Rémi is no longer trying to hold back the feelings he has been suppressing he openly shows his anger, disappointment, confusion, and annoyance at Léo's changed behaviour. Unable to hold back his tears, Rémi carries out a physical confrontation, marked by pushing Léo as hard as he can. As Bordwell et al. (2024) noted, an actor's gesture and facial expression are an integral part of a film and can express the character's state of mind. In other words, Rémi's gesture and facial expression demonstrate how he communicates feelings he previously could not find a way to convey.

Léo's response to Rémi's accusation is a transparent lie: "*I ate too early, so I left too early.*" He tells Rémi not to overthink it. But neither of them believes the explanation, and both of them know it. Léo cannot disclose the truth that social pressure has made him afraid of what their friendship looks like to others, because doing so would require naming a vulnerability that hegemonic masculinity has taught him is unacceptable. As Way (2011) found, boys express their sadness for losing friends through anger, because that is the only acceptable emotion. The push from Rémi is not aggression it is the physical form of everything he cannot say. Léo's inability to name why he is pulling away, and Rémi's inability to name what he is losing, makes them sink into an incommunicable distance.

Based on the data presented above, the restriction of self-disclosure between Léo and Rémi shows a consistent and escalating pattern. From Léo's continued avoidance as a defense against masculine norms, to Rémi's continued efforts to maintain connection but continued experience of rejection ultimately leading Rémi to the point where he too can no longer communicate his feelings directly. This progressive breakdown is a significant indicator of how deeply the internalization of hegemonic norms damages not only the relationship, but each boy's capacity to speak honestly within it. As Way (2011) found, boys tend to isolate themselves precisely in response to how their friends treat them not from an absence of feeling, but from an inability to find a way to communicate it.

4. The Collapse of Closeness

Closeness as identified by Gaia (2002), represents the most encompassing dimension of emotional intimacy. It is a sense of mutual belonging and the feeling that another person is present to you in a way that is irreplaceable, not a single gesture or exchange, but an accumulation of all the dimensions of intimate connection over time. According to Way (2011), this dimension is particularly vital during adolescence, where it serves as the primary emotional foundation through which young people construct their sense of self-worth, validation, and connectedness. When this foundation is removed, the consequences extend far beyond the relationship itself.

In *Close* (2022), the breakdown of Léo and Rémi's closeness is not a single event, but an inevitable culmination of everything analyzed in the preceding sections. Physical intimacy has turned into withdrawal, emotional openness has become isolation, and self-disclosure has turned into silence and avoidance. What remains at this point in their friendship is a closeness that exists only in memory between two adolescent boys who cannot find a way back to each other. This is marked by the tragic climax of the film, where Rémi is ultimately faced with his decision to take his own life. This is directly in line with Way (2011), who stated that adolescents without close friendships are at significant risk of depression, suicide, and disengagement from school.

Datum 10

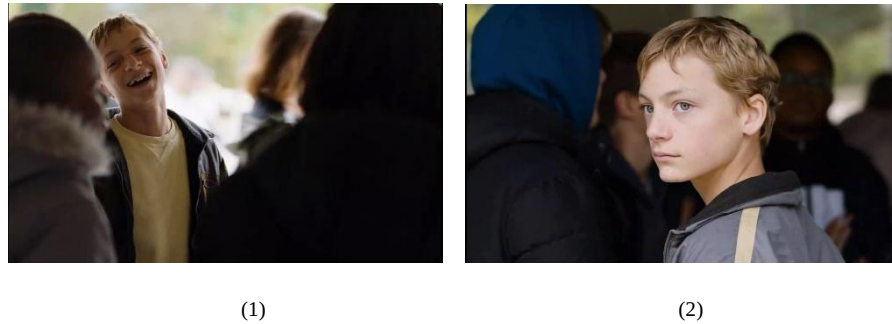


Figure 8.1 Léo looking for Rémi in the crowded (*Close*, 2022, 00:39:05 – 00:39:30).

Figure 8.1 captures two moments that occurring at the same time. In Figure 8.1 (1), the scene shows Léo laughing and joking with his new friends. Meanwhile, Figure 8.1 (2) captures the moment when Léo looks around to see Rémi among the crowd.

In terms of setting, both scenes take place in the school's public space the same location where all the critical dynamics of Léo and Rémi's relationship have played out. Now, for the first time, the visual language of this setting communicates something final, the two characters are completely separated physically, each in their own circle of friendship. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, the setting conveys the social position of the character and helps the audience understand the narrative development. In this context, Léo and Rémi's physical separation within the same shared space makes the collapse of their closeness unmistakably visible.

While in terms of body language, the most significant element here is Léo's gaze. If seen from Léo's perspective, he has entered the circle of friends he has worked so hard to belong to his smile and expression initially show a happy, socially integrated attitude. But that smile slowly fades as his eyes begin to search

for the crowd. The data captures Léo's gaze filling with suppressed, unspoken feeling as he witnesses that Rémi, too, has moved on to a different circle. As Bordwell et al. (2024) argued, the eyes hold a special place in film for conveying crucial story information. The gaze shown by Léo here clearly indicates the emptiness at the cost of the distance he himself created an emptiness that his new social belonging cannot fill. The form of the loss of closeness is also more deeply demonstrated in the following scene.

Datum 11



Figure 8.2 The death of Rémi (*Close*, 2022, 00:39:05 – 00:39:30).

Figure 8.2 captures the moment Léo received the news of Rémi's death. Figure 8.2 (1) captures Léo's room after the incident. Meanwhile, Figure 8.2 (2) shows Léo rushing to Rémi's house shortly after hearing the news of his friend's death.

In terms of Setting, the scene takes place in Rémi's house specifically, Rémi's bedroom, with a broken and half-open door. This location, previously depicted as the warmest and most intimate space shared by the two boys, has now become the site of the most irreversible event in the film. As Bordwell et al. (2024,

p. 115) stated, the setting plays a role in providing dramatic emphasis to the understanding of the story's action. Here, the contrast between what this room once meant and what it now contains communicates, without a single word of dialogue, the full and irreparable weight of what has been lost. The place that was once a site of joy and closeness has become the site of a tragic ending a visual symbol that the relationship can no longer be repaired.

While from the terms of Léo's body language, in Figure 8.2 (2) conveys a depth of feeling that has been suppressed across the entire film. His tears, his downward gaze, and his physical shock speak to the fact that the emotional capacity was always present it was never absent. It was simply never permitted expression, until now, when expression no longer matters. As Bordwell et al. (2024) stated, the gesture of the actor shows the emotional feelings of the character and here, for the first time, Léo's grief breaks completely through the surface.

Rémi's death is the most devastating evidence of the collapse of closeness in *Close* (2022). It directly reflects Way's (2011) extensive documentation that the loss of close male friendship during adolescence carries profound psychological consequences, including depression, disconnection, and in the most extreme cases, the complete erosion of a young person's will to remain. Rémi has lost the one person who made him feel seen, safe, and valued not because Léo stopped caring, but because masculine norms made it impossible for Léo to show that he still did. In the case of Léo and Rémi, the death of Rémi by suicide is a concrete example of the fatal impact of social demands that enforce hegemonic norms on teenagers. Léo

must now face demands and feelings that he himself was never able to recognize or articulate and that incapacity leaves a void that cannot be undone.

The collapse of closeness thus serves as the most devastating and irreversible consequence of hegemonic masculinity's internalization within their relationship. As Gaia (2002) identified, closeness represents the most encompassing dimension of emotional intimacy built cumulatively, and destroyed the same way: gradually, quietly, and at great cost. Léo and Rémi do not reach the film's tragic climax by natural distance, but by the weight of a social construction of masculine norms that neither of them had the language to resist. This is in line with Way's (2011) study, which states that adolescent boys who internalize hegemonic norms face the loss of a fundamental pillar of their psychological well-being. In Rémi's case, the loss of Léo's presence both physically and emotionally has a fatal impact. In conclusion, as demonstrated by Rémi's suicide, the impact of hegemonic masculinity on adolescents' emotional intimacy is not theoretical or abstract, it is the story of how social norms can lead a teenage boy to sacrifice the only relationship that makes him feel safe, leading to a tragic and irreversible loss of life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter presents the conclusion and suggestions for further study based on the findings that have been discussed in the previous chapter. After reading, watching, and analyzing the object of this research, the film *Close* (2022) by Lukas Dhont, using the framework of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (1987) and further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), Gaia's (2002) framework of emotional intimacy, and Way's (2011) study on adolescent male friendship, the researcher is now able to answer the research questions through the following conclusions. In this chapter, ideas are also proposed for additional research regarding the representation of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on male adolescent emotional intimacy in film.

A. Conclusion

This study examines the forms of hegemonic masculinity represented through the character Léo in *Close* (2022). To analyze it, the researcher applied the theory of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (1987), further developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), as the primary theoretical framework, and also analyzed the visual aspects of the movie using *mise-en-scène* analysis as proposed by Bordwell et al. (2024). As a result, the researcher concludes that the forms of hegemonic masculinity represented by Léo are identified into four classifications: emotional suppression, fear of social labelling, rejection of intimacy, and conformity to peer norms. These four classifications show that hegemonic

masculinity does not operate in a single moment, but through an accumulated process of internalization that quietly shapes Léo's behaviour, decisions, and relationship with Rémi.

The second research question addresses how the internalization of these forms of hegemonic masculinity affects the emotional intimacy between Léo and Rémi in *Close* (2022). In addition to Connell's (1987) theory, Gaia's (2002) framework of emotional intimacy and Way's (2011) framework were also used in this section of the analysis. The researcher concludes that the impact of hegemonic masculinity on their emotional intimacy is identified into four dimensions: the fading of physical intimacy, the loss of emotional expression, the restriction of self-disclosure, and the collapse of closeness. These four dimensions demonstrate the erosion of Léo and Rémi's friendship caused by social norms. The erosion that occurs is not the result of natural distance, but rather the direct consequence of social norms that systematically destroy every layer of their closeness, from physical to emotional.

Through *Close* (2022), the audience is invited to understand that masculinity does not always have to be expressed through dominance, strength, authority, physical control, or emotional control. The film depicts the journey of both characters in finding their true selves while facing the social expectations attached to the norms of male identity. Confusion, silence, and even physical confrontation are depicted as important parts of this process of self-discovery. From the analysis, it appears that Léo and Rémi, both victims of social

construction, continue to face pressure to meet social expectations that attach men to certain traits. This perspective has important implications for gender and emotional studies, as it shows that gender stereotypes, which are often associated with certain traits, can have a major negative impact on male emotions, especially during adolescence. By portraying emotional dynamics that end in a tragic decision, suicide, *Close (2022)* voices the consequences of repressed vulnerability. More broadly, this research implies the importance of gender representation in film as a means of critiquing social stereotypes and supporting male emotional education. Thus, *Close (2022)* is not only an object of study on hegemonic masculinity in film, but also an example of how film can be a medium for positive social change.

B. Suggestion

For researchers who wish to expand on this study using *Close (2022)* the researcher suggests investigating this film through different theoretical approaches. As a rich and layered cinematic work that addresses many social issues, *Close (2022)* can also be approached through semiotic theory, trauma studies, or psychoanalytic film criticism to generate different and equally significant findings.

For readers and audiences who wish to engage with the story in *Close (2022)*, the film is available for streaming on Mubi and other international film platforms. The researcher acknowledges that this study has limitations, particularly in its focus on a single character's perspective and its reliance on *mise-en-scène* as the primary analytical tool. It is hoped that this study can contribute meaningfully

to the academic discussion on gender representation in film, and that readers may use this research to reflect critically on how social norms shape the emotional lives of the people around them and of themselves.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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