

# Softboys in the age of Millennial Masculinity

Aaron Muldoon

University of Cambridge, UK

[amm316@cam.ac.uk](mailto:amm316@cam.ac.uk)

**Abstract:** The last decade has witnessed the rise of a new type of Hollywood film star: the softboy. Actors including Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles all appeal to the stereotypical characteristics of this type—young, skinny, fashionable, clean-shaven, quirky, gentle and emotionally intelligent. By analysing a sample of mainstream media articles on the softboy published between 2015 and 2023, the following paper seeks to deepen our understanding of this influential internet type and the dominant stereotype of masculinity he undermines—what R. W. Connell termed hegemonic masculinity. More specifically, this paper explores the extent to which the softboy can be understood as the product of an overlapping matrix of demand from gay male and straight female film and television audiences. Within this matrix, the softboy emerges as the result of a delicate balancing act in which he avoids presenting either as too straight, too gay or too masculine. He achieves this balance through a range of strategies involving clothing choices, film role choices, choices about sharing his personal life with the public and a carefully curated public persona. Considering the softboy from a cultural materialist perspective, this paper argues that the affected personality traits and designed sexual ambivalence of the softboy can be understood as a response not of men themselves but of the entertainment industry to both the increased demand for this type from straight female audiences in the wake of the #MeToo movement and the increasingly recognised demand for this type from gay male audiences. For straight women, the softboy appears to have superseded the stereotype of the muscled, bearded, deep-voiced or emotionally unavailable man in the hierarchy of desire precisely because he resists being easily framed as an aggressor. Meanwhile, either by playing gay roles in films or pandering to a stereotypically gay aesthetic or set of behaviours, these actors appeal simultaneously to the gay male audience. This analysis therefore attempts to construe contemporary changes in the nature of masculinity as it is represented by the rise of the softboy film star in terms of fundamental changes in the market of desire.

**Keywords:** Softboy, #MeToo, Masculinity, Gay men, Women, Film and television

---

## 1. Introduction: Defining ‘Softboy’

The term softboy (or softboi) entered internet parlance almost a decade ago, yet has still not garnered any real attention within academia. It belongs to a broader internet diction which includes the pick-me girl, the hypebeast, the e-boy, the sad girl, the Tumblr boy, and the soy boy. In regard to their tone, these terms exist on the same plane as memes: while they may point to a truth about the world, they do so primarily for the purposes of amusement (hence, they are usually said tongue-in-cheek). Although the precise origin of the term softboy is difficult to trace, there is a general consensus that it was coined in 2015 to denote a variation on the fuckboy (Hanson 2015, Rowe 2015). In contrast with the fuckboy (typically a man with many sexual partners and little respect for women; similar to a player), the softboy purported to be caring, cultured and emotionally intelligent. However, implicit in this early use of the term was the expectation that he too would end up behaving like a fuckboy. This wolf in sheep’s clothing connotation lent early uses of the term a nefarious and deceptive undertone: one would be dismissed or mocked as a softboy, rather than lauded as one.

The use of the term softboy in this sense has been most famously deployed by Iona David, creator of the Instagram page [@beam\\_me\\_up\\_softboi](https://www.instagram.com/beam_me_up_softboi) which has around 680,000 followers and is largely responsible for the proliferation of thousands of softboy memes (David 2019, Smith 2022). The page functions by posting anonymously submitted screenshots of women’s online encounters with softboys, the butt of the joke typically being the softboys’ embarrassing attempts to flirt by name-dropping indie bands, declaring themselves to be a feminist or attesting to their own emotional depth and maturity. For David, the softboy can be distilled into three characteristics: possessing a superiority complex, being emotionally exploitative and having alternative taste (Benwell 2019). This assessment is echoed by Ross (2017) who describes him as sinister, McMeekin and Morgan (2021) who describe him as prone to gaslighting, manipulation and coercion, and Strapagiel, in whose words the softboy “is, and always was, a fuckboy. The only difference is that he had a soft exterior and just enough of a hint of depth that you got tricked” (2019).

Despite these connotations of the term lingering on, recent years have seen the softboy largely ameliorated in the public consciousness. As Holt notes, “Now that the term is being tied to real celebrities, the concept has been redefined, dropping the whole idea that softboys are just disguised fuckboys. Instead they’ve been reclassified as guys with good intentions and a lucid understanding of their emotions” (2019). Holt is right to suggest a relation between this shift in the connotations of the term and the increased association of the softboy with specific celebrity figures (as opposed to the generalised stereotype it was initially coined to describe). The

most recent uses of the term are indeed often accompanied by an expansive cataloguing of softboy popstars or film stars. Alongside Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles, those male celebrities now associated with the tag include Asa Butterfield, Alex Lawther, Zayn Malik, Evan Peters, Ross Lynch, Jaden Smith, Noah Centineo, Lucas Hedges, Frank Ocean, Steve Lacy, Cole Sprouse, Tom Holland, Ansel Elgort and Joe Keery, and in a peculiar sort of hagiography of the softboy, actors of a slightly older generation (including Paul Rudd, Michael Cera, Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Jesse Eisenberg) are being invoked retrospectively as examples of softboys *avant la lettre*.

In terms of these actors' classification as softboys, their onscreen personas matter just as much as, and perhaps even more than, their real selves. For instance, in her discussion of Chalamet, Holt almost entirely avoids distinguishing between these two seemingly different representations of the actor, first observing how Chalamet displays vulnerability on social media platforms and in interviews, and then discussing how his "resume of soft and atypical performances has redefined the Hollywood male sex symbol as a cisgender guy coded in stereotypically female characteristics" (2019). The softboy characters Chalamet plays in *Call Me By Your Name* (2017), *Lady Bird* (2017), *Beautiful Boy* (2018), *Little Women* (2019) and *Bones and All* (2022) are indeed difficult to separate from his own celebrity persona, at least in the public's perception. Onscreen softboys are very rarely detestable and tend not to fit with the wolf in sheep's clothing use of the term. The softboy's morphing from online everyman to specific celebrity has undoubtedly informed this public amelioration of the term.

If a conclusive definition were to be offered of the softboy today, it would likely include five fundamental aspects: fashion sense, physicality, cultural interests, personality and attitude to women. According to media news sources, softboy fashion ranges from the cute to the gender-bending but has in common the feeling of being in some sense feminine. For Frantz, the typical softboy wears a cardigan and vintage tee, paints his nails and has a "floppy haircut" (2020) while for Strapagiel, it is "pastels, fluffy sweaters, florals" (2019). Yotka notes in a *Vogue* article on "softboy style" that velvet suits and black turtlenecks are typical softboy attire for red carpet appearances, and names Haider Ackermann as the most significant designer for the softboy aesthetic (2018). Largely in keeping with this aesthetic, the softboy's build is typically one that de-emphasises masculinity. He tends to be skinny, gaunt and waif-like and almost always clean-shaven. As Adamec notes, no longer are "six-pack abs and a grizzled beard the subject of teenage girls' adoration, but instead it's the tall, skinny gender-bending, dark-haired boys who steal their hearts" (2021). The softboy's cultural interests tend towards the alternative; according to McMeekin and Morgan he listens to Sufjan Stevens (2021). His personality is quirky, cringy, artsy or sweet (Frantz 2020, Holt 2019) and, perhaps most significantly, and in the largest pivot away from David's early definition of him, he is respectful of women.

The remainder of this paper explores how the softboy might be viewed as a response both to the #MeToo movement and the increasing recognition of gay male audiences within the entertainment industry. As above, this analysis is informed by mainstream media articles on the subject. In total, nineteen different new sources are referenced: *Buzzfeed News*, *Dazed*, *The Telegraph*, *Babe*, *Politico*, *Glamour*, *Vulture*, *The Guardian*, *Evie*, *Quartz*, *Into*, *Medium*, *The Irish Times*, *Hollywood Insider*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Out*, *L'Officiel*, *Gay Times* and *Vice*). The value of surveying such sources lies in the fact of their huge readerships: their engagement with the concept of the softboy both testifies to its prevalence in contemporary digital culture, and clarifies the various ways in which the softboy is actually considered. While the content of these articles may not be produced with longevity in mind (they are often written in the sensationalising tone of clickbait), they are nonetheless invaluable in providing a snapshot of ephemeral internet concepts like the softboy, which emerge rapidly into social media discourse and disappear just as quickly. Finally, while the focus here is predominantly on US and UK media sources, it should be noted that the softboy is by no means specific to these cultural spheres. For instance Tabanera (2019) identifies five softboy characters from recent Filipino cinema, while Darnige (2019) discusses the concept as it has emerged in French internet culture.

## 2. The Softboy's Dual Appeal

The history of different expressions of masculinity is immensely complex, and the historical uniqueness of the softboy's reckoning with masculinity ought not to be overstated—yet it seems that he is in many ways specific to our current moment. For instance, consider his generational specificity: the majority of the aforementioned actors are millennials, and the term softboy is most closely associated with and used by Gen Z. As Strapagiel reports, the softboy represents "a rejection of the traditional toxic masculinity by the younger generation" (2019). That is not to say the *effect* of the phenomenon does not go beyond these age groups. On the contrary, the impact of the softboy seems to have been much more widely felt. In one of the earliest accounts of the softboy, Rowe describes him as "the most rounded example of 21<sup>st</sup> century masculinity yet" (2015). Meanwhile Robertson, articulating a general disgruntlement about the prevalence of softboys for *Politico*, states that the

“rise of the softboy might have been easier for some American men to digest if it were contained to one corner of pop culture, but they’ve mounted a stunningly complete takeover” (2021). In this peculiarly fear-mongering analysis of the softboy, Robertson is referring mainly to the Billboard Hot 100’s Top 10, where he was dismayed to find Lil Nas X, Ed Sheeran and a collaboration between BTS and Coldplay. But he also suggests that even the US senator Jon Ossoff’s “boy-next-door charm and general visage itself recall Styles and Chalamet” (2021).

According to another commentator, “the softboy is just a new twist on a familiar type: the manicure-loving ‘metrosexuals’ of the early 2000s, or the alternative slackers played by Ethan Hawke in Gen X classics like *Reality Bites* and *Before Sunrise*” (Quartz 2021). But to consider the softboy as a 21<sup>st</sup> century echo of the metrosexual, the alternative slacker or even as comparable to gender-bending or sexually ambiguous pop stars like Kurt Cobain, David Bowie or Prince would be to neglect the crucial fact that the softboy, despite the cultural content he consumes, is not himself an expression of the alternative or marginal but rather of the mainstream. What renders the softboy specific to our contemporary moment is not only the basic fact of him being a less stereotypically masculine man, but rather the very extent of his visibility and cultural influence, and the way in which this is perceived as a major disruption to gender roles and the social order.

Taken together, the primary characteristics of the softboy seem almost specifically designed to appeal to straight women living in the post #MeToo era and to gay men living in the post liberation era. Today, sexual harassment is increasingly being named for what it is, becoming more frequently frowned upon by mainstream media and society, and resulting more often in penalisation or conviction. Articulating the widespreadness of sexual harassment has been central to the movement. As Srinivasan notes, the “most recent inflection point of American feminism, the #MeToo campaign of 2017, gained its motive force from the simple fact that all working women, or near enough, have experienced sexual harassment: lewd remarks, humiliation, groping, sexual threats, sabotage” (2021). It therefore makes sense at an intuitive level that the type of man being increasingly represented onscreen is physically unimposing and lacking in musculature, and is celebrated for being sweet, tender and respectful to women. A more sophisticated psychoanalytic reading of the post #MeToo woman is not necessary to see that this constitutes a paradigm shift in the perceived power dynamics between genders. The fact that traditional expressions of masculinity have gone out of favour today is not surprising. As Gannon puts it, following “the revelations of the #MeToo movement, it’s no wonder the idea of ‘traditional masculinity’ is being slowly crushed by its own toxicity” (2019). Likewise, for Strapagiel, “part of the point [of the softboy] seems to be to separate manhood from toxic masculinity, and things like aggression, violence, misogyny, and an anti-gay attitude” (2019).

Most mainstream media accounts of the softboy remain vague on the possible mechanisms through which this shift (from toxic to non-toxic) might actually occur. This paper proposes to consider the rise of the softboy not in terms of men’s individual or collective decision to alter their own behaviour (or at least how it is perceived) but rather as a change in the film industry’s awareness of the market for desire and *its* response to that. It is this change which might in turn be said to partly impact men’s behaviour more broadly. Building on this cultural materialist contention, Section 3 of this paper outlines a theoretical model through which we might conceive of society-wide changes or crises in masculinity as responses to changes in the status or perception of women in society. The resultant explanation of the rise of the softboy thus stands in contrast with important recent work on wokeness and virtue signalling in digital culture which explores the way individuals are compelled to conform to the most current political paradigms—sometimes in a way that obfuscates ‘real’ action or activism (Sobande et al. 2022).

The global film industry is now responding en masse to a long-neglected demand amongst viewers for more queer representation in mainstream cinema. In fact, in recent years, it has been hard to miss the sheer proliferation of new queer films (Lodge 2018). It is noteworthy that a similar cohort of actors has been offered up by the film industry to cater to the recently engendered gay male audience as to the post #MeToo straight female audience: consider Harry Styles’ almost simultaneous appearance in *My Policeman* (2022) and *Don’t Worry Darling* (2022), Lucas Hedges’ in *Boy Erased* (2018) and *Manchester by the Sea* (2016), and Timothée Chalamet’s in *Call Me By Your Name* (2017) and *Lady Bird* (2017). The connotations of sexual ambiguity, however fantastical, lent to these actors by their playing gay roles (and, in Styles’ case, releasing songs with sexually ambiguous lyrics) combines with their other softboy qualities to result in a personal brand tailored perfectly for a gay male fandom. Seemingly in spite of Chalamet’s acknowledged heterosexuality, one can deduce a clear sense of the gay demographic of his fandom from the frequency with which he appears in gay media publications like *Gay Times* (Damshenas 2019) and *Out* magazine (Dommu 2019).

This is certainly not the first time that this audience has been taken into account in film production; there is a rich history of film acknowledging it, overtly or covertly, stretching from *Ben Hur* (1959) to *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). But in a certain sense these new films stand apart from the lineage of gay cinema culminating in *Brokeback Mountain* because, unlike their predecessors, they are marketed to an enormous audience that is highly visible, vocal, culturally influential and politically active—and no longer in the truly marginal sense. Given the context of its release, *Brokeback Mountain* was still considered to be a film that pushed boundaries by telling a relatively untold story of love between two men. It also offered Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal what was then a relatively unique opportunity to obtain a new type of acting accolade through playing gay characters convincingly. In contrast, the contemporary context of the release of a film like *My Policeman* (2022) prevents it from doing either of these things. Furthermore, and especially considering the critical consensus on Styles' unfortunate performance both in *My Policeman* and *Don't Worry Darling*, indicators such as an actor's ability to act seem increasingly irrelevant for a film's perceived success. What instead becomes centrally important is the very fact of Styles—and all that he stands for—having appeared in the film.

In this regard, such examples of contemporary gay cinema tend towards the cultural logic of K-pop, with its highly engineered fandoms so deeply invested in the personal lives of the stars. (Incidentally, a significant number of the media articles surveyed here cite the influence of K-pop as an important factor in the rise of the softboy in the US and UK (Strapagiel 2019, Frantz 2020, Holmes 2021, Robertson 2021, Quartz 2021)). Some K-pop stars are famously prevented from having relationships by their record labels in order for them to be perceived as 'available' in the eyes of their fans (Griffiths 2018). A similar obsession with Styles' own sexual interests could be said to have fueled the maelstrom of accusations of queerbaiting that have been levelled against him—as well as other actors playing queer roles such as Kit Connor—in the past year. The difference between gay cinema today and in the *Brokeback Mountain* era becomes apparent when one considers that the same frenetic speculation about Ledger's sexual orientation did not accompany the release of *Brokeback Mountain* as that which did of Styles' upon the release of *My Policeman*. All of which is to say that casting decisions in contemporary film are so fundamentally entangled with an understanding of the film star as an object of desire that it becomes necessary to consider these types of films as a product of what audiences want to see as much as what directors want to show.

It could be argued further that it is not even necessary for a character to be gay for it to be evident that the casting decision has been made with a gay audience in mind. (In fact, the hallmark of 20<sup>th</sup> century American queer cinema has been its depiction of queer life through deeply coded scripts and performances that simultaneously avoid the censorship that shaped so much of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood and communicate directly with an acknowledged queer audience). The same goes for the deployment of the softboy onscreen today. As McHenry puts it, "though many of these types of characters are coded as queer, as many twinklike characters are, that's usually not explicit" (McHenry 2019). The point here is not that there is something about the softboy that is inherently attractive to a gay male audience; gay desire is far from homogenous. There is, however, a clear sense in which the softboy's version of masculinity caters for a gay male audience in a way that paragons of late-twentieth century Hollywood masculinity like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger did not.

Interestingly, the casting of softboys in gay roles seems to have little impact on their perceived desirability in the eyes of a straight female audience. As Holt notes, in the advent of the softboy, for "the first time, I witnessed many of my straight female friends falling head over heels for a character whose interest lied [sic] in men" (Holt). McHenry is one of the few commentators who pick up on this dual appeal. He states that the softboy is "often coded as queer, but in a way that associates queerness with approachability to both straight women and gay men" (2019). The same point is implicit in Gannon's suggestion that the 2019 line-up of *Love Island* (which reportedly included three softboys) marked "a mainstream acceptance of a cultural phenomenon that has seen heterosexual women and gay men grow weary of the empty macho archetype constantly sold to them. Instead, they were fantasising about swooning into the arms of someone more sensitive" (2019). The emergence of the softboy, then, appears to respond to an intersecting demand from gay male and straight female audiences.

### 3. Softboys and Masculinity's History of Crises

As in many discussions within the humanities today, a presentist bias lends the impression that society is currently experiencing a historic reckoning with masculinity. While there may indeed be something unique about the social evaluation of masculinity in our contemporary moment, deducing precisely what this is requires some consideration of the history of various different 'crises' in masculinity, and of what exactly this term means.

“That men are today confused about what it means to be a ‘real man’—that masculinity is in ‘crisis’—has become a cultural commonplace, staring down at us from every magazine rack and television talk show in the country” (Kimmel 1987). Given how current the sentiment of this passage feels, it might be surprising to note that it dates from an essay published over thirty-five years ago. Here, its author, the sociologist Michael Kimmel, models an even longer history of crises in masculinity, identifying comparable crises in early-eighteenth century England and in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century United States. Based on these case studies, he proposes that “definitions of masculinity are historically reactive to changing definitions of femininity” (1987). In both of the contexts Kimmel surveys, large structural changes set in motion various processes that lead women to redefine their roles in society. It is this economic restructuring and the subsequent reevaluation of women’s place in society that Kimmel suggests provoke these periods’ crises of masculinity. Kimmel’s thesis provides an interesting theoretical precedent for considering the widespread reevaluation of social and sexual dynamics between men and women in the wake of the #MeToo movement—for in this context there also appears to be a causal relation between the changing status of women in society and the contemporary crisis in masculinity.

Today, the term ‘crisis in masculinity’ typically refers to the “situation in which the traditional cultural touchstones of ‘masculinity’ are under real or perceived threat, of men struggling to adjust to a world in which they are being outcompeted academically by women, and of so-called ‘blue collar’ jobs, once largely held by men, being displaced” (Bush 2022). Most of the recent discourse on the crisis of masculinity, then, is concerned either with the resurgence of machoism and ‘traditional’ forms of masculinity as a reaction to the perceived decline in men’s status and role in society, or with the various sociological symptoms of this decline. Pankaj Mishra, for instance, points to influential figures like Jordan Peterson, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi in arguing that today’s crisis of masculinity is characterised by “luridly retro ideas of what it means to be a strong man” (2018), while Godwin cites various statistics from the Men’s Health Forum, according to whom “men make up 76% of all suicides, 95% of the prison population, 73% of adults who go missing and 87% of rough sleepers” (2018). Similar to Kimmel’s assessment of the crisis of masculinity in the late 1980s, Mishra sees today’s crisis as just the latest manifestation of a long historical shift in gender dynamics which

*began in the 19th century, with the most radical shift in human history: the replacement of agrarian and rural societies by a volatile socio-economic order, which, defined by industrial capitalism, came to be rigidly organised through new sexual and racial divisions of labour. And the crisis seems universal today because a web of restrictive gender norms, spun in modernising western Europe and America, has come to cover the remotest corners of the earth as they undergo their own socio-economic revolutions (2018).*

It is indicative of the scale of this situation and the attention being paid to it that a such a host of books have been published in the last year that grapple with the changing role of men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in an attempt to address this crisis of masculinity (Reinicke 2022, Jablonka 2022, Reeves 2022, Power 2022, Srinivasan 2021). Almost all of these books are concerned with the subject of sexual harassment and view the #MeToo movement as the tipping point in society’s coming to full awareness of the extent of this problem.

These texts are also acutely aware that #MeToo has spawned its own wave of problems and on many counts can be said to have further contributed to masculinity’s crisis. This is in keeping with de Maricourt and Burrell’s (2022) qualitative analysis of the politicisation of masculinity in the wake of the #MeToo movement which surveys expressions of backlash against feminism. Srinivasan also considers the #MeToo with reference to the consequences for men, albeit within a broader abolitionist framework and with particular attention to the racialised outcomes of carceral solutions to harassment. As she puts it: “a feminist politics which sees the punishment of bad men as its primary purpose will never be a feminism that liberates all women, for it obscures what makes most women unfree” (2021). Srinivasan’s argument is that

*once you have started up the carceral machine, you cannot pick and choose whom it will mow down. Feminism’s embrace of carceralism, like it or not, gives progressive cover to a system whose function is to prevent a political reckoning with material inequality [...] feminists must ask what it is they set in motion, and against whom, when they demand more policing and more prisons (2021).*

Anticipating some of these reactions, both Jablonka and Reinicke advocate a reparative politics that works towards the idea that the current crisis can only be solved by approaching an understanding that a ‘good’ man is an ally in the feminist struggle rather than a politics which simply frames men as inherently implicated in the perpetration of systematic harm against women. It is within, and largely as a result of, this fraught political context that the softboy is best understood. As has already been suggested, it is no coincidence that the softboy reached its zenith in the years following the worldwide movement to end sexual harassment and violence against women and the period witnessing the meteoric rise in gay cultural production.

Does it make sense to view the softboy as part of a long term remedy for toxic masculinity? One concern with such an optimistic outlook would be that the widespread uptake of the softboy within society amounts only to a superfluous new form of self-representation that, at best, masquerades as meaningful action—this is the same worry has been considered by Sobande et al. in the context of woke politics more broadly (2022). Another concern would be that the emergence of the softboy—rather like the #MeToo movement itself—might exacerbate the current crisis of masculinity. At the same time, one cannot help but anticipate that the softboy represents a fundamental shift in the relationship between different forms of masculinities that seems to have structured society at least for the past few hundred years. R. W. Connell’s canonical model of a dominant or hegemonic masculinity maintaining its status through the subordination of other forms of masculinity seems less able to capture the nature of the various masculinities defining our contemporary moment. Admittedly, the very question of how to assess such a hierarchy becomes more complicated when society is splintered into different spheres of influence, as it is today. In certain spheres, traditional expressions of masculinity undoubtedly still dominate, yet in other spheres—typically online ones populated mostly with younger people—it is arguably the case that softboy masculinity is currently vying for the dominant position. Yet even this comparison seems only to highlight the limitations of Connell’s model in thinking about how masculinity exists in reality. By analysing the softboy’s initial emergence in online discourse through to his uptake by the celebrity class, this paper has sought to illustrate how, as with so many things, lasting change in the nature of masculinity in society does not always come from individuals enacting change themselves but rather from a more complicated system of capital (in this case the entertainment industry) anticipating demand for certain onscreen content from previously unacknowledged markets; and in turn, this celebrity uptake filtering back down and influential societal trends more broadly. There remains a great deal to consider in the relation between the softboy and contemporary masculinity. For example, the question of the softboy’s being predominantly white must be reckoned with at length.

#### 4. Conclusion

Despite a noticeable turn towards the subject of masculinities within academia, work on understanding the complexities of how it is both fashioned and challenged in contemporary culture is still extremely limited. This paper advocates the softboy as a powerful site of deepening our understanding of masculinities in the contemporary political climate within the context of desires. Whether the emergence of the softboy heralds ‘real change’ in the place of masculinity in the broader social terrain, or whether it is a matter of mere visibility’ will require further analysis.

#### References

- Adamec, C. (2021) “The Rise of Teen Idols Timothée Chalamet & Harry Styles—Destroying Toxic Masculinity”. *Hollywood Insider*. <https://www.hollywoodinsider.com/timothee-chalamet-harry-styles-masculinity/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Benwell, M. (2019) “What is a softboi? You might be dating one – and you don't even know it.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/sep/05/softboi-what-is-it-instagram-q-and-a> [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Bush, S. (2022) “The Masculinity Crisis.” *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/2122af5e-f094-48e8-a9bc-67ca221fbd1>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Connell, R. W. (2005) *Masculinities*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Damshenas, S. (2019) “Timothée Chalamet Responds to Being Called the ‘Straight Prince of Twinks’”. *Gay Times*. <https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/timothee-chalamet-responds-to-being-called-the-straight-prince-of-twinks/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Darnige, C. (2019) “C’est Quoi un Softboy (et pourquoi faut-il l’éviter à tout prix)”. *Cosmopolitan*. <https://www.cosmopolitan.fr/c-est-quoi-un-softboy-et-pourquoi-faut-il-l-eviter-a-tout-prix,2025676.asp>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- David, I. (2019) “The A to Z of Softbois”. *Vice*. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywagbg/guide-a-z-what-is-softboi-softboy>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Dommu, R. (2019) “Timothée Chalamet on Being Hollywood’s Straight Prince of Twinks”. *Out*. [https://www.out.com/film/2019/12/16/timothee-chalamet-being-hollywoods-straight-prince-twinks?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=film](https://www.out.com/film/2019/12/16/timothee-chalamet-being-hollywoods-straight-prince-twinks?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=film). [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- De Maricourt, C. and Burrell, S. R. (2022) “#MeToo or #MenToo? Expressions of Backlash and Masculinity Politics in the #MeToo Era”, *Journal of Men’s Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 49-69.
- Frantz, N. (2020) “Decoding The Viral Soft Boy Aesthetic Of Frank Ocean, Harry Styles Et Al”. *L’Officiel*. <https://www.lofficielsingapore.com/men/decoding-the-viral-soft-boy-aesthetic-of-frank-ocean-harry-styles-et-al>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].

- Gannon, J. (2019) "Move Over, Hard Men: 2019 has been the Summer of the Soft Boy". *The Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/move-over-hard-men-2019-has-been-the-summer-of-the-soft-boy-1.3992963>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Griffiths, J. (2018) Can K-Pop Stars Have Personal Lives? Their Labels aren't so sure. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/21/entertainment/kpop-dating-hyuna-edawn-music-celebrity-intl/index.html>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Halberstam, J. (2005) Shame and White Gay Masculinity. *Social Text*. 23 (3-4), 219-234.
- Hanson, Alan (2015) Have You Encountered the Softboy? *Medium*. <https://humanparts.medium.com/have-you-encountered-the-softboy-7e95e2c7f3e7>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Holmes, J. J. (2021) Apparently Harry Styles & Other "Softboys" are to Blame for Fragile Masculinity. *Into*. <https://www.intomore.com/culture/apparently-harry-styles-softboys-blame-fragile-masculinity/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Holt, B. (2019) Film Showed Women that Softboys are the Emotionally Intelligent Men they Wanted All Along. *Quartz*. <https://qz.com/1772566/film-changed-the-softboy-trend-now-it-fights-toxic-masculinity>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Houston, J. (2018) Softboys: Unpacking the guy that's not like other guys. *The McGill Tribune*. <https://www.mcgilltribune.com/softboys/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Jablonka, I. (2022) A History of Masculinity: From Patriarchy to Gender Justice. Trans. Bracher, N. London, Allen Lane.
- Kimmel, M. S. (1987) The Contemporary "Crisis" of Masculinity in Historical Perspective. In Brod, H. (ed.) *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. Boston, Allen & Unwin, pp. 121-154
- Lemaster, C. (2021) The Rise Of The Soft Boy And The Fall Of Masculinity. *Evie Magazine*. <https://www.eviemagazine.com/post/the-rise-of-the-soft-boy-and-the-fall-of-masculinity>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Lodge, G. (2018) How Gay Cinema is Calling on the Past to Point at a Radical Future. *The Guardian*. <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=How+gay+cinema+is+calling+on+the+past+to+point+at+a+radical+future&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- McHenry, J. (2019) Why Are British Soft Boys Taking Over Netflix? *Vulture*. <https://www.vulture.com/2019/01/british-soft-boys-netflix.html>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- McMeekin, S. and Morgan, L. (2021) 'Harder to spot and infinitely more difficult to get rid of': Why 'Softboys' are the New 'F \*ckboys' of Dating. *Glamour*. <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/what-is-a-softboy>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Nilsson, B. and Lundgren, A. S. (2021) The #MeToo Movement: Men and Masculinity in Swedish News Media. *Journal of Men's Studies*. 29 (1), 8-25.
- Power, N. (2022) *What Do Men Want? Masculinity and its Discontents*, London, Allen Lane.
- Quartz (2021) "Softboys". <https://qz.com/essentials/1964941/softboys/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Reeves, R. V. (2022) *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters and What to Do About It*, London, Swift Press.
- Reinicke, K. (2022) *Men After #MeToo Being an Ally in the Fight Against Sexual Harassment*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robertson, D. (2021) "How the Rise of the 'Softboy' Fueled the Culture Wars." *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/10/24/soft-boy-pop-culture-harry-styles-gender-politics-music-514168>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Ross, A. (2017) "Beware the Softboy, the Most Sinister Type of Fuckboy." *Babe*. <https://babe.net/2017/01/18/softboy-fuckboy-1887>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Rowe, S. (2015) "Move Over Spornosexuals, the 'softboy' is Masculinity's New Favourite Stereotype." *The Telegraph*. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/move-over-spornosexuals-the-softboy-is-masculinitys-new-favourite/>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Sarkisian, J. (2021) "17 Straight Actors Who Were Praised for Playing LGBTQ Characters." *Insider*. <https://www.insider.com/straight-actors-praised-for-playing-lgbtq-characters-gay-queer-pride-2020-5>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Smith, S. (2022) "Beam Me Up Softboi: 'There have always been men like this'". *Dazed*. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56495/1/beam-me-up-softboi-instagram-book-is-this-love-or-dopamine-interview>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Sobande, F., Kanai, A., and Zeng, N. (2022) "The Hypervisibility and Discourses of 'Wokeness' in Digital Culture," *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 44, No. 8, pp. 1576–1587.
- Strapagiel, L. (2019) "Here's Why Boys All Over Social Media Are Proudly Calling Themselves 'Softboys'". *BuzzFeed News*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/laurenstrapagiel/heres-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-history-and>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Tabanera, L. G. (2019) "Meet 5 Softboys From Filipino Movies". *Cosmopolitan*. <https://www.cosmo.ph/entertainment/softboys-filipino-movies-a2520-20190623>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].
- Yotka, S. (2018) "Calling All Softboys: There's a Tender New Trend in Menswear". *Vogue*. <https://www.vogue.com/article/softboy-2018-menswear-trend>. [Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023].