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Hegemonic and Inclusive Masculinities in American and Czech YouTube Vlogs

Abstract

This paper examines discursive means of the construction of hegemonic and inclusive masculinities in American and Czech YouTube vlogs. The vlog is a relatively young new media genre, which has developed primarily in the context of YouTube (the second most visited website and the second highest ranking social media platform in the world) and is a curious object of study as a platform of identity construction. The two types of masculine identities are analyzed in terms of two-level indexicality realized by means of positioning of self and others in the context of YouTube vlogs. The author outlines the most salient strategies of performing the two types of masculinities and shows how differently they are employed by young male Americans and Czechs. The extent and means of constructing these gender identities by Czech and American YouTubers diverge: both masculinities were constructed more prominently in American vlogs, whereas Czech YouTubers exhibited more neutral patterns. Moreover, American vloggers proved to resort to inclusive masculinity considerably more frequently than their Czech counterparts and tended to co-construct the two masculinities in such a way that they appear blended (for instance, by clustering affectionate homosociality with address terms indexical of cool solidarity). In Czech YouTube vlogs, on the other hand, the instances of inclusive masculinity were significantly less abundant and more isolated, which is in line with a less intensive construction of masculine identity in Czech vlogs overall.

Keywords: gender identity, hegemonic masculinity, inclusive masculinity, social media, YouTube, vlog, micro-celebrity, indexicality, positioning

1. Introduction

1.1 The notion of gender identity

The focus of the paper is a comparative study of the discursive means of masculinity construction, specifically two types of masculinities in American and Czech YouTube vlogs. Masculinity studies is one of the branches of gender studies encompassing a wide range of scientific frameworks, including

sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. Post-modern social sciences are investigating gender in the context of social constructionist theory of identity, which posits that gender as an aspect of identity is discursively constructed and is complex, dynamic and context-sensitive. Bucholtz and Hall (2003: 376) define identity as “the product of situated social action” and “an outcome of language” highlighting the principal role of linguistic interaction in identity construction processes. In addition to that, a social constructionist approach dismisses the structuralist idea of a purely dichotomous nature of gender and proposes to explore a wide range of various femininities, masculinities, gay and queer gender identities.

1.2 YouTube vlogs as a platform for gender identity construction

It is especially interesting to explore the discursive construction of gender identities in the context of new media, which transform traditional ways of social interaction and generate new environment for the construction and negotiation of identities (Van Dijck and Poell 2013: 3; Jones et al. 2015: 1-17).

YouTube (sometimes referred to as “post-television” (Dynel 2014: 39)) is the second most popular video sharing platform and a social networking service in the world as well as the most popular social media platform in the U.S. (Global social media ranking 2018, 2019; Hills 2018). YouTube is often referred to as an unprecedented media discourse phenomenon made possible only in the environment of dynamic, interactive and multimodal Web 2.0., the user-generated Internet, as we know it today.

YouTube vlogs are a multimodal hybridized genre of new media, which exhibits the features of a number of genres ranging from informal spontaneous face-to-face interaction to some television genres (such as reality shows, advertising etc.). The parallel between YouTube vlogs and television is often suggested due to key characteristics they share: multimodality, public character and asynchronicity. The content of YouTube vlogs is presented via multiple modes, purposefully uploaded to a video sharing website and made accessible to an infinite number of potential viewers, who (unlike television viewers) can actively participate in the quasi-interaction initiated by the vlogger by evaluating the video or commenting on it.

Early vlogs were typically recorded by a single person in domestic environment by means of a web-cam (Burgess and Green 2009:28) and often exhibited low quality. Nevertheless, due to the rapid technological development as well as the development of users’ digital literacy, present-day vlogs are not limited to featuring a talking head in a bedroom producing a monologue but often present a number of events that happened in the course of the vlogger’s day or a longer period of time and include a wide range of communicative situations in an unlimited number of places, often edited in such a way that the original sequential order of the recorded material is modified and amplified with additional multimodal elements. In addition to that, vlogs are highly hybridized and often incorporate elements of other YouTube genres, such as reactions, pranks, Q&A, challenges, food tasting, gaming etc., embedding them into the main casual “behind the scenes” theme of the video. All of the abovementioned peculiarities of the genre make YouTube vlogs a curious platform for the analysis of the ways gender identities are constructed and negotiated.

Given the drastic differences between Czech and American political histories and current sociocultural environments, it is expected that, on the one hand, the main patterns of gender identity construction as well as the range of gender identities should be divergent, whereas on the other, there should be observed a similar tendency preconditioned by global trends dominant in today’s social media (specifically, YouTube) and globalized popular culture in general.

2. Methodology

The corpus compiled for the analysis of the discursive means of masculinities construction in YouTube vlogs is a collection of transcriptions of personal vlogs recorded and uploaded by top-ranking American and Czech YouTube users featuring elements of quasi-interaction with the viewers and interaction with other participants of the video.

There were selected 5 channels of top white young male heterosexual vloggers from the U.S. and the Czech Republic. The channels' names and popularity rates, as well as the age of the vloggers are presented in Table 1:

American Youtube Channels			Czech Youtube Channels		
Channel name	Subscribers	Age	Channel name	Subscribes	Age
Logan Paul Vlogs	18 102 885	23	MenT	1 256 483	21
Tanner Fox	8 005 526	19	Jirka Král	1 117 832	28
Mark Dohner	2 125 034	25	Kovy	756 032	21
Brennen Taylor	1 973 656	23	Stejk	736 696	26
Sam Golbach	1 047 934	22	Jmenuju Se Martin	563 810	20

Table 1: Basic information about the selected channels of young male heterosexual American and Czech vloggers—channels names, the number of channels subscribers, vloggers' age.

Five vlogs uploaded over the past three years (2015-2018) were randomly selected on each of the channels amounting to 50 vlogs in total (see Appendix A and B), transcribed and re-watched iteratively in order to conduct the analysis of the constructed masculinities. The videos were chosen in thematic vlog playlists, which are usually created by YouTube users on their channels to distinguish them from other types of videos, or on separate vlogging channels. Since nowadays the vlog is a highly hybridized genre incorporating a wide range of other YouTube genres mentioned above (reactions, pranks, Q&A etc.) and featuring a great variety of participants and communicative situations, no further selection is applied to single out the "pure" samples of the genre. The only important criterion was the centrality of unprepared, spontaneous interaction with other participants of the vlog and quasi-interaction with the audience.

The strategies of constructing gender identities in the selected vlogs were explored in terms of the following social constructionist theories:

- 1) Judith Butler's *performativity theory* (1999), challenging the conceptualization of gender as static and pre-given, while suggesting that it is constructed (or performed) in discursive practices;
- 2) Ochs's *indexicality theory* (1992), which refutes the idea of a direct correlation between language forms and gender and posits that indexicality is realized on two levels: first, language forms are associated with particular interactional stances, which in their turn (on the second level) come to be associated with certain social groups typically assuming such stances and positions;
- 3) Davies and Harré's *positioning theory* (1990), which highlights the complex and dynamic process of constituting speakers and hearers in discursive practices via foregrounding what is interpreted as relevant in the context.

Thus, gender identity is seen as discursively constructed and is analyzed in terms of two-level indexicality, realized by means of positioning of self and others in discursive practices.

As was pointed out earlier, in post-structuralist social sciences, gender identities are primarily looked at not as a strict dichotomy of masculinity and femininity, but as a spectrum, as a multiplicity of identities some of which can be constructed simultaneously or overlap in seemingly inconsistent ways. This paper focuses on two types of masculine gender identity, namely hegemonic masculinity and inclusive masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is the cornerstone of gender and masculinity studies and refers to the most dominant traditional “patriarchal” type of masculinity in American and European societies, characterized by whiteness, heterosexuality, homophobia, homophobia (the fear of being perceived as gay by others), rationality, emotional restraint as well as misogyny and racism. *Inclusive masculinity*, on the other hand, is a relatively recent concept referring to an alternative masculine identity mostly constructed by contemporary young men (Millennials and Post-Millennials). It is described as soft and attenuated (Roberts 2013: 672), eschewing homophobia, homophobia, misogyny and embracing emotional intimacy and once-feminized artefacts, thus undermining hegemonic masculinity. It is important to mention that hegemonic and inclusive masculinities are so-called large identities, which function as the background for small, situational micro-identities, which include other types of masculinities related to specific context.

According to recent research, American male YouTube gamers (Morris & Anderson 2015: 1212) and British male vloggers (Maloney et al. 2018: 1710) tend to actively co-construct the two types of masculinities. The aim of the analysis was to verify the accuracy of these findings for American male vloggers and examine the extent to which hegemonic and inclusive masculinities are constructed by Czech male vloggers.

The identities constructed in the vlogs were analysed at the first and second *levels of communication on YouTube* (Dyrel 2014: 40-45):

- 1) the level of interaction in the video (between the vlogger and other individuals); and
- 2) the level of interaction between the vlogger and the audience (also called “mediated quasi-interaction” due to the spatial and temporal gap between the utterer and the interpreters (Dyrel 2014: 37; Chovanec 2010: 235 and Talbot 2007: 83).

The level of written comments was not taken into account.

The analysis focused on the identification of salient linguistic and multimodal clusters of features indexing the categories having semiotic associations with the two types of masculinities, as is summarized in Table 2:

The study was based on the following hypotheses:

- 1) Similarly to American YouTube gamers, American vloggers are expected to co-construct hegemonic and inclusive masculinities;
- 2) There should be observed similar tendencies in constructing the two types of masculinities in American and Czech vlogs (due to global trends in social media and popular culture);
- 3) The main patterns of masculinities construction in American & Czech vlogs should be divergent (due to different political histories and sociocultural environments).

Hegemonic Masculinity	Inclusive Masculinity
Heterosexuality Homophobia and homophobia Misogynistic attitudes Emotional restraint Aggressive behaviour	Eschewing homophobia and homophobia: Affectionate homosociality Ironic heterosexual recuperation (positioning self and others as homosexuals in order to affirm one's heterosexuality)

Table 2: sociological categories associated with the construction of hegemonic and inclusive masculinities.

3. Results

The analysis proved the relevance of the previously mentioned research on British vloggers and American gamers for American vloggers: all of them actively resorted to parallel co-construction of both hegemonic and inclusive masculinities. In addition to that, both types of masculinities constructed by top-ranking American male vloggers proved to be articulated in a much more prominent manner than those of Czech male vloggers. The discursive strategies used by both groups are discussed below.

3.1.1. Hegemonic masculinity in American vlogs

According to the analysis results, American YouTubers (especially those with the highest number of subscribers—Logan Paul and Mark Dohner) resorted to the performance of highly stereotypical hegemonic masculinity in 22 out of 25 vlogs; the construction of this type of gender identity mostly relied on the following strategies:

- 1) self-positioning as powerful heterosexual males via positioning women as an object of their sexual interest (“I know *my girls* like wine so I said put a cellar in the house!” or “Yo Blue [*dog*] is gonna get me so many girls”) or projecting femininity onto cars and digital devices, which are stereotypically seen as an area of men’s interest (“It’s kinda *sexy*” referring to speakers or “*my baby*” referring to a car);
- 2) self-positioning as emotionally detached and reckless indirectly indexing young careless and energetic masculinity by using legal discourse in potentially dangerous situations to create a humorous effect (“It’s a liability. Sign the waiver.” repeatedly uttered by Logan Paul and other males in a number of his vlogs in a careless and sarcastic manner when engaged in potentially dangerous activities, such as riding a bike on a steep roof).

3.1.2. Hegemonic masculinity in Czech vlogs

Hegemonic masculinity constructed by the Czech vloggers appeared much more reserved and neutral: it was detected only in 4 vlogs and was mostly indexed by emotionally detached joviality and the communicative situations involving self-positioning and positioning of others as having expertise in cars and software by means of using characteristic vocabulary clustered with evaluative adjectives and interjections (“Tady ta M dvojka—ty krá:::so wow:::” (That M2 model—wow!) referring to a car or “Erik to

zvladl na vybornou! Dobra zatáčka!” (*Erik handled it perfectly! Good turn!*) as a comment on a friend’s skill in driving in Jirka Král’s vlogs).

No allusions to misogyny or homophobia were detected in any of the vlogs.

3.2.1 Inclusive masculinity in American vlogs

The extent to which inclusive masculinity was constructed in American vlogs turned out even more curious. Elements of inclusive masculinity were obvious in 20 out of 25 American vlogs; micro-celebrities openly and readily resorted to the following discursive strategies:

- 1) affectionate homosociality by using emotionally expressive affectionate language addressing other males, which explicitly indexed emotional intimacy (“*Bro, I love you*”, “*I missed you Evan!—I missed you too!*”);
- 2) ironic heterosexual recuperation by means of positioning self and others as homosexuals in order to affirm their heterosexuality, which is achieved via sexually suggestive language (“*I’ve never touched men’s hands like this before! I’m getting excited!*”, “*I want your fingerprints on my body*”) and other para—and extra-linguistic means such as prosody, timbre and pitch, moaning, gaze and even kisses.

3.2.2 Inclusive masculinity in Czech vlogs

Czech vloggers, as was expected, were considerably less prone to constructing inclusive masculinity (it was spotted only in 3 vlogs): there were no uses of language indicative of affectionate homosociality and only three instances of ironic heterosexual recuperation based on self-positioning as gay (“*A soutěž o nejvíc gay café vyhrává... ja:*” (*and the winner of the gayest coffee contest is... me*)) and involving other males in positioning as homosexuals (“*Já si jdu dát páru.—A já si jdu dát tebe.—[lowering pitch] ... prosím, dej si mě [moving with his hips imitating a sexual intercourse]*” (*I’m going to take a sauna.—And I am going to take you.—[lowering pitch] Please, take me. [moving with his hips imitating a sexual intercourse]*)).

4. Discussion

In all the instances in both American and Czech vlogs all the elements of inclusive masculinity were accompanied by linguistic and non-linguistic means of creating a humorous effect. At the same time, whereas in Czech vlogs the rare instances of inclusive masculinity naturally co-exist with the dominant context of hegemonic masculinity, in American vlogs inclusive masculinity is practically infused with hegemonic masculinity: almost every instance of affectionate homosociality or positioning as gay is clustered with elements indexical of heteronormativity such as forms of address “bro” and “dude”.

The analysis findings prove the abovementioned hypothesis that, firstly, American YouTube vloggers co-construct and blend hegemonic and inclusive masculinities; secondly both American and Czech vloggers exhibit similar tendencies resorting to the performance of trendy inclusive masculinity; finally, the extent and means of constructing masculinities by American and Czech vloggers diverge: American masculinities are considerably more salient and much more extensively performed, whereas Czech masculinities are noticeably more neutral and employ less diverse and fewer means.

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APPENDIX A—American vlogs

Logan Paul Vlogs	WE GOT A NEW ROOMMATE IN THE MAVERICK HOUSE! (Published on 23 Oct 2017)
	I JUST BOUGHT A PUPPY! **not clickbait** (Published on 8 May 2017)
	FALLING IN LOVE WITH MY ROMMATE... (Published on 20 Mar 2018)
	THE WORLD WASN'T MADE FOR HIM... (Published on 5 Sep 2017)
	KSI RECEIVED HIS MAVERICK MERCH AND HE'S IN THE LOGANG! (Published on 21 Mar 2018)
Tanner Fox	700HP GTR VS TESLA P100D STREET RACE! (Published on 13 Aug 2017)
	Webisode 9: He will NEVER be a FATHER after this... (OMG)(Published on 13 Aug 2017)
	OUR NEW \$15,000,000 MANSION!! *EXCLUSIVE TOUR* (Published on 13 Jul 2018)
	this RUINED the tour... (Published on 10 Jan 2018)
	DON'T PLAY WITH GUNS! (Published on 10 Jan 2018)

Mark Dohner	REACTIONS! THIS MAGIC TRICK WILL BLOW YOUR MIND! (Published on 10 Sep 2017)
	REAL LIFE FRUIT NINJA VS EMOJI FRUITS! *Dangerous Mess* (Published on 12 Dec 2017)
	MY FRIENDS TOLD ME NOT TO DO IT! 25 ft JUMP into 6ft POOL! (Published on 22 May 2017)
	Our NEW HOUSE Tour! *EXCLUSIVE LOOK* (Published on 5 Jun 2018)
	Meet Our NEW ROOMMATE! You'll NEVER GUESS Who! (Published on 22 May 2017)
Brennen Taylor	WHO DID THIS TO MY CAR?!?! WTF! (Published on 22 Nov 2016)
	WE SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE THIS!! (Published on 27 Nov 2016)
	Our big secret revealed... Don't hate us... :((Published on 4 Dec 2016)
	GOODBYE FOR NOW... (Published on 21 Dec 2016)
	I GRABBED HIS... ??? (Published on 11 Jan 2017)
Sam Golbach	LIVING IN MY NEW HOUSE IS HORRYFYING (Published on 3 Mar 2017)
	LOST IN A DESERT (Published on 30 Mar 2017)
	WAKING ROOMMATE UP IN A POOL PRANK WARS (Published on 12 Apr 2017)
	EXPLORING FLOODED CAVES IN NEW ZEALAND (Published on 17 Mar 2017)
	"CASH ME OUTSIDE" OFFICIAL DANCE VIDEO!! (Published on 10 Feb 2017)

APPENDIX B—Czech vlogs

MenT	Hong Kong Adventure! #2 – Hondě schodů! (Published on 16 Dec 21015)
	Hong Kong Adventure! #4 – Taipei adventure? (Published on 21 Dec 2015)
	Hong Kong Adventure! #6 – Las Vegas i Benátky za den? (Published on 6 Jan 2016)
	Hong Kong Adventure! #7 – Chillujem, tak ako chcem (Published on 15 Jan 2016)
	Hong Kong Adventure! #5 (Published on 25 Dec 2015)
Jirka Král	Nové auto – výlet do Maďarska s Erikem [VLOG-] (Published on 19 Sep 2017)
	Výlet za MenTem – Koupil jsem si Yeezy [VLOG] (Published on 5 Feb 2018)
	Na nákupu s trenérem a nová spolupráce s LEGEM [VLOG] (Published on 2 Mar 2018)
	IEM KATOWICE – Nejlepší finále CS:GO [VLOG] (Published on 7 Mar 2018)
	Prěkvapení pro Expl0iteda – Liga Mistrů [vlog] (Published on 29 Apr 2018)
Kovy	Týden v Japonsku w/MenT KOVY (Published on 12 Dec 2016)
	USA TRIP – Začínáme w/Martin, Pedro, House KOVY (Published on 19 Jun 2016)
	USA TRIP #2 – Umím létat! w/Martin, House, Pedro KOVY (Published on 26 Jun 2016)
	USA TRIP #3 – Medvěd a a vykradené auto KOVY (Published on 10 Jul 2016)
	USA TRIP #4 – New York a konec výletu KOVY (Published on 20 Jul 2016)
Stejk	ORGIE NA UTUBERINU /Vadak, Kovy... (Published on 3 May 2018)
	MYSLÍ SI ŽE NÁS PRANKUJE – WEEK #101 (Published on 14 Apr 2018)
	V PEVNOSTI S YOUTUBERAMA WEEK #99 (Published on 31 Mar 2018)
	SOUBOJ GLADIÁTORŮ – WEEK #87 (Published on 6 Jan 2018)
	MOJE PRVNÍ TETOVÁNÍ NA TÁBOŘE – WEEK #62 (Published on 15 Jul 2017)
Jmenuju Se Martin	Skočil Jsem Z Letadla! – USA TRIP #3 Martin (Published on 20 Jun 2016)
	USA TRIP #2 – Poprvé Na Surf! Martin (Published on 22 Jun 2016)
	PRVNÍ TŘÍDOU DO RIA! Martin (Published on 16 Dec 2017)
	USA TRIP #4 – VidCon & Výhra 1000\$ V Las Vegas! Martin (Published on 30 Jun 2016)
	USA TRIP #1 – Přílet Do Los Angeles! Martin & Youtubeři (Published on 19 Jun 2016)