

“SO TODAY I WANT TO TALK TO YOU GUYS ABOUT
SOMETHING”:

Coming out videos and the stance features of YouTube
celebrity-fan relationships

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Tiivistelmä - Abstract <p>YouTube kasvattaa jatkuvasti suosiotaan viihdepalveluna ja on tuonut suosituimmille sisällöntuottajille eli 'tubettajille' myös laajaa julkisuutta. YouTube-julkisuutta ei ole kuitenkaan ilmiönä tutkittu vielä kovinkaan paljon, ja erityisesti YouTube-videoiden multimodaaliset piirteet ovat jääneet toistaiseksi tutkimushuomion ulkopuolelle. Videopalvelussa on myös huomattava queer-edustus, ja seksuaalivähemmistöjen videotuotantoja onkin tutkittu jo jonkin verran lähinnä sosiologisesta näkökulmasta käsin.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia kielitieteellisen stance-käsitteen avulla, miten suositut tubettajat asennoituvat videoissaan yleisöään ja fanejaan kohtaan. Tutkimusaineistona on käytetty viiden suosituksen englanninkielisen tubettajan 'coming out' eli 'kaapista ulostulo' -videoita. Tavoitteena on selvittää multimodaalisen diskurssintutkimuksen keinoja käyttäen, millaisia asenteita faneja kohtaan näillä videoilla esiintyy ja minkälaisia merkityksiä näillä asenteilla on näiden digitaalisen median kuuluisuuksien ja heidän faniensa väliselle suhteelle.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksena ilmeni viisi erilaista asennetyyppiä, joita rakennettiin multimodaalisin keinoin ja jotka ilmensivät tubettajien erityislaatuista fanisuhdetta. Erityisen yleisiä olivat ystävälliset ja tunnepitoiset asenteet, joilla rakennettiin intiimiä ja henkilökohtaiselta tuntuva suhdetta yleisöön. Tyypillinen oli myös aitoutta korostava asenne, jossa tubettajat painottivat esiintyvänsä faneille täysin rehellisinä ja aitoina omina itsenään. Tubettajien fanisuhteen todettiin olevan poikkeuksellinen perinteisen median kuuluisuuksiin verrattuna, mutta sen havaittiin myös ilmentävän yleisempiä sosiaalisen median julkisuuden haasteita, kuten painetta säilyttää somen välityksellä välitön ja intiimi yhteys faneihin.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

It comes as no surprise to anyone following current trends in digital media that YouTube celebrities are gaining momentum. Video bloggers or ‘vloggers’ on the popular video-sharing site, established little more than a decade ago, have transitioned from micro-celebrities to big names. YouTubers’ celebrity status now often extends to the offline world, evidenced by conventional markers of fame, such as book deals and talk show appearances (Robehmed 2015). A survey commissioned by Variety (Ault 2014) found that among U.S. teens, YouTube stars are now more popular than many mainstream celebrities, such as musicians and actors.

There are several explanatory factors behind the rapid rise of YouTube celebrities. Firstly, with the YouTube Partner Program, which was launched in 2007 (Biggs 2007), creators are able to monetize their videos and gain advertisement revenue in exchange for video views (YouTube Partner Program Overview 2017). This has meant that being a video blogger or content creator on YouTube is now a viable career. Secondly, as entertainment consumption habits have rapidly shifted from more traditional media to the online realm, YouTube has become an accessible new entertainment platform.

YouTube stardom may follow from various types of talents that YouTubers possess. Notably, however, creators may acquire million-wide audiences without possessing any special skills at all. Many YouTubers, especially of the vlogger variety, are simply in the ‘business of being themselves’. Researchers who have examined vloggers’ claims to fame (see e.g. Marwick 2015; Jerslev 2016) have noted that processes of ‘self-celebrification’ and creating a sense of intimacy between vlogger and audience are among the features that make a successful vlogger.

YouTube has a fairly established presence of queer video bloggers and creators. Some popular queer creators, such as Matthew Lush or Tyler Oakley, have enjoyed popularity on the site from as early as 2006 or 2007. As a social media platform, YouTube has aided in promoting visibility and resources for LGBT+ youth. A particularly salient genre on YouTube is the so-called ‘coming out video’ (Alexander and Losh 2010), where YouTube creators directly come out as LGBT+ to their audience,

or, already being out to their audience, discuss their real-life coming out experiences. Coming out videos often reach wide audiences beyond the queer community, and at times even become viral hits. For example, YouTube beauty guru Ingrid Nilsen's emotional coming out video has been viewed a total of over 17 million times.

Coming out videos are a new way for LGBT+ YouTubers to perform the task of disclosing their sexual and/or gender identities. The creators of coming out videos often also have secondary goals of gaining visibility and providing support for the LGBT+ community. This social responsibility is especially underlined when prominent YouTubers with million-wide audiences come out in video form. Navigating the choice to come out and the process of doing so creates unique new challenges for these digital media celebrities.

My research aims to study the unique features of the modern online celebrity-fan relationship, as viewed through the intimate lens of YouTube stars' coming out videos. The videos I will study feature prominent YouTube video bloggers announcing their LGBT+ status directly to their audience. I am particularly interested in studying the stances expressed in these videos in order to examine how the videos reflect YouTubers' unique relationship with their fans. In my study, I will employ multimodal discourse analytic tools to examine the videos' various features.

The processes of stance-taking, or positioning oneself through communicative means, have been studied quite extensively. So far, these studies have mostly paid attention to the linguistic processes of stance-taking, while ignoring embodied practices or modalities other than language. As communication has been proven to be a process that extensively utilizes many modalities, it is also worthwhile to expand the research focus on stance into multimodal directions. This is especially the case with emotionally-loaded communication situations, such as that of coming out, where the high stakes of the communication call for carefully constructed discourse strategies. I wish to include these multimodal aspects of stance-taking in my study.

Coming out videos on YouTube have received increasing research interest in the past several years (see e.g. Alexander and Losh 2010, Craig and McInroy 2014, Wuest 2014,

Kleitsch et al. 2015, Barbee 2015). However, many of these studies have utilized a sociological focus, studying the implications of coming out videos for the queer community. The particular features of online celebrity-fan relationships that have made coming out videos such a prominent genre have not yet been studied. I wish to start filling this particular gap in research with my study.

Coming out videos, especially when made by established YouTube stars with large fan bases, make an intriguing object of study and raise several questions. What motivates YouTube vloggers to come out to their audience, and how are these motivations expressed? What kind of stance do vloggers negotiate towards their audience in coming out videos? How does this stance utilized in the “live act of coming out” (Barbee 2015) differ from more traditional forms of coming out, such as coming out to one’s parents? And finally, how do YouTube stars’ coming out videos reflect the features of modern, online celebrity-fan relationships? These are questions that I seek to answer with my study.

The findings of this study may have broader applications for studying the features of YouTube celebrity culture, which is a prominent new phenomenon in social media research. Additionally, as the online realm is rapidly moving away from solely text-based discourse and becoming more multimodal, there is a great need for multimodally-focused studies on online culture, which take into account the visual and dynamic features of online communication. Studying video data, such as YouTube videos, enriches the field of digital media research with new applications for time-tested concepts and theories.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will highlight some fields of research that are of relevance to my study. I will also present some examples of studies that have been carried out in these fields, as far as their findings relate to my research. Theoretical concepts and terms will also be clarified. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the history of the YouTube platform and explain some of the inner workings of *vlogging*.

Secondly, I will examine the concepts of *celebrity* and *fan*. I will also highlight the shift from so-called 'traditional' celebrity culture, which centers around traditional media such as music and film, to the newer forms of celebrity culture that are emerging on digital media. I will peruse the phenomenon of the *YouTube celebrity* further, looking at some unique features of this type of celebrity.

Thirdly, I will take a look at the social phenomenon of *coming out*. In this area, too, I will first focus on the history of the phenomenon, and later delve into examining its new digital media forms, such as coming out on YouTube.

The final section of this chapter will focus on presenting two linguistic terms that will be utilized throughout this study as methods and working concepts. The first of these is *multimodal discourse analysis*, a special subsection of discourse analysis. The second is the concept of *stance*, which has been used in many different linguistic fields to examine a speaker or writer's attitude or positioning.

2.1 YouTube as a platform

YouTube was created as a simple video-sharing platform in 2005. In the past decade, the popularity of the site has grown exponentially, and it is now estimated that in the U.S., YouTube reaches more 18-49-year-olds than any broadcast or cable network (YouTube for Press 2017). Similar findings have been recorded in many other countries; in Finland, YouTube reaches at least 73 percent of 18-74-year-olds (Digipeople 2013). Mimicking television terminology, YouTubers' home pages are commonly called *channels*. Fans of particular creators can *subscribe* to their channel, so that they immediately get notified of any new content. Subscription numbers are a usable indicator of a particular creator's popularity on the site.

Table 1. The 10 most subscribed YouTubers. (Figures from December 16, 2017.) Only channels run by individuals are included; other types of popular channels include e.g. music channels run by record labels.

Channel name	Country of origin	Content type	Number of subscribers (to the closest million)
PewDiePie	Sweden	Comedy	58 000 000
HolaSoyGerman	Chile	Entertainment	32 000 000
elrubiusOMG	Spain	Comedy	26 000 000
whinderssonnunes	Brazil	Comedy	25 000 000
Fernanfloo	El Salvador	Games	25 000 000
Dude Perfect	USA	Entertainment	24 000 000
Smosh	USA	Comedy	22 000 000
VanossGaming	Canada	Games	21 000 000
nigahiga	USA	Entertainment	20 000 000
Yuya	Mexico	Beauty	19 000 000

As YouTube's popularity has grown, so has the level of professional production. In the early days of YouTube, video production was an amateur undertaking. Videos were simply filmed and then uploaded onto a channel. Even early YouTube 'partners', people who received income from advertisement revenue for making videos, were independent creators. In the modern YouTube era, however, creators with large followings often get signed onto a *network*, which represents and assists the creator in exchange for a percentage of the ad revenue. YouTubers signed onto networks gain many benefits, including access to professional production facilities, which can help create more professional content. This professionalism extends not only to videos, but also to the lives of YouTube content creators. Professional video bloggers, for example, are now a common feature of YouTube, with dozens of vloggers with million-wide audiences and formidable salaries. (MCN overview for YouTube Creators 2017.)

Video blogging or *vlogging* has been a YouTube phenomenon since the site's inception in 2005. Vlogging is a diary-like video format, in which vloggers typically sit in front of a camera and express opinions or describe events from their daily lives. In the early days of YouTube, vlogging was often done with the use of stationary web cameras attached to the tops of computer screens or integrated into laptops. With the

advancement of easily portable camera technology, vlogs now also frequently include dynamic footage from vloggers' daily lives, such as depictions of errands or travels. Stationary vlogging has remained a popular format, however.



Figure 1. Video blogger Casey Neistat. The popular Neistat is known for taking his camera and vlogging wherever he goes. Here, he is vlogging from an airplane.

The content on YouTube has always been diverse, carrying a wide range of genres from home videos to sketch shows. *Coming out videos* had become a phenomenon on YouTube by as early as 2009 (Alexander and Losh 2010: 23). The videos were found to feature recurring elements: “young gay person discovers his/her difference, or the ‘truth’ about him/herself at an early age, struggles with telling close friends and family, finds various levels of acceptance and rejection, accommodates accordingly, and learns to love his/her life” (Alexander and Losh 2010: 26). These recurring conventions identified the coming out video as a formidable genre of its own. This genre will be elaborated on in a later section.

2.2 Celebrity culture

2.2.1 Celebrities and fans

A central concept for this study is the notion of a *celebrity*. Marshall (1997: ix) muses on the topic as follows:

In the public sphere, a cluster of individuals are given greater presence and a wider scope of activity and agency than are those who make up the rest of the population. They are allowed to

move on the public stage while the rest of us watch. They are allowed to express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the members of the population are constructed as demographic aggregates. We tend to call these overtly public individuals celebrities.

Marshall points out that a prerequisite for the system of celebrity is that celebrities have a certain amount of power, including discursive power: “[...] within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channeled into the media systems as being legitimately significant” (Marshall 1997: x). According to Marshall, the phenomenon of celebrity also contains a tension between authenticity and falsehood: between the actual living, breathing person and the media image that they both possess and project. In the traditional Western media landscape, and especially its American sub-variety, these media images are often carefully constructed and managed by personnel that work for the celebrity. Among these image cultivators are employees such as agents, managers and publicists.

The notion of celebrity divides the populace into two sub-groups, those who are famous and those who are not. However, there is also a third group that is necessary for the continuation of celebrity culture: *fans*, the individuals who idolize certain celebrities. *Fan studies* and fan culture are phenomena that have traveled from traditional media, such as music and television, to the wide online realm in the digital age. The internet provides spaces to practice the admiration of traditional celebrities such as movie stars, but it has also increasingly become a medium for creating celebrities itself. Bloggers and YouTube stars are some of the new online forms of celebrity.

Being a fan evokes varied connotations. Jenson (1992: 9) has described the unfortunately-commonplace imagery of fans as fanatics and hysterics, their behavior commonly depicted as bordering on pathological. However, recent fan studies increasingly focus on the phenomenon of *participatory culture* (Jenkins 2006: 2), in which fans actively and creatively engage in order to produce art, entertainment, and other types of original content about the people or things they are fans of. Especially with the rise of the internet, which contains visible and creative expressions of fan culture, fans are no longer solely depicted as passive consumers ‘eating up’ entertainment (Jenkins 2006: 1).

Burgess and Green (2009) have studied YouTube as a site of this participatory culture. YouTube is indeed a massive repository for fan-made content, such as 'fanvids' (which are music videos made from television or movie scenes), reviews, and comedy spoofs. Despite being dominated by the presence of fans, YouTube is increasingly also becoming a site for new media celebrities, 'YouTubers', to be born. The phenomenon of professional YouTubers will be elaborated on in the upcoming sections.

The medium of the internet has indubitably also changed the face of celebrity-fan relationships. Twitter, for example, has become a channel to get direct updates from celebrities about their lives. It also allows for direct communication between celebrities and fans, a phenomenon that was less easily facilitated before the age of the internet. Bloggers and YouTubers often communicate with fans through comment sections. The traditionally unilateral relationship between celebrity and fan – where the fan, as the subject, engages in unrequited worship towards the celebrity object – has turned on its head. Celebrity-fan relationships are becoming ever more dialogical.

2.2.2 The shifting celebrity culture

The incredible reach of social media in the current age is enabling more and more people to pursue behaviors of attention-seeking and validation online. In an age where a two-minute video about a young boy's post-dentist-visit ramblings can lead to instant worldwide fame (referring to the viral David After Dentist video of 2009), it is fair to say that celebrity status is more attainable to the average person than ever before. According to Marwick (2015), social media has given rise to the phenomenon of micro-celebrity. *Micro-celebrity* is a term first coined by Theresa M. Senft in 2001 (Senft 2013: 346). It can be defined as a set of practices, usually taking place in the context of social media, in which "the audience is constructed as a fan base, popularity is maintained through ongoing fan management, and self-presentation is carefully assembled to be consumed by others" (Marwick 2015: 6). Marwick elaborates that micro-celebrity is also what one does rather than merely what one is.

While micro-celebrity personas can sometimes be carefully constructed, there is an expectation from the part of their audience of *authenticity*. This authenticity and ‘realness’ is, indeed, often part of what appeals to people about social media celebrities, such as YouTube stars. Celebrities without extensive PR and management teams polishing up their image are perceived as easier to relate to: they are just ‘being themselves’, albeit in an interesting and consumable fashion (Marwick 2015: 17).

Another feature of new celebrity practices is the increased focus on the private life – not only by external forces, but by the micro-celebrities themselves. Jerslev (2016: 5239) elaborates on this:

Contemporary celebrity practices favor performances of the private, and this might be the most important change to have taken place in “the game of celebrity” (Senft, 2013, p. 350). Negotiations and tensions between celebrities, fans, and media regarding access to stars’ private lives have constituted the core of celebrity logic since the beginning of the 20th century, coincident with the rise of the star system. [...] Around 2000, reality television profoundly changed the relationship between the mediated private and public and created celebrities through seemingly unlimited exposure of the intimate and private. In the present media landscape, the “‘star system’ of YouTube” (Burgess & Green, 2009b, p. 24) is one important field in which this blurring of boundaries between the private and the public characteristic of not only celebrity culture but also contemporary media culture as a whole is played out – to the extent that Andreas Kitzmann, already in 2003, talked about “the online collapse of the public/private divide” (p. 58). Attention-creating performances of a private authentic self are the most valuable commodity in social media celebrification.

Marwick (2015) presents the YouTuber Miranda Sings as a case study of micro-celebrity. Her findings indicate that Sings does, indeed, utilize micro-celebrity practices in her YouTube career. What makes Marwick’s examination of Sings somewhat lacking is that Sings, who currently has over eight million subscribers on YouTube, and who has led national tours and appeared on talk shows, does not quite seem to embody the term ‘micro-celebrity’ any longer. Indeed, this is the case with many originally niche YouTube stars, who have since exploded into million-wide audiences and major recognition. With the success of the YouTube platform and its stars, many YouTubers have ‘gone mainstream’, and can now demonstrably be called actual celebrities.

The line between the traditional celebrity and the so-called online celebrity has also noticeably blurred in recent years. Celebrities tend to engage in similar social media practices regardless of their origin: they often have Instagram and Twitter accounts,

communicate extensively with their fans through social media, and build their brand online as well as offline. Marwick and Boyd (2011: 143) have studied the celebrity practices of traditional celebrities on Twitter. They found several recurring practices that celebrities use to maintain fan relationships. For example, *affiliation* is the process of performing a connection between celebrities and fans using affiliative language. *Intimacy* involves celebrities creating a sense of closeness and familiarity between themselves and their followers. *Authenticity and sincerity* include open displays of hidden inner lives, as well as an extreme sense of honesty.

Expanding on these various practices, Marwick and Boyd note (2011: 156) that modern celebrities must expend significant emotional labor in order to maintain a sense of connectedness with their fans (or, rather, the *impression* of connectedness). This labor is very similar to the celebrification practices used by so-called micro-celebrities. It is for these reasons that I would suggest that micro-celebrities are often better understood simply as celebrities.

2.2.3 The YouTube celebrity

With the increasing influence of YouTubers, research interest is beginning to pour into the platform. The video-sharing site is beginning to challenge traditional media in popularity, and the prevailing question that underpins much of the research on YouTube seems to be “Why are these YouTubers so popular?”. After all, many YouTubers do not possess any special skills, such as musical talent or acting skills, which are traditionally associated with fame. They are simply in the business of being themselves on camera; and for a select few, fame follows.

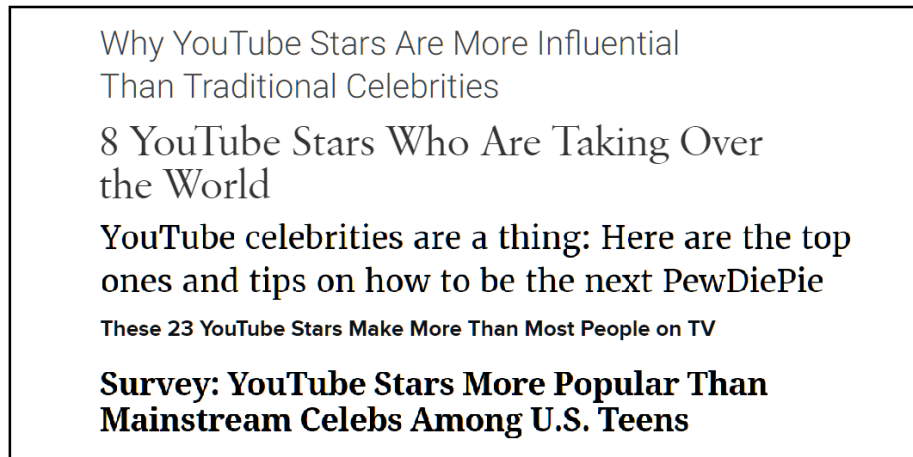


Figure 2. YouTube stars in the media. The rise of YouTube stardom has been a popular topic, as these headlines highlight.

Some answers to this question may lie in the communication practices that YouTubers use. Jerslev (2016: 5233) has studied the popular YouTube beauty guru Zoella and the way she interacts with her audience. Firstly, Jerslev found that Zoella gives her followers “the impression of connectedness” by talking directly to the camera and addressing her viewers directly. Zoella was also found to utilize many communication practices typically reserved for friends, such as confessional-style talk, expressions of affection, and soliciting advice. “She may seek immediate advice by asking her audience whether a pair of trousers is okay on her, as if all her followers were her girlfriends”, Jerslev (2016: 5242) notes. She also found that Zoella often communicates “a sense of equality with her audience” by, for example, stating that she is not an expert, but simply an amateur who wants to share beauty advice. Zoella is also keen to include her viewers in her everyday life through her “Day in the Life” vlogs, where she takes her camera wherever she goes – even to bed.

All of these examples seem to demonstrate one key feature of YouTube vlogs: a sort of ‘glamorization’ of the private sphere. While Zoella is hailed as a ‘beauty guru’, viewers seem most interested in the inner workings of her private life, including her home life and her relationship with her boyfriend. YouTubers may indeed differ from e.g. movie stars in that they are not in the business of fighting off intrusive paparazzi spying on their personal lives; in fact, YouTubers often happily and willingly provide these candid video shots for their fans themselves.

Another feature that is tied hand-in-hand with this glamorization of the private sphere is a type of mediated intimacy that many YouTubers utilize. While YouTubers never meet the majority of their viewers in person, many of them are keen to provide an illusion of in-person contact. Many of Jerslev's examples of Zoella illustrate how she includes her viewers in her life and addresses them as if they were her closest friends. *Parasocial relationships*, one-sided relationships with celebrities which may feel like real friendships, have long been an interest in celebrity research (Horton and Wohl 1956, in Marwick and Boyd 2011: 144); however, YouTubers seem to encourage the birth of these kinds of relationships to a unique degree. This is an important implication for my study as well: acts of coming out have traditionally been reserved for family and friends, so it may be that this perceived intimacy with fans enables YouTubers to come out even when they do not personally know most of their audience.

2.3 Coming out

2.3.1 The coming out process

Coming out is traditionally understood as the process by which an individual discloses their non-heterosexual sexual orientation (and more recently, non-cisgender gender identity) to their family, friends, or acquaintances. Because individuals' social circles rarely encompass only one person or group, coming out tends to indeed be more of a process, rather than a single event. Coming out is a social process fraught with tension that stems from the stigma that has been traditionally associated with homosexuality and other differing sexual orientations. With the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in the Western world, however, the stigma has greatly lessened in recent years. Marriage equality laws, such as the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to allow same-sex marriage throughout the U.S. in 2015, and a similar law taking place in Finland in 2017, are one sign of the enormous shift in attitude.

The rise of the digital age has also provided mitigating factors for the coming out process. In as early as 1998, McKenna and Bargh conducted a social psychological

study titled “Coming out in the age of the Internet: Identity “demarginalization” through virtual group participation”. Even in these early days of the internet, McKenna and Bargh concluded that participation in internet newsgroups that centered on marginalized sexual identities led to greater self-acceptance. Participation in these groups also often led members to begin the process of coming out offline. Similar studies have also been carried out more recently (see e.g. Craig and McInroy 2013) with comparable results: the findings indicate that exploring sexual identities online often increases individuals’ self-acceptance and aids them in their real-life coming out process.

Barbee (2015: 14) notes that with the tensions that often accompany it, coming out should be seen as an interactional accomplishment:

It is this “taken-for granted” nature of heterosexuality, or heterosexism, the privileging of heterosexuality as normal and natural (Kitzinger, 2005), that makes the announcement of one’s homosexuality or one’s status as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming such a marked if not daunting task. For this reason, one simply cannot escape the fact that normative heterosexuality “constitutes a backdrop against which to analyze the strategies of LGBT people both in concealing their identities and in making them – or allowing them to become – apparent” (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 224). If we lived in a world where sexual minorities were as accepted – were not as stigmatized – as heterosexuals, coming out would not be an issue. However, because of the marked nature of homosexuality, for one to come out under the umbrella of heterosexism, strategies must be implemented if it is to be done as a part of interaction.

In his own study of a son coming out to his father via a phone call, Barbee witnesses some of these interactional strategies. Strategies include so-called pre-announcements to prepare the hearer (e.g. “I have something to tell you”), as well as framing the announcement as bad news to mitigate a potential negative response (Barbee 2015: 18). These strategies underline the emotional weight that can accompany the task of coming out.

While coming out is often a private affair reserved for a small group of close individuals, occasionally there are social pressures to come out to a larger audience. The increased acceptance of homosexuality has led to the phenomenon of celebrities coming out. One of the earlier and most publicized occasions of this was the event of comedian and actress Ellen DeGeneres coming out in 1997. Since this pivotal moment, the number of Hollywood actors coming out has been increasing at a nearly

exponential rate, with stars like Portia de Rossi, Ellen Page, and Neil Patrick Harris following suite.

Increasing societal conversation has also taken place on whether coming out is even a necessary step anymore (see e.g. Kelly 2016). In a world where sexual diversity is simply a part of life, there have been arguments stating that coming out should no longer be needed. Kelly remarks on the reaction to a Scottish politician coming out in 2016:

Why, they asked, did it matter in 2016 that someone happened to be gay? "Does anyone under 70 who isn't a religious fanatic really care these days?", wrote a commenter on Mail Online's news story. One tweeter remarked: "Why is this even news? Surely in this age, people accept and don't judge... surely?" It was a welcome sign of progress, the Spectator's Alex Massie wrote, that the reaction of many would be: "David Mundell is gay. So what?"

However, many argue that LGBT+ acceptance has not yet reached the point where coming out would be redundant. This is especially evident in many conservative and religious circles, where coming out is still a taboo that has the potential to break family ties and even lead LGBT+ youth to land homeless on the street. Moreover, LGBT+ acceptance has failed to reach many parts of the world at all, with multiple nations remaining where homosexuality is illegal, occasionally even punishable by the death penalty (Kelly 2016). In the face of such inequality between acceptance rates, it could be argued that coming out will be a necessary fact of life for some time to come.

2.3.2 Coming out on YouTube

The genre of coming out videos has received growing research attention in recent years. Many studies into the genre have focused on its sociological impact, outlining how coming out videos on YouTube can act as an invaluable resource for queer youth struggling with their own identity and coming out process. Coming out videos have even been suggested to act as a resource in queer suicide prevention (Kleitsch et al. 2015). However, not many discourse- or language-oriented studies have been carried out in the genre. Moreover, the coming out videos that have been studied have often

featured YouTubers with small audiences, and the specific features and challenges of popular YouTube celebrities coming out have not yet been examined.

Craig and McInroy (2013) studied the influence of new media on the identity development of LGBT+ youth. Interviewing 19 participants on their experiences, they found that the internet enables queer youth to access resources, explore identity, find likeness, and digitally engage in coming out. Some participants also revealed that the LGBT+ identities they had been allowed to explore and work on online later carried out into the offline world. Similar results were found by Kleitsch et al. (2015), who examined whether LGBT+ YouTube channels could provide a sense of community for LGBT+ youth. Their research concluded that a sense of community could indeed be found in these YouTube communities, and their value should not be undermined.

Wuest (2014) similarly studied the effect of coming out videos on the identities of queer interviewees. Wuest notes the circular effect of coming out videos: youth who view others' YouTube coming out stories and find them helpful can then be prompted to make their own videos for others still struggling. This might indeed be one of the reasons for the popularity of the genre, as benefitters of coming out videos want to 'pay it forward'. Wuest (2014: 24) also points out the importance of YouTube for queer representation:

[...] some queer youth find online resources to be a venue for more personally meaningful instances of queer representation, especially when their own circumstances do not match what they see in film and television's queer characters. With increasing media literacy and continuing technological development, the ability and means to record and upload videos are more accessible, evident in laptops that often have built-in webcams and simple video editing software, alongside the fact that many youth have spent enough time consuming media to understand the basics of producing their own. YouTube's usability and accessibility for users regardless of geography increases the volume and specificity of the representations available for consumption.

Alexander and Losh (2010: 34) examined YouTube coming out narratives as rhetorical action, concluding of their importance: "Unlike ephemeral memes that quickly fade with the movement of fads or fan culture online, coming out videos are in their very nature rhetorical: they presume the presence of an addressee, they are oriented around a transformative speech act, they respond to discourses around community building, and they recognize enduring ambiguities in the construction of sexual orientation, sexuality, and gender." Barbee (2015) utilized conversation analysis to examine one

case study of coming out on YouTube. Barbee makes important notes (2015: 24) on the high stakes of coming out online, where the already-high risk of rejection to the announcement is amplified as the audience grows.

2.4 Theoretical framework

In this section, I will present key terms for the theoretical framework of this study. These include the field of MDA, which is a special subset of discourse analysis, as well as the linguistic concept of stance, which relates to how speakers position themselves. Stance is the concept that I will use in my analysis to examine how YouTubers relate to their audience. In addition to introducing the definition of stance, I will also present a selection of relevant studies that have been carried out while utilizing this linguistic term.

2.4.1 Multimodal discourse analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is defined as “an approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language” (Jones 2012: 1). Multimodal discourse analysis is a natural extension to *discourse analysis* as a framework. Discourse analysis concerns itself with language in use; it asks not what language is like, but what that language is used *for* (Brown and Yule 1983: 1). MDA, however, gives equal weight to all modes of communication, instead of prioritizing written or spoken language.

As YouTube is a highly multimodal medium, comprising many other modes of meaning-making besides language, it is only natural to analyze its effects in this study by utilizing the approaches of MDA. Indeed, studies have demonstrated that vloggers engage their viewers in a multitude of multimodal ways. Frobenius (2014) examined how vloggers adapt to the necessarily one-sided conversation style of vlogs. Frobenius

discovered many multimodal means that vloggers utilize for audience involvement, such as physical setting, gesturing, gaze behavior, and prosody.

Norris (2004: 11) states that the first step to a multimodal analysis of interaction is to understand different *modes of communication*. It is noteworthy to point out that different modes do not always have clear-cut borders, and the same ingredients to an interaction could be separated into different modes in a variety of ways. However, for the purposes of this study, it is useful to introduce some basic modes of communication, particularly ones that are relevant for the analysis of data in the form of vlogs.

Proxemics is “the study of the ways in which individuals arrange and utilize their space” (Norris 2004: 19). How social actors orient themselves in relation to other social actors in a space can communicate many things. In the vlog setting, the concept of space between social actors is, in a way, performed: the camera becomes the stand-in for actual people, but the distance between the two is significant nonetheless. In the vlog genre, a related mode that should be taken into account is that of *setting*. Because vlogs can be interpreted as performances, the setting of the vlog also becomes the stage on which the performance is set. Where a video is filmed, how the setting looks visually, and what the setting communicates all become relevant questions for the multimodal study of vlogs.

Gestures are deliberately expressive movements that are usually performed with the arms and hands (Norris 2004: 28). For a gesture to be considered communicatively significant requires that it is performed with a degree of intentionality; though this intentionality can often only be judged by co-participants in the conversation (Kendon 2004: 15, in Haddington 2005). McNeill (2000: 1, in Haddington 2005) divides gestures into four different groups: gesticulation, pantomime, emblems (gestures with set meanings such as the ‘OK’ sign), and sign language. The communicative function of these types can be seen as rising while moving through them, i.e. gesticulation (1) has the least function while sign language (4) is essentially ‘all function’. Gesturing is highly culture-dependent, and the speaker’s culture influences how much and what type of gestures they are likely to use. Gesturing is also closely linked to emotional

states. A highly stimulated person is more likely to use expressive gestures than someone in a depressed state.

Haddington (2005: 93) muses on the oft-unclear relationship between gestures and talk. He points out that gestures are not only used in place of talk, but frequently also to support the same message that is conveyed via words (and possibly also other means, such as intonation, gaze behaviors, facial expressions, and so on). In a way, then, gestures and language can be taken to function together to convey the same meaning.

As Kendon (1994, in Haddington 2005: 93) puts it:

[...] the gestures produced by speakers in association with their speech are produced as an integral part of the same plan of action as the spoken utterance; and that they are but another manifestation of the same underlying process or [...] are produced by the same “computational stage” as speech.

Gaze is defined as “the organization, direction, and intensity of looking” (Norris 2004: 36). In a vlog setting, the study of gaze can reveal important clues about the relationship between vlogger and audience. Vlogs are a form of mediated communication, and as such, the object of gaze in vlogs is not directly a person but instead a camera lens. However, much like proxemics, gaze is an important mode of communication in vlogs nonetheless.

Facial expressions, Streeck and Knapp (1992, in Haddington 2005: 96) argue, are used to provide metacommunicative commentary about the simultaneous speech. Streeck and Knapp provide the example of eyebrow-raising marking an utterance as new information. Much like gestures, facial expressions are often used to support speech acts, and they may emphasize the actual linguistic content of a message. In communicative situations that have high emotional content, co-occurring facial expressions are extremely common and even expected (consider, for example, the oddity that would ensue from a person exclaiming “oh my God!” without any corresponding facial expression).

2.4.2 The concept of stance

One of the key concepts I will utilize in this study is that of *stance*. Stance can be simplistically defined as how one positions oneself with respect to one's utterance and one's audience. Taking an expert stance, for example, might entail the speaker positioning themselves in an expert role. On YouTube, stances taken towards an audience can reveal a great deal about the relationship between vloggers and their fans.

The specific approach to stance that is of interest to this study is a *sociolinguistic* one. As Jaffe (2009: 4) states, "One of the primary goals of a sociolinguistic approach to stance is to explore how the taking up of particular kinds of stances is habitually and conventionally associated with particular subject positions (social roles and identities; notions of personhood), and interpersonal and social relationships (including relations of power) more broadly." As this study concerns itself with the interpersonal and arguably hierarchical relationship between celebrity and fan, this particular view of stance is highly relevant.

The concept of stance has been studied across many different theoretical fields. Systemic functional linguistics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology are among the fields that have utilized this concept to look into various phenomena regarding interaction. There are also some related theoretical concepts that have been used either in conjunction with or in place of stance (Du Bois 2007). These are namely the concepts of appraisal and evaluation.

In systemic functional linguistics (SFL), Martin and White (2005) divide *appraisal* into three subcategories. Of these categories, *attitude* comprises our feelings and judgments, *engagement* refers to "the play of voices around opinions in discourse", and *graduation* concerns itself with different degrees of evaluation (Martin and White 2005: 35). The notion of appraisal is often utilized in SFL, whereas more applied linguistic traditions tend to prefer either 'stance' or 'evaluation'.

Evaluation, as described by Thompson and Hunston (2000: 5), is "the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude of stance towards, viewpoint on,

or feelings about the entities or prepositions that he or she is talking about". As this definition reveals, stance and evaluation overlap to a great degree, and can indeed be summarized as competing concepts that mostly describe the same phenomenon.

In summary, stance, evaluation and appraisal are all similar concepts that view the phenomenon of positioning from slightly different perspectives and different theoretical viewpoints. It is noteworthy that the overlap of these concepts and the lack of clarity surrounding their use in research literature can be problematic. Unifying the terminology might be a useful step in bringing 'stance research' forward, as it would provide both clarity and diversity to the field.

Stance-taking automatically shapes the roles and rules of an interaction. For example, an utterance framed as a performance automatically positions receivers as an audience; this particular social interaction then divides its participants into two distinct social roles, that of the performer and those of the audience. Similarly, as outlined in the example of the expert role above, a person giving out advice positions themselves as the expert and the receivers as novices. Again, stance-taking has shaped the social patterns of the interaction taking place. (Jaffe 2009: 8.)

Generating stances is often described in linguistic literature with the active description 'stance-taking'. However, it is worth noting that the taking of stances is usually a natural, subconscious process that is actually a necessary precondition for the conduct of conversation (Jaffe 2009: 8). As an example, in an everyday conversation where one person is sharing their holiday experience with another person, a multitude of stances must be naturally taken: expert-novice (the holiday-goer, having had this experience, is the expert), positive-negative (the holiday-goer evaluates the experience), and so on. This example underlines the fact that formulating a stance towards a topic or an audience is an everyday phenomenon that happens in all interaction.

Du Bois (2007: 163) conceptualizes stance as a triangle. In Du Bois' stance triangle, stance-taking is a process where the subject evaluates something, positions themselves relative to an object, and aligns themselves to another subject. Du Bois sees these not as separate types of stance, but as different aspects of a single stance act. These aspects

could be referred to as *interpersonal stance* and *epistemic stance*. In interpersonal stance, the subject positions themselves relative to their audience. In epistemic stance, the subject positions themselves relative to the subject matter. For the purposes of this study, interpersonal stance is perhaps the more relevant concept, as it is the relationship features between vloggers and fans that are under study. However, epistemic stance can also communicate a great deal about assumed social roles and relationships.

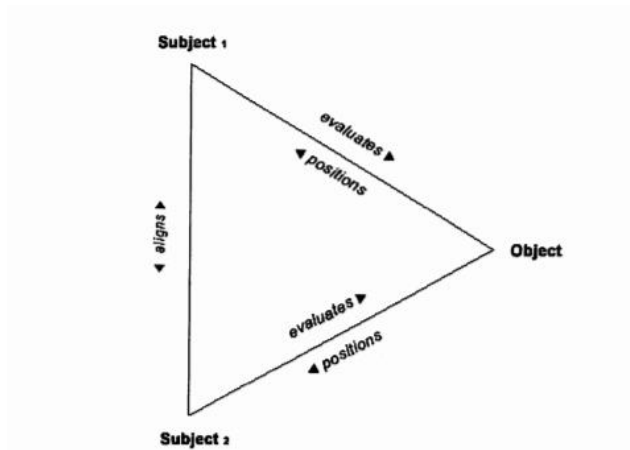


Figure 3. Du Bois' stance triangle. (Du Bois 2007)

Stance-taking is not the only relevant aspect of stance. Another ingredient in the stance act is the *uptake* (Jaffe 2009: 8), or how a particular stance taken by the speaker is received by the audience. Stances are not always simply accepted and aligned to, but can indeed also be realigned or even rejected. For example, a listener may reject an advice-giver's taking of expert stance by, for example, suggesting that they are not equipped to give advice on the topic. The uptake of stance is a challenging feature to study in vlogs, where audience response is not only delayed and scattered, but also expressed in a different format than the vlogs (i.e. through text in the comment section). While audience stance is not the main topic of this study, I will also pay some attention in the final sections to how the uptake of stance is played out through video comments.

2.4.3 Stance in action

Stance is a concept that can be used to examine language-in-use in the most diverse settings. It has been used to study, to provide only a few examples, Mexican immigrant youth slang, patterns of social distinction, weight loss discussions, and the discourse of news interviews. (Jaffe 2009; Englebretson 2007.) In the following, I will present some key findings from a number of studies on stance. Findings that relate to the topic and area of this study will be further highlighted and discussed.

Haarman and Lombardo (2009) looked into how stances were expressed in war news. Using a combination of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, they carried out analyses on how reporters expressed stance while reporting on the first month of the Iraqi war in 2003. An important portion of their study looked at the use of the personal pronouns 'we' and 'you' in taking stances. Their findings indicate that it is not always easy to determine who is included in these groupings, and they state: "The interpretation of pronouns in such instances then requires cooperation between the speaker/writer and the addressee, and it is often the addressee who decides who is included in the pronoun reference." (Haarman and Lombardo 2009: 73.)

Of the pronoun 'you', Haarman and Lombardo state that it is most often used to construct a more personal relationship between a news anchor and the audience (Haarman and Lombardo 2009: 80). Similarly, 'we' is occasionally used to construe common values between the reporter or news team and the audience. In all cases, these pronouns were used to signal the relationship between the presenters and the television audience in some way (Haarman and Lombardo 2009: 94). These findings may become relevant later in this study when analyzing if and how vloggers utilize personal pronouns in taking stances.

Haddington (2005) has studied stance-taking in talk-in-interaction. His data mostly comprises news interviews, which is a rather similar setting to that of Haarman and Lombardo. Haddington points out that the stances of political figures will accrue over time, which contributes to the social construction of their personhood (Haddington 2005: 129). Stances are therefore not just single acts, but stances taken contribute to the

wider perception of a person's communication style, role, and personality. Haddington's research includes not just verbal data, but also embodiment (such as gaze, gestures, etc.) as a resource for stance-taking (Haddington 2005: 88). Of the inclusion of this data, Haddington (2005: 89) points out:

In the following I do not claim that a particular gesture or any other embodied practice alone is expressive of a speaker stance. Rather, I suggest a way to examine how combinations of these practices contribute to the interlocutors' intersubjective stance taking, i.e. I emphasize that in order to investigate the role that embodied practices have in stance taking, it is necessary to study how they are used together with the concurrent linguistic and interactional practices during a stance-taking activity.

As stated earlier, this is also the intention of the current study. A multimodal analysis comprises many modes that must be analyzed both separately and together to determine how they contribute to stances taken. Haddington's point of view is therefore highly compatible with the aims of this study.

Haddington (2005: 90) notes that modalities besides language should be taken into account while investigating stances, as it is an established fact that human beings do not use solely language to communicate in face-to-face interaction. He also points out that the role of gaze, in particular, has been largely neglected in studies of stance. Haddington does indeed examine gaze behavior in his own study, finding gaze patterns that contribute to stances expressed. He also expresses some important points about the lines between modalities, pointing out that some researchers prefer not to draw lines between different modalities at all, and rather look into their combined effect. However, Haddington points out that it is possible to do both at the same time, exploring both how a certain modality (e.g. gesture) plays into stance-taking on its own, and how it contributes to stance concurrent with other modalities. This is a point that I will consider in my own research design.

Several scholars have studied the stance functions of common linguistic expressions. Keisanen (2006) studied the functions of negative yes/no interrogatives and tag questions. Kärkkäinen (2003) looked into the interactional functions of the phrase 'I think'. In another publication, Kärkkäinen (2007, in Englebretson 2007) performed a similar process for the related expression of 'I guess'. What all of these studies have in common is the finding that there is no clear link between an expression and its

intended use. The same expression can even be used in different situations to take up completely opposite stances. This drives home the point that there is no simplistic relationship between linguistic items and stance; and any item that seemingly expresses stance should always be considered in its proper context to determine its actual effect.

Keisanen's study focused on epistemic stance, but her findings indicate that epistemic stances often possess highly interactional functions, as she explains here (Keisanen 2006: 183):

Showing commitment to the status of the information that one is providing, i.e. marking epistemic stance, was shown to be an essentially interactive activity. First of all, the very initial placement of epistemic markers in intonation units or utterances can be seen as interactionally motivated: establishing stance before the upcoming utterance helps recipients to align themselves to the unfolding utterance, sometimes only a word that needs qualification in the course of the utterance's production. Secondly, stance is not just an isolated mental position of an individual speaker that randomly "surfaces" at various points in the discourse, it is firmly rooted in and engendered by the interaction between the conversational coparticipants: stance displays manifest aspects of that interaction such as managing routine trouble spots, engaging in more strategic recipient design, pursuing uptake or signaling completion of one's turn-at-talk.

This suggests that even when speakers are positioning themselves not relative to other subjects, but to subject matters, they are still performing interactional actions and achieving interactional goals. Stance, then, is interactional by its very nature; it is used not only to convey information, but also to negotiate interpersonal relationships between participants.

What happens to this interactional nature of stance when communication is no longer face-to-face and two-sided, but is instead mediated? In the vlog setting, neither the video bloggers nor their fans as commenters are able to receive immediate feedback. It seems clear that this would likely alter stance-taking activities. Very little research has been done on stance through mediated communication. This study will hopefully begin the process of filling that gap.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Aims

There has been very little research so far on stance-taking from a multimodal perspective. As Keisanen (2006: 179) points out, “[...] linguistic-interactional studies that pay more than sporadic attention to embodiment have thus far been rather rare in general. However, the inclusion of embodied resources to the analyses of grammar-in-use and of stance taking can be seen as a fruitful area for further study”. In my study, I aim to do precisely this, analyzing YouTubers’ stance activities with a highly multimodal focus.

Stance-taking is described in linguistic literature as a continuous, negotiated process between interaction participants. In other words, what stance one ends up adopting depends on the previous stances taken by others. These descriptions assume stances to always be negotiated in face-to-face, real-life communication contexts. Mediated communication, however, is increasingly common in our digitalized culture. It is useful to study what happens to stance practices when communication is no longer strictly bilateral, and instead relies on delayed responses.

With the advent of new media, and especially with the proliferation of social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, the face of celebrity culture is changing. Studying the features of new forms of online celebrity, such as ‘YouTube stardom’, offers important windows into examining how the face of celebrity is changing in the age of digitalization. My study aims to do precisely this, examining certain features of modern YouTube celebrities and how they position themselves towards their fans.

YouTube culture as a whole has received little research attention as of yet. Meanwhile, online video is a growing business, with implications for many other media agents in the online sphere. Expanding the research focus onto YouTube videos, and especially onto their visual and multimodal features, is important. YouTube vlogs are a distinct

genre in their own right; however, while the 'blogosphere' has been studied extensively, there has been fairly little research into the 'vlogosphere'.

YouTube is increasingly becoming a channel for entertainment not unlike television channels or subscription services, such as Netflix. This is especially the case in the younger demographics: in 2013, 80% of Finnish 18-to-34-year-olds said that they visit YouTube at least once a week (Digipeople 2013). It seems likely that in the four years since, this figure has risen even higher. Teenagers are increasingly idolizing YouTube celebrities, some of whom they watch on a daily basis. There are even popular annual conventions for fans of YouTubers, including VidCon in the U.S. and Tubecon in Finland. These events draw up audiences in the tens of thousands. In light of these statistics, it is worth researching what enables YouTubers to gain such popularity amongst their young fans.

Coming out videos are also an incredibly relevant phenomenon in the face of the digitalization of queer culture. Studies have shown that viewing coming out videos online is an increasingly common step in the coming out process: Craig and McInroy (2014: 102-103) found that the queer youth they studied "increased their comfort with their identities by watching the journeys of other LGBTQ youth online through video blogs". As one participant in Craig and McInroy's study stated: "YouTube actually played a really big role in [my] coming out. I always tell people the six months to a year before I came out was literally a YouTube quest to find coming out videos basically [...]". Similar sentiments have been expressed by the video bloggers I will analyze in this study. It seems clear that coming out videos on YouTube can help queer youth come to terms with their own identity. Presumably the effect is even larger when a prominent YouTuber comes out. It is therefore worthwhile to study the features of these coming out videos to see what enables their powerful effect.

3.2 Research questions

The aim of this study is to examine the features of celebrity-fan relationships on YouTube through the lens of coming out videos. Coming out on YouTube is a unique phenomenon, differing from traditional forms of coming out in several key ways. Coming out videos on YouTube, if made public, can reach wide and unpredictable audiences. Moreover, the response to the coming out is necessarily delayed, as the geographically scattered audience cannot be present in the actual act of coming out.

Of particular interest, then, is how popular video bloggers on YouTube navigate the process of coming out to their audience in video form. This study aims to examine what kind of celebrity-fan relationship enables video bloggers to come out directly to their fans. The concept of stance will be heavily utilized in the research, as it is a useful lens through which to examine the relations between video bloggers and fans; stances affect and demonstrate how vloggers position themselves in relation to their audience.

The research questions of this study are formulated as follows.

1. How do popular YouTube video bloggers construct their stance towards their audience
 - a. verbally
 - b. multimodallyin their coming out videos?
2. What implications does this stance-taking have for the relationship between the video bloggers and their fans?

These research questions naturally divide the study into four related sections. Verbal expressions of stance will be examined first. Secondly, the multimodal means that express stance will be taken into account. Thirdly, these separate analyses will be combined for a true multimodal analysis of stance-taking in coming out vlogs. Finally, the analysis will extend into what these stance activities actually mean for these YouTubers' fan relationships. Choosing these particular research questions enables focusing on the relative effect of each modality on stance-taking on its own, before considering their combined effect. They also allow the drawing of some important conclusions on the effects of stance-taking for the kinds of mediated celebrity-fan relationships that are common on YouTube.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Data collection process

The data for this study comprise of five separate coming out videos by five prominent YouTube video bloggers. The vloggers whose videos have been selected as data are Ingrid Nilsen (missglamorazzi), Joey Graceffa (JoeyGraceffa), Troye Sivan (TroyeSivan18), Connor Franta (ConnorFranta), and Shane Dawson (ShaneDawsonTV). The videos have been produced between 2013 and 2015 and have view counts ranging from seven million to over 17 million views. The video bloggers in question are large-scale YouTube stars, with subscriber counts ranging from around four to eight million subscribers. The following table lists several key statistics of each video and video blogger.

Table 2. Video blogger data. (Figures from December 16, 2017.)

Video blogger	Number of subscribers	Number of views on coming out video	Number of comments on coming out video
Ingrid Nilsen	3 912 207	17 005 995	153 625
Joey Graceffa	8 420 237	7 980 712	69 493
Troye Sivan	4 449 388	7 680 424	72 446
Connor Franta	5 633 725	11 845 610	175 369
Shane Dawson	8 122 870	9 164 789	162 079

These particular videos were chosen based on the status of the video blogger in question. As the study aims to examine the features of modern celebrity-fan relationships on YouTube, only the most popular video bloggers who had produced coming out videos were selected. This allows for a working analysis of YouTube celebrities with large fan bases, instead of less popular creators. YouTube fame can be interpreted as a relatively subjective phenomenon in an age where many people get their ‘fifteen minutes of fame’ on the platform. However, these five creators have garnered followings of millions and have achieved popularity both on- and offline.

The timeframe for the production of each video, as well as the size of the fan base of each vlogger, were taken to be sufficiently comparable, which allows for more accurate contrasting and comparison between the different vloggers. Additionally, all five vloggers come from English-speaking countries, are native English speakers, and have similar cultural backgrounds. 'Vloggers' here refers to the fact that all five YouTubers have been known to create popular vlog-style videos, although not every YouTuber in the data is primarily a vlogger. Shane Dawson, for example, is known for comedy videos; Troye Sivan is a musician besides being a vlogger; and Ingrid Nilsen gained popularity by doing beauty tutorials. The following section offers a closer overview of the careers of each vlogger in the data.

3.3.2 Overview of creators

Ingrid Nilsen, also known by her YouTube alias "Missglamorazzi", is a YouTube beauty guru. *Beauty gurus* are a subset of YouTube creators who make videos on topics such as hair, make-up, and lifestyle. Nilsen was born in 1989, resides in California, and has been making content on YouTube since 2009. In addition to her main YouTube channel, she also has a secondary channel, which she uses to post mostly vlog-style personal videos. Nilsen's offline accomplishments include representing the CoverGirl make-up brand and being a judge on a reality television show. In 2016, Nilsen was invited to the White House as one of chosen YouTubers to interview president Barack Obama for a YouTube livestream.

Connor Franta, born in 1992, is a California-based vlogger. Franta's videos range from personal vlogs to advice videos and comedy skits. In addition to his YouTube career, Franta is an entrepreneur running a business called Common Culture, which currently sells music, coffee, and clothing. Franta has also published a memoir called "A Work in Progress", which spent 16 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list (Richwine 2015). Franta has garnered attention for how he has turned his successful YouTube personality into a brand, with a large following of loyal consumers buying his merchandise (Sandell 2016).

Troye Sivan, born in 1995, is a South African born vlogger and singer-songwriter who now resides in Australia. Sivan's videos are mostly vlogs and live performances of songs. Sivan has been making videos on YouTube since he was thirteen years old. Recently, Sivan has used YouTube to help launch a successful music career; he has since signed onto a major record label and released a top-selling studio album.

Joey Graceffa is a California-based vlogger who has been making videos since 2009. Graceffa was born in 1991. In addition to his vlog channel, Graceffa also has a secondary channel where he posts gaming videos. His offline accomplishments include appearing on two seasons of the reality television show *The Amazing Race*, as well as publishing a bestselling memoir. Graceffa has also undertaken multiple other business ventures, such as creating a jewelry line, publishing music, and co-writing a young adult novel.

Shane Dawson, born in 1988, is a California-based YouTuber who has gained fame by making successful comedy videos. Dawson's YouTube channel has been active since 2008. Dawson has released two books to date, both collections of personal essays. Like many other big-name YouTubers, Dawson is a multi-talent who has been involved in several projects such as a music career, a podcast, and multiple short films.

3.4 Methods of analysis

3.4.1 Methods

Discourse analysis, and especially multimodal discourse analysis, will be the methodological framework of this study. As video data is inherently multimodal, a merely linguistic-analytic process would not be sufficient for the aims of this study. The modes of communication that will be taken into account in the analysis are *language and content, space and setting, gesture, gaze, and facial expression*. Relevant concepts for analysis will also be drawn from the field of sociolinguistics, especially as they relate to the concept of stance, which is an important analytic tool for this study.

The five videos will be studied in detail for both linguistic and multimodal features. Screenshots will be taken from all the videos to aid in the analysis and demonstration of multimodal and specifically visual features, such as those pertaining to gaze and gesture. All the videos will be transcribed to allow for close and careful linguistic analysis. The next section will provide a closer look into the transcription practices of this study.

Key verbal themes and discourses will be identified from each video; these discourses will then be divided into their own distinctive categories for analysis. A similar process will be employed for the multimodal data: different modes will be separated into their own categories, which will then each be analyzed separately to determine their effect on generating stance. Finally, all the modes will be analyzed together to determine their combined effects on stance. Stance-taking will therefore be examined in three broad sections, as outlined by the research questions: linguistic stance (where language is the mode under examination), mediated stance (where extralinguistic means are analyzed separately), and multimodal stance (where all the modes are analyzed concurrently).

3.4.2 Transcription practices

The video data will undergo two different forms of transcription. Firstly, all videos will be transcribed for textual content in order to carry out textual and language analysis. Secondly, key scenes from each video will undergo a more detailed *multimodal transcription*, in which other salient modes of communication will be transcribed and described alongside speech. In carrying out this multimodal transcription, I will adapt a version of Baldry and Thibault's (2006) multimodal transcription models.

Multimodally-transcribed data will be presented in the form of a table, in which each mode of communication will be ascribed their own separate column. The analysis will then focus on determining what the different modes together communicate, as well as

what kind of stance they possibly generate. The following image demonstrates one form that multimodal transcription may take.








Time	41.12	41.17	41.22	41.27	41.32	41.37	41.42
Image							
Action	Ken Burns over photo	Ken Burns over photo	Fade to Appalshop image	people walking in river, singing	people walking into river, singing	people walking into river, singing	people walking into river, singing
Speech	Voiceover	Voiceover	Voiceover	Voiceover; singing from footage	Voiceover; singing from footage	Voiceover; singing from footage	Voiceover; singing from footage
Shot Level	Close-up	Close-up	Long Range	Long Range	Long Range	Long Range	Long Range
Transition	Fade in	Ken Burns	Fade in/overlay	None	Fade into subtitle	Fade out subtitle	None
Music	Banjo music	Banjo music	Banjo music/fade to sing singing	singing	singing	singing	singing
Dialogue	"After I had graduated from college I took a summer job in a training program	at the Appalachian Film Workshop in Whitesburg, not far from where I grew up.	Appalshop, as we call it, gave young people a chance to learn filmmaking.	When I walked in the door,	a film had just come back from the lab. As they screened the film, I felt like	I was seeing a part of my own place for the first time. And hearing singing I'd never really listened to before.	None
Written Language	None	None	None / Appalachian Film Workshop /	<i>In the Good Old-fashioned Way /</i>	None	None	None

Figure 4. An example of multimodal transcription. In this example, eight different modes are combined in the analysis of a film scene. (Media and Social Change Lab 2014)

Multimodal transcription, which describes many different modes of meaning in the same space, aids in ensuring that multimodal analysis does not become too compartmental. While different modes can be separated and analyzed as their own units of meaning, it is also essential to consider how these modes act in unison (or, perhaps, contrast with one another) to create meaning in a text.

4 LINGUISTIC STANCE

4.1 Narrative structure of coming out videos

The five coming out videos in the data set have several key recurring features, which afford them a very similar narrative structure in reference to one another, as well as identify them as belonging to the same genre. The videos by Ingrid Nilsen, Connor Franta, Troye Sivan, and Shane Dawson follow a very similar narrative script; however, Joey Graceffa's coming out video differs from this script for several reasons. The main reason is that Graceffa's coming out video is a follow-up video to another video of his, a music video through which he already informally came out by engaging in some romantic same-sex scenes. A large portion of Graceffa's video is therefore dedicated to

dealing with the reactions he has already received from that previous video. In the following, I will offer a general overview of the format and narrative structure of the coming out videos in the data.

The vlog format typically includes editing. While vloggers may physically sit in front of the camera recording for lengthy periods of time, these recordings are then usually edited down to videos that are fit for consumption. Many of the videos in the data, however, are mostly unedited so that they feature significantly fewer cuts than typical vlogs. Regarding video duration, most YouTube vlogs produced during this timeframe are no longer than ten minutes; notably, however, three out of the five videos in this data run longer than the ten-minute mark. Ingrid Nilsen's video even reaches 19 minutes, which is considerably longer than the average vlog.

These features are noteworthy to point out, because they both distinguish the coming out videos from the vlogger's usual output (marking these videos as 'special events'), and they also demonstrate the authentic and vulnerable selves that vloggers put forth in their coming out videos. Indeed, Connor Franta states at the beginning of his video: "So I'm sitting here in front of you with no script, no plan, no fancy editing, and I'm just gonna be really honest". Several videos in the data include long pauses, stumbling over words, and emotional reactions; these items may usually be edited out of videos, but in these videos, they are frequently kept in. The acts of coming out, then, are not carefully curated. They are instead crafted to closely resemble acts of coming out face-to-face, mimicking real-life interaction.

Most of the videos begin by the video blogger expressing nervousness about making the video, as in the following data examples:

[1] I kid you not, as soon as I turned on the camera, my heart just like immediately started beating really hard.

[2] This is probably the most nervous I've ever been in my entire life, uh... but I'm going to deal with it [...].

[3] Umm... so... this is a really hard video for me to make, umm... and I'm really scared, and umm...

In these examples, vloggers demonstrate a high degree of vulnerability in front of their audience. This declaration of nervousness can be interpreted to act both as a tool for performing authenticity, but also as a tool for preparing the viewer that something

unusual is about to take place. After the nervousness is dealt with, the video bloggers generally move onto prefacing their big news, and then declaring their confession.

[4] So today I want to talk to you guys about something. [...] I'm gay.

[5] I have something to tell you guys, as you can probably see by the title of this video. [...] I want you guys to know that I'm gay.

[6] Umm... there is something that I want you to know. And that something is: I'm gay!

The prefacing that takes place is an example of what Kitzinger (2000, in Barbee 2015: 18) calls 'pre-announcements'. This communicative strategy is meant to prepare the hearer to receive a weighty piece of information. The pre-announcements in these examples are very similar to one another ("I want to talk to you guys about something"; "I have something to tell you guys"; "There is something that I want you to know"). They underline the fact that the following interaction may contain information that evokes strong emotional reactions. Notably, these types of pre-announcements are typically used in conjunction with telling bad news. Coming out is a statement that on its own is neither bad nor good news; however, the societal attitudes to minority sexualities suggest that it can be construed as bad news by some. The vloggers are perhaps trying to mitigate these possible negative reactions in advance.

After the declaratory portion ("I'm gay/bisexual") of the video has been carried out, the vloggers generally begin 'backtracking' into their past by moving onto a lengthy narrative portion. This narrative typically deals with how the vlogger first realized they were gay or bisexual, how they have struggled and dealt with those feelings over the years, how they have come out to people offline, and finally, how they have gained a sense of self-acceptance. This narrative is nearly identical to the typical structure of coming out videos identified by Alexander and Losh (2010: 26). The stories tend to be extremely linear, beginning with the very first years of the vlogger's life and ending with events from their recent past. In the following examples, some quotes are taken from both the beginning and concluding parts of these narratives.

[7] [Beginning] Growing up, I always knew that I was a little bit different than everyone else. I always just had this feeling that I wasn't the same.

[End] So in January of this year, after keeping one of my friends up 'til, like, five A.M. on his couch, I told him.

[8] [Beginning] Uh, when I was born, I always knew that something was a little bit different about me, uh...

[End] And after my family, I just carried on working through, like, my inner circle of best best friends. [...] I don't have anything to hide anymore, so I could just kind of chill and not think about anything anymore.

[9] [Beginning] When I was five, umm, I always had crushes on girls. But I also liked boys. And, umm, and I told my family and they were very religious - I love my family, but that was not accepted.

[End] [...] and that's what I've been trying to do for the last couple of months. It's just not be so hard on myself. And um... and just be open to love whether it's a guy or a girl, and just be open to it [...].

In the final sections of the videos, the vloggers typically muse on the possible implications of their coming out.

[10] So if you're wondering what happens now, umm... I... I want to live my life unapologetically, because I'm proud of who I am and I'm not gonna apologize for who I am anymore.

[11] I hope this helped, and umm... and uh, from now on, you know everything about me. Ohh and that feels so fucking good! Because I feel like I've been hiding so fucking long.

[12] What matters to me most is that I'm affecting lives and using my story to make a difference in the world. And I want to affect as many people as possible. That's the real goal here.

Combined with the beginning and ending portions of the videos, these narrative stages could be summed up with the following points:

1. Greeting
2. Pre-announcing and coming out
3. Telling a contextualizing story
4. Musing on the implications of coming out
5. Signing off

It is worthwhile to note that nearly all of the videos in the data do indeed follow this familiar formula. There are several underlying reasons for this. One reason is the fact that coming out videos were a formidable YouTube genre before any of these vloggers made their own videos (Alexander and Losh 2010: 37). In fact, two of the vloggers explicitly mention in their videos that they themselves have previously watched many coming out videos from other YouTubers. This would suggest that the vloggers in the data are already familiar with the traditional format of coming out on YouTube and are either knowingly or subconsciously emulating it.

Another reason for the established structure may be that the narratives of the videos follow some of the wider narrative forms of oral stories. Labov and Waletzky's (1997) influential formulation of the narrative structure of oral stories introduces very similar points, dividing narratives into the parts of orientation, complication, and resolution. These narrative structures are arguably so widely used while performing narratives in our society that they come to us naturally.

This study concerns itself with stances, and with interpersonal stance in particular. While the linear story section, or section 3, of the videos does presume an audience, it is often performed with less overt interpersonal stance-taking than sections 1, 2, 4 and 5. Put in another way, the story sections seem to concern the 'I' (the vlogger) more than the 'you' or 'us' (the audience or the community). The stance examples in the following chapters will then, for the most part, draw from these other sections.

4.2 Categorizing linguistic stances

Language is the traditional mode through which studies of stance have been carried out. There are multitudes of tools ingrained in language that can be utilized to take up different stances. In the data set, both epistemic stance and interpersonal stance are frequently expressed through linguistic means. Firstly, I will look into how epistemic stances, or positioning oneself relative to the subject matter, are taken up in the data. Secondly, I will move onto examining interpersonal stance, where speakers position themselves relative to their audience. Linguistic stances will be divided into several key categories based on their functions.

4.2.1 Claiming expertise

The most overt epistemic stances arise when the vloggers frame their own experience with coming out as a type of expert knowledge that the audience – presumed to be the

'novices', perhaps struggling with coming out themselves – can benefit to learn from.

Connor Franta, in his video, expresses the following:

So I'm making this video for anyone who needs it. It's okay. It may not seem like it right now, but you are gonna be fine. And I know it's scary, but don't be afraid. You are who you are and you should love that person. And I don't want anyone to have to go through 22 years of their life afraid to accept that.

In this example, Franta is expressing a clear *epistemic expert stance* by giving advice ("it's okay"; "you are gonna be fine"; "don't be afraid"; "you are who you are and you should love that person"). He is even partly offering reasoning for why he is qualified to give such advice by mentioning his 22 years of experience. The mention of his age also strengthens the expert stance, as it seems to suggest that Franta is specifically speaking to a younger audience here. His age and his experience, then, both serve to make him the expert, qualified to give out advice on the topic. A similar expert stance regarding coming out is also taken by Troye Sivan, when he states:

And after my family, I just carried on working through, like, my inner circle of best best best friends. And not a single one of them had a problem with it. [...] And all the time you see these like "it gets better" videos online, and, and, things like that makes you aware, umm, you know... for people, it's really really really shit in the beginning, but "don't worry, it gets better". I'm here to say that, that, that's, that's true, because it will get better for everyone, but, uh... I'm also here to say, I guess, that my message is that it can be good right from the start. You could have a completely smooth, smooth sail out of the closet.

Sivan also takes up an expert stance by offering advice on the coming out process. Sivan seems much more reluctant to take this expert role, however, hedging his speech with uncertainty markers ("umm, you know"; "but, uh"; "I guess"). Of particular significance is Sivan's use of the epistemic stance marker 'I guess', which has been shown in stance research to have several possible interactive functions. The function of this particular occurrence can be inferred by looking into its surrounding statements in more detail.

Firstly, Sivan (1) gives some context on his upcoming advice by presenting previous coming out advice given by others, namely the notion of "it gets better". (In the online LGBT+ sphere, this statement is often offered as a comfort to teenagers who are struggling with their identity. It is meant to signal that even though the teenager's current environment may not be very LGBT+ -positive, their future experiences are likely to be much easier.) Secondly, Sivan (2) acknowledges the truth in this advice,

emphasizing that he is not presenting a 'better' piece of advice, but rather presenting his own take on it. Thirdly, immediately prior to and after the 'I guess' statement, Sivan (3) expresses his own angle ("but [...] I'm *also* here to say [...] that *my* message is"). This surrounding context presents some clues on Sivan's usage of 'I guess'. It seems that Sivan is using it to present his uncertainty of the validity of his advice relative to previous advice, therefore weakening his expert stance.

Similar stances are also taken up by Joey Graceffa and Shane Dawson:

[13] [...] and in no way was it to push all the people out of their closet, because I know what it's like in there, it's scary. And sometimes it's not the right time to do it. But if you feel like it is the right time, then do it! If this video inspires you. But in no way if you, like, feel like you're unsafe or it's not the right time or place to do it. Umm, then... you don't have to. No one's making you do anything. It's up to you, it's your choice.

[14] And if you are out there and you're confused and you haven't talked about it and told your friends and you feel scared – let me just tell you, the more I've talked about it to my friends and to my family and to people in my life, the more I've realized that a LOT of people feel this way. [...] And if you're feeling that way, I'm gonna tell you: who the fuck cares? Fuck it! Love who you wanna love. Life is short. Nobody's gonna hate you for it. God isn't gonna hate you for it 'cause God loves you.

Both Franta's stance earlier, as well as Graceffa and Dawson's stances above, are expressed partly by advice given through *imperatives*. Imperatives are rather direct forms of speech which arguably require careful use so as not to make the speaker sound forceful. Graceffa mediates this issue through offering hedges and alternatives for his own advice ("If you feel like it is the right time, then *do it!* But [...] you don't have to. [...] It's your choice"). Franta and Dawson's imperatives, on the other hand, read more like comforting statements than actual advice ("*don't be afraid!*"; "*love who you wanna love!*"), which helps them dodge the issues of forcefulness that using imperatives may otherwise introduce.

4.2.2 Addressing and affection

Interpersonal stances are expressed frequently throughout the videos. Common locations of such stance-taking are their introductory and concluding remarks – the greetings and signings-off. An oft-expressed stance in these sections is what I will call the *interpersonal friendly stance*, in which vloggers address their audience much like

they would address a friend. In the following, several examples of expressing this stance in these narrative stages are offered.

- [15] [Greeting] Hey, what's up, you guys.
- [16] [Greeting] Hey, what's up, you guys.
- [Signing off] I love you guys so much, I'll see you next week. Bye!
- [17] [Signing off] I love you guys, I'll see you all tomorrow.
- [18] [Greeting] Hey, what's up, you guys.
- [Signing off] So... I love you guys. And I'll see you... every day.
- [19] [Signing off] I love you guys! And I'll see you really soon.

The taking-up of the friendly stance, as seen through informal greetings and goodbyes (“Hey, what’s up, you guys”; “I’ll see you”), shapes the relationship between vlogger and viewer. Fans are constructed as friends, which is an apt example of the way vloggers often encourage the formation of parasocial relationships. It is difficult to determine how much of this encouragement is conscious on the vloggers’ part and how much of it is convention. Informal friendly greetings have long been a part of the vlog genre, and newcomers into the genre often adopt established genre features without second thought. The effect, however, is clear.

These examples show not only generic friendliness that is often expressed between friends and acquaintances, but also overt declarations of affection (“I love you guys”), which express an even deeper interpersonal stance, the *interpersonal affective stance*. Reading these excerpts out of context might easily fool the reader into thinking that they are getting a glimpse of friendly one-on-one exchanges, instead of exchanges between a singular YouTuber and their millions of fans. It could be argued that the adoption of such stances is meant to mitigate the otherwise large power imbalance between vlogger and fan. After all, the vlogger is both the ‘holder of power’ and the usual source of adoration here; perhaps expressing friendliness and adoration towards fans helps them feel appreciated, and like they are on more equal grounds with their idols.

These findings would seem to confirm Jerslev’s (2016) observations on the vlogger Zoella, who frequently engages in these types of ‘equalizing’ behaviors with her audience, perhaps to make sure that power imbalances do not threaten her continued popularity. This is an important finding, as it was pointed out earlier that one reason

for vloggers' popularity is the direct unfiltered 'relationship' that fans can access with them. This relationship largely differs from the mediated relationships that people may have with traditional celebrities. Feeling on equal grounds with the vlogger and perceiving them as being 'just like us' may indeed be one of the reasons for their popularity.

The interpersonal friendly stance is also frequently expressed outside of the greetings and signings-off. Vloggers often address their audience by using the personal pronoun 'you'. Talking directly to the audience in this way, coupled with the effect that is created through the visual vlog format (sitting close to the camera and looking into it), creates a very compelling simulation of one-on-one interaction. Again, an interpersonal friendly stance is communicated, this time through directly addressing the audience:

[20] So I'm sitting here in front of *you* with no script, no plan, no fancy editing [...].

[21] [...] I may as well catch *you* up on this chunk of my life that's kind of been missing from the internet's knowledge.

[22] [...] from now on, *you* know everything about me.

[23] I'm giving myself my best chance... and so should *you*.

[24] I wanna sit down and talk to *you* and have this conversation just like I've had this conversation with friends and with people who are close to me in my life.

In example 20, Connor Franta not only addresses the viewers as 'you', but he takes it one step further by suggesting that he is "sitting here in front of you", as if he is physically sitting in front of the group of people he is talking about. This creates a sense of intimacy between vlogger and viewer that contributes to this stance.

Troye Sivan, in example 21, says: "I may as well catch you up". Again, Sivan not only utilizes 'you', but he also suggests that his viewers need to be 'caught up' on what is happening in his life. This is an idea that frequently exists in the sphere of friendship, and by extending it to his fans, Sivan is heavily taking up a friendly stance.

In example 22, Shane Dawson says: "from now on, you know everything about me". Suggesting that his fans know everything there is to know about him points to a very strong sense of intimacy between vlogger and fan. Jerslev (2016: 5239) states that tensions regarding access to celebrities' private lives have long been a feature of

'traditional' forms of fame. Dawson's apparent shirking of this traditional dynamic suggests a new type of celebrity practice, where the more you share, the better.

In example 24, Ingrid Nilsen states: "I wanna sit down and talk to you and have this conversation just like I've had this conversation with friends and with people who are close to me in my life". Nilsen's remark suggests that she views her audience similarly as she views her friends, which is why she wishes to come out to them in the same way.

The examples above highlight the use of 'you', which can be both a singular and a collective noun. As evidenced below, the vloggers in question also very frequently address their audience by the expression 'you guys'.

[25] So today I want to talk to *you guys* about something.

[26] I feel like a lot of *you guys* are, like, real, genuine friends of mine [...].

[27] [...] my aim on this channel is to make *you guys* smile and you guys laugh.

[28] And eventually talking with *you guys*, like now, about being open and being gay.

[29] So I am sitting here today because I care about *you guys*. You have been a part of my life for the past, you know, almost six years.

'You guys' differs from the oft-used 'you', because unlike 'you', it does not suggest a one-on-one relationship between the vlogger and fan, but instead hints at the fans being a multitude and comprising a community of sorts. However, the contexts in which 'you guys' is used are very reminiscent of real-life speech situations where a group of friends is being addressed. Sivan's remark in example 26, where he overtly states that he sees his audience as friends, seems to confirm that this is indeed often the goal of using this stance.

Example 28 offers another insight into this unique vlogger-audience relationship: Graceffa says that he wants to "talk *with you guys*", as if he wants to have a discussion with his friends. Of course, the reality here is that he is merely talking *at* his audience, which happens to comprise of millions of individuals scattered around the globe. This sense of friendship and intimacy is, then, mostly an illusion.

Affective stances are also taken in these examples. Some of them utilize a great deal of pathos and emotional vocabulary ("*real, genuine friends*"; "*make you guys smile and make you guys laugh*"; "*care about you*"). This expression of affection frames the fan

relationship as a two-way street, suggesting that the affection enjoyed by vloggers also extends back to the fans.

Another vehicle for the expression of stances is the use of thanking. Thanking someone implies gratefulness for something that the ‘thanker’ has done for the thanker. By thanking viewers, vloggers emphasize the two-way relationship between them. This might, again, be interpreted as an equalizing strategy where vloggers are attempting to mitigate their clear power advantage in this fan relationship. Thanking demonstrates an *interpersonal humble stance*, which shows that the vloggers recognize the role their fans have had in their success. The following examples from the data demonstrate the use of thanking.

[30] And I don’t... I don’t know what else to say. My friends, my family, and you guys have supported me through anything and everything and I can’t *thank you* for that enough.

[31] People are tweeting, commenting, everything – I just want to *thank you* all for your amazing support and I just feel like the luckiest boy in the world, so thank you.

[32] So I just wanted to *thank you* all so freaking much for all the love and support that you’ve showed me. It’s like, changed my life in such a crazy way.

One could argue that this is a practice that happens in traditional celebrity circles just as it does on YouTube. Celebrities are often expected to pay something back to their fans, extending their thanks to fans for supporting them. Famous people tend to be lauded when they display traits of being humble or grounded, and they may receive criticism if they appear arrogant or egotistical.

With traditional Hollywood celebrities, however, a clear power imbalance usually still exists between celebrity and fan, and is perhaps taken for granted. After all, these traditional celebrities may lead powerful and wealthy lives that are out of the realm of normality, whereas YouTubers are often considered ‘regular people’. To keep up this image, YouTubers take every possible action to mitigate any power imbalances and to undermine their effects. The equalizing affective and humble stances highlighted above, which are frequently taken up by vloggers, support this view.

4.2.3 Building inclusivity

As discussed above, the personal pronoun ‘you’ is frequently used in the data in conjunction with equalizing stances. What about ‘we’? In theory, it seems like constructing a common identity with ‘we’ could function in similar ways as ‘you’, bridging the gap between the worlds of the vlogger and viewer. Interestingly, there is very little usage of audience-inclusive ‘we’, ‘us’, or any other collective pronouns in the data. When using ‘we’, vloggers mostly refer to themselves and figures from their personal lives. The following examples show the few accounts of audience-inclusive plural forms.

[33] Race, gender, religion, sexuality – we are all people. And that’s it. We’re all people, we’re all equal.

[34] [...] this new generation coming out, and we can get rid of all those old people who don’t accept it and start a new world of it being fully accepted.

[35] So now let’s fast-forward to last year.

[36] So that leads us into the next part, which is, you know, if I’ve known all this time, what the heck happened?

In the first two examples, it is not immediately clear who the referent of ‘we’ is. Example 33 uses some relatively common expressions (“we’re all people”; “we’re all equal”), which are usually taken to refer to the entirety of the human race instead of any smaller community of people. In this case, it seems like the use of ‘we’ does not construct any kind of inclusive or community-building stance. In example 34, too, the referent seems to be the aforementioned “new generation” and not necessarily the audience of the video.

Examples 35 and 36 use the inclusive forms ‘let’s’ and ‘us’. These examples both come from Ingrid Nilsen’s coming out video, and specifically from its narrative story section. Nilsen uses these forms to structure and clarify the timeline of the story she is telling (“let’s fast-forward to *last year*”; “that leads us to the *next part* [of the story]”). It could be argued that these inclusive forms are attempting to include the viewer in the story-telling process; Nilsen is constructing the ‘us’ as the collective community that is joining her (via technology) while she tells her story.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Nilsen frequently makes remarks in her story-telling process that function to include the viewer, such as: “I wanna sit down and talk to you and have this conversation” or “I’m gonna do my best and walk you through my mindset”. Nilsen’s communicative strategies suggest that she has an image of her audience in mind while she tells her story, and in many ways, she is telling it *with* her audience and not just *at* it. These strategies contribute to an interpersonal friendly stance.

4.2.4 Presenting authenticity

As previous YouTube studies highlight, authenticity is a valuable asset for vloggers. This is reflected in the data through various means. Firstly, words that express openness, honesty and transparency are used in almost all of the videos. Lexical items that were searched from the data set were the adjectives *open*, *honest*, *real*, and *true*; and the expressions *be me*, *be myself*, and *be who I am*. These items occur frequently in the data. The following examples demonstrate some occurrences of these authenticity words.

[37] I just want to be able to *be me*, and not be afraid.

[38] I’m just gonna be really *honest*.

[39] [...] I don’t know what my life is gonna be, I just wanna be *honest* about it.

[40] So today I wanna talk to you guys about that and be *open* and *honest* [...].

[41] [...] I just wanted to make a video just to clarify things and to just really talk and be *open* for one of the first times ever on my YouTube channel.

These, I argue, are exchanges that take up what can be termed the *interpersonal authentic stance*. The authenticity presented by vloggers in these videos may be a natural extension of their usual authentic personas. It may also naturally follow from the convention of vloggers being honest about their lives. This highlighting of honesty and openness is, however, also a frequently occurring part of the discourse surrounding LGBT+ identities. Even the expression of ‘coming out of the closet’ itself implies something previously being hidden (or even lied about) that is only now being seen properly. It is perhaps this intersection between the authenticity expected of

vloggers and the amplified authenticity of coming out that makes coming out videos so compelling, often even becoming viral hits.

The vloggers occasionally present some conflicting views on the significance of their coming out videos. On one hand, coming out videos tend to significantly differ from the usual format of the vloggers' videos both in length and editing style. Vloggers also tend to frame the videos in a way that highlights their unusualness or importance, such as expressing nervousness about making the video and using pre-announcements to prepare the viewer for the 'big news'. On the other hand, there are many remarks in the data that suggest that these same vloggers wish not to place so much importance on the fact that they have now come out:

[42] This is just one little part of who I am. And I'm not gonna let my sexuality define or confine me. [...] In true Connor Franta fashion, I'm gonna end my videos like I always do, because this is just another video. It's just another video where you found out a little more about me.

[43] I'm still gonna make the same videos, I'm still the same Troye, I, um... this is just some new information about Troye. [...] Though this video has probably been the hardest video to make that I've ever made, I hope that, umm, nothing will change.

[44] [...] because in a way I think it's, umm, not necessary to have to say who you are, and do like... a video just talking about your sexuality, because my life is so much more than that.

[45] This is the last video I'm gonna do where I talk about it, because it's not me! I'm Shane, I'm a comedian, I'm a writer, I'm a director, I'm a YouTuber, I'm a podcaster - whatever the fuck I am. AND I am bisexual. That does not define me.

There is indeed some contradiction in, for example, Franta's statement that "this is just another video", when many of the format and framing techniques of the video suggest that it is quite significant and exceptional. This phenomenon of both elevating and downplaying the coming out process may perhaps best be understood through what Barbee (2015: 14) calls 'the umbrella of heterosexism', the heteronormative societal structure which requires that special strategies must be implemented to disclose one's non-heterosexual orientation. Often these strategies require for coming out to be framed as something unusual and perhaps unusually significant. This contradiction also highlights the transitional period that Western society is experiencing regarding homosexual identities. While acceptance rates are rapidly rising, coming out is still risky, because there is a part of society that does not condone it.

5 MULTIMODAL STANCE

5.1 Embodied practices

This chapter deals with the way that embodied practices, or modalities besides language, affect the processes of stance-taking. The modalities of *space and setting*, *gaze*, *gesture*, and *facial expression* will first be briefly analyzed separately. The analysis of embodied practices will draw from video data from all five videos, presenting and highlighting salient examples. This will lay the groundwork for the later section, where a true multimodal analysis, aided by multimodal transcription of video data, will be performed. In this chapter, I will adopt Haddington's (2005) view of the role of different modalities in stance-taking. Haddington suggests that while these extra-linguistic modalities may not necessarily have enough communicative function to take up stances on their own, they still contribute to the process whereby multiple modes act together (or perhaps contrast with one another) to create stances.

5.1.1 Stance through space

Proxemics deals with the way that space is utilized in communication. While vlogs are a form of mediated communication, this does not diminish the importance of space use within them. In fact, proxemic features in vlogs become even more salient than in offline communication, because video makers are afforded a lot of choice and precision about how they visually frame their videos. In the data set, all five vloggers have opted to use a *medium close-up shot* (MCU) for their videos. This is a common choice of framing that shows the speaker's head, shoulders, and occasionally the upper portion of their chest. The following two images demonstrate the use of the medium close-up shot in the data.

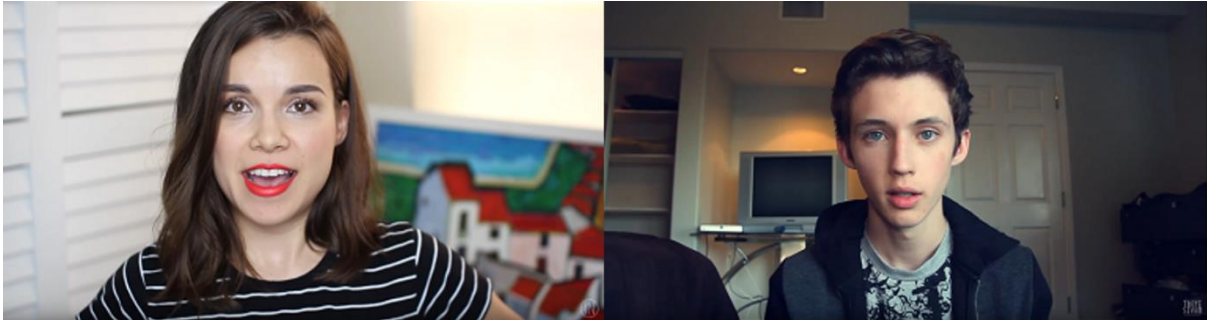


Figure 5. Medium close-up shot. Ingrid Nilsen and Troye Sivan demonstrate their similar use of this shot type.

It is worthwhile to compare this choice of framing with real-life communication situations. Jerslev (2016: 5241) noted in her study of the YouTuber Zoella that she used many communication practices which are normally reserved for friends. The MCU shot type does arguably resemble the conversational distance in real-life communication situations to a degree; however, vlogs' visual demands may require the distance to be slightly too 'close for comfort'. The vlog is a highly visual medium, which perhaps contributes to the proximity of the vlogger to the camera. It should also be noted that the history of vlogs began with web camera videos. Webcams were mounted on tops of computer screens, making the distance between camera and vlogger the same as the distance between vlogger and their screen. This historical fact has influenced the development of vlogs even into current times, where such space constraints are no longer a concern. While vloggers can theoretically frame their videos any way they wish, they typically choose to follow established genre conventions.

Another feature that adds to the communicative effect of vlogs is the setting. Vlogs are typically filmed in domestic spaces. Features that pinpoint the vlogs as being filmed inside the vloggers' homes are readily visible in most videos in this data set. Connor Franta's background includes a clearly recognizable living room. Ingrid Nilsen sits in front of a decorative painting and a window pane. Joey Graceffa's background is out of focus, but appears to include some bedroom windows. By filming inside of their homes, these celebrity vloggers are inviting viewers into their private spaces in a way that may be uncommon for more traditional celebrities.

Bedrooms are a particularly common vlog setting. To analyze the bedroom setting further, we can look at the setting of Troye Sivan's video. In figure 5 above, the

background is instantly recognizable as a bedroom. Behind Sivan is a room door, a television, and what appear to be some integrated shelves; beside him, the corner of a bed is visible. The fact that Sivan films his coming out video in his bedroom becomes even more meaningful after, several minutes into the video, he relays the story of how he came out to his father while they were lying on his bed. Whether the bed beside him is the same bed he is talking about does not matter so much, as the parallels have already been drawn.

Sivan also makes a further comment on the parallels between these two situations in the beginning of his video when he states: "The date today is August 7th 2013, and the reason I'm telling you this is because on August 7th 2010, I told my family that I am gay. And now on August 7th 2013, I want you guys to know that I'm gay." In Sivan's eyes, then, the best way to come out to his fans is the exact same way as he did to his family.

Perhaps the vlogger has not given much thought to his act of visually inviting the viewer into his room, but the effect is clear nonetheless. Looking into the camera from an intimate distance inside of his bedroom almost creates the illusion that the viewer is right there with him. Whether carefully chosen or not, the setting communicates something about stance. It builds a sense of mediated intimacy which, together with the other modalities, creates an interpersonal friendly stance between the vlogger and viewer. This stance could well evoke a real sense of closeness from the audience's point of view – though the vlogger is in fact far, far away.

5.1.2 Stance through gaze

Eye contact is a crucial part of real-life communication situations. If we continue to view vlogs as a mediated communication situation, it should be clear that eye contact in vlogs matters. However, there are certain obvious factors that distinguish real-life gaze behavior from that used in videos. Firstly, vloggers are not looking into the eyes of an actual person, but into a camera lens. Secondly, the vlogger is not getting any input of the viewer's eye contact while filming their vlog. The entire vlogging situation

then becomes almost a simulation of a communication situation, where the vlogger is imagining a respondent in place of the camera and behaving as though that were the case. If this is indeed what vloggers do, we could expect the gaze behavior of vloggers to closely mimic the gaze behavior of face-to-face communication.

To analyze whether this is the case, we can take a closer look at Ingrid Nilsen's video. The following series of images portrays the gaze behavior of the first eight seconds of Nilsen's coming out video. Nilsen is visibly nervous and constantly switches between meeting the camera with her gaze and turning her gaze away. Technically speaking, Nilsen should not need to be nervous of meeting the 'gaze' of the camera, an inanimate object, but she clearly is. This would suggest that Nilsen is in fact utilizing gaze behavior that is typical of face-to-face communication. She is communicating not only to an object, but also to the watchful eyes of her imagined audience.



Figure 6. Nervous gaze behaviors. Ingrid Nilsen displays nervousness by alternating between meeting and averting the imagined viewer's gaze.

Nilsen's gaze behavior contributes to an interpersonal authentic stance. Nilsen allows herself to be nervous and vulnerable on camera, features that are perhaps not typical of entertainers or performers, but are interestingly commonly displayed in the vlogosphere. The vlog is, after all, all about authenticity. Allowing true emotions to shine through, whether through language features or through gaze-shifting as displayed here, gives the effect that the viewer is witnessing the real person instead of a performance.

While the other vloggers do not necessarily display the same level of visible vulnerability as Nilsen, all of them utilize eye contact in ways that mimic real-life

communication situations. They occasionally glance away to briefly think; they look straight at the camera while making important, weighty statements; and their eyes dart away in moments of nervousness. It seems that their gaze behavior contributes to the overall stance that is communicated.

5.1.3 Stance through gesture

Frequent gesturing is a common interaction practice across many cultures. An initial point needs to be made, however, on the restrictive nature of the videos in this data when it comes to gesturing. While all the videos in the data do indeed utilize some form of the MCU or medium close-up shot, they differ from each other regarding how much of the speaker's body their framing shows. Shane Dawson, Troye Sivan, and Connor Franta's gesturing are relatively easily read, as their framing includes a significant portion of their arms. Ingrid Nilsen and Joey Graceffa's videos feature closer framing, which means that for the most part, only the most animated or dynamic gestures can be seen. This means that not all gestures, even though they may have had communicative functions, can be analyzed.

Gestures are commonly used by the vloggers to co-construct the rhythm of talk. This means that gestures often mirror the sentence structure, as well as the patterns of stress and intonation that are put forth in speech. A vlogger may, for example, raise their hands at the mid-point of an utterance and then noticeably lower them in fast motion to signal the end of an utterance. Similar downward hand motions can be seen at points of higher (or occasionally lower) intonation, and are frequently seen performed concurrently with stressed syllables.

These uses of gesturing are indeed common in everyday conversation, which vlogs often try to emulate. It is therefore not surprising that they appear in the videos, too. On their own, it is difficult to determine any sort of stance that these types of gestures construct; but it seems likely that they add to the previously discussed illusion of

'friendly conversation', other features of which (e.g. affection markers, direct forms of address) take up the interpersonal friendly stance.

The following example from Troye Sivan's video demonstrates the uses of hand gestures concurrently with intonation and stress patterns. In this example, bolding indicates stress and underlining indicates rising intonation. Here, Sivan is comparing his coming out to the audience with his earlier coming out to his family, which took place on the same day in 2010; hence Sivan is highly stressing the year '2013' and the 'you' indicating the audience. The example shows that Sivan frequently lowers his hand during syllables that hold the highest intonation and strongest stress in the sentence.

[Speech]	And	now	on	August	seventh	two-thousand-and-thir teen ,			
[Hand]					[rises]	[lowers]			
[Speech]	I	want	you	guys	to	know	that	I'm	gay.
[Hand]	[rises]		[lowers]						

Sivan is also a frequent user of gestures that support or enhance the meaning conveyed by his verbal descriptions. Again, these are common everyday gestures that, out of all gesture types, perhaps most demonstrate Haddington's (2005) view that gestures support and add to the meaning conveyed via language. The following examples illustrate several situations where Sivan uses these gestures.

- [46] But yeah, basically I always kind of put those thoughts in the backburner [*gestures toward the back over his shoulder*] and in the back [*gestures behind his head*] of my mind.
- [47] I didn't want to really think [*places hand on temple*] about it, it kind of scared me and terrified me.
- [48] I remember when I was younger, I used to lie in bed and picture [*uses thumbs and forefingers to make the 'picture' gesture*], like, you know the signs on the doors of toilets [...].
- [49] Now that I've told you guys that, I may as well catch you up on this chunk [*uses both hands to form a 'chunk'*] of my life that's kind of been missing from the internet's knowledge.
- [50] You could have a completely smooth, smooth sail [*lays out his flat hand and glides it smoothly across the air*] out of the closet.

In Sivan's case, frequent animated gesturing adds to the energetic atmosphere of his video. This level of animation can have the effect of captivating the viewer; Sivan's coming out is not a monotone monologue, but a passionate undertaking. Joey Graceffa also utilizes rather animated gesturing, which adds a dramatic element to his video.

These gesturing styles may not have clear stance-taking functions, but they do showcase the vloggers' authentic personalities and unique communication styles.

Some gestures in the data also communicate nervousness. In her video, Ingrid Nilsen frequently pushes her hair away from her face in what appears to be a nervous tic. Shane Dawson rests his hands on a table and nervously fidgets with his interlaced fingers. These gestures act as reminders of the very personal nature of the topic being discussed, and they signal that viewers are being let in on private and vulnerable information about these YouTube stars. On their own, nervous gestures may not take up clear stances, but they contribute to the overall authentic and humble stances discussed above.

5.1.4 Stance through facial expression

Facial expressions have a great deal of communicative value. They are often used purposefully to convey attitude or meaning alongside language, but they may also unwittingly reveal details of communicators' emotional states. In the following, I will compare and contrast the facial expressions of all five vloggers in the data immediately following their confession of coming out.



Figure 7. Facial expression of smile.

Joey Graceffa and Ingrid Nilsen display similar wide smiles immediately after making their coming out statements. Smiling seems to indicate that they view the message to be happy news. The facial expression of smiling therefore also communicates to viewers that the vloggers consider their news to be of happy nature, and therefore this act of smiling may guide the viewers' own reaction in a positive direction. Smiling is

also usually seen to indicate friendliness, which adds to the overall friendly stance that the vloggers take up through various means.



Figure 8. Facial expression of pursed lips.

Connor Franta and Shane Dawson immediately purse their lips following their coming out statements. Franta also slightly raises his eyebrows. Pursed lips indicate seriousness, which may perhaps make Franta and Dawson's statements feel more serious than those of Graceffa and Nilsen. Franta and Dawson's expressions correlate with the style of their coming out videos at large, which are generally less emotional than Graceffa and Nilsen's videos. Their communication styles are more contained; however, as stances are built through many modes, this seriousness does not negate any friendly stances that they otherwise take up.



Figure 9. Facial expression of raised eyebrows.

In a previous chapter, we remarked on Streeck and Knapp's (1992, in Haddington 2005: 96) take on facial expressions. They suggest that expressions provide metacommunicative commentary about speech. An example that they used was the raising of eyebrows, which is often used to indicate new information. This seems to also be the function of Troye Sivan's eyebrow-raising. His facial expression is a mixture of smiling and surprise, which frames his coming out statement as simultaneously being happy and potentially surprising news.

What all these facial expressions reveal is that extralinguistic means can significantly alter the communicative value of a statement. The expressions that vloggers use create a strong epistemic stance, positioning their attitudes toward their message. This epistemic stance may then affect how viewers align themselves, in turn, to the vlogger's message. However, friendly facial expressions do also contribute towards the friendly stances that have been multimodally built through many other means. Facial expressions, therefore, have both epistemic and interpersonal stance functions.






5.2 Multimodal stance






In the preceding chapter, I have presented some findings of the stance effects of different modalities on their own. I have also tentatively suggested that some of these modalities do in fact act as stance-taking resources. We do not consume media 'one modality at a time', however; our brains take in and analyze the information given by different modalities concurrently. Baldry and Thibault's (2006: ix) multimodal analysis model states that "combinations of words, images, and sounds, whether sitting on a page or flashing past in real time, make more meanings together than any one of them can make alone".

This is indeed the starting point for this next chapter, which utilizes an adaptation of Baldry and Thibault's multimodal transcription model in order to examine the combined effects of different modalities on the stance-taking process. Speech, facial expression, gaze and gesturing will be analyzed concurrently alongside each other. The modality of space will not be included here, because it stays constant throughout the videos. I will analyze select scenes from all five videos in the data. I have chosen scenes that include the first two narrative stages of the videos: 1) the greeting, and 2) the contextualized coming out. These scenes are fruitful for analysis, as they include the main message of the video, the coming out itself.

5.2.1 Expressions of vulnerability: Ingrid Nilsen

Table 3. Multimodal analysis of Ingrid Nilsen.

Frame	Time	Facial expression	Speech	Gaze	Gesturing
	00:00-00:02	Neutral, worried	<i>none</i>	Away	<i>None</i>
	00:02-00:04	Neutral, worried	[sighs deeply]	Camera → away	Uses hand to push hair back from face
	00:04-00:10	Smiles with a tight mouth	Okay. [sharp inhale]	Camera → away → camera	Raises hand and rapidly lowers it down to lap; raises both hands and displays palms with fingers separated
	00:10-00:14	Closes and opens mouth	I'm doing this [sharp exhale].	Away → camera	Uses hand to push hair back from face
	00:14-00:24	Smiles, then furrows brows	Alright. Umm. I guess I am just going to... get right to it. Umm...	Away → camera → away → camera → camera	Raises both hands and shoves them towards the camera in rapid motion

	00:24-00:28	Slightly furrowed brows	There's something that [sharp exhale] I want you to know.	Away	Raises both hands and shoves them towards the camera in rapid motion
	00:28-00:35	Nervous expression, then nervous smile	[sharp inhale] And... [sharp exhale] that something is...	Camera	Uses hand to push hair back from face
	00:35-00:36	Raises eyebrows	I'm gay.	Camera	Raises both hands in the air while shrugging (iconic 'I don't know' gesture)
	00:36-00:42	Smiles, then face contorts from crying	It feels so good to say that.	Away → camera → away	Partly covers face with hands to cry
	00:42-00:46	Crying	[barely audible] It feels so good.	Camera → away	<i>None</i>

Ingrid Nilsen's video is in some ways the most successful coming out video in the data set. This is supported by the fact that the video has garnered an amazing 17 million views, despite featuring nothing else except Nilsen talking to a camera for 19 straight

minutes. It seems clear that Nilsen's video has captivated the audience. The following analysis might provide some possible explanations for why this is.

Nilsen's video begins with a close-up shot of her shirt. We then see her visibly moving from standing into a sitting position in front of the camera. After sitting down, Nilsen briefly glances at the camera while letting out an audible sigh. Her expression is serious and worried, and she looks down and to the side while using her hand to pull her hair from her face. It is only at the six-second mark that Nilsen then looks into the camera, smiles and, in a small voice, states "okay" - as if only now formally starting the video. These first six seconds of the video have quite a lot of communicative value. Nilsen could have easily edited out this slightly awkward, worried beginning of the video, but she has chosen to keep it in. Immediately, Nilsen is letting the audience see her in all her vulnerability.

Seeing her seat herself to start her monologue arguably has two-fold effects. Firstly, it makes the occasion feel more marked; this could be compared to how live shows feature actors or musicians walking up to the stage in a ceremonious manner. This seems to frame Nilsen's video more as a performance, rolling off to a start by Nilsen ceremoniously sitting down in front of her audience. Secondly, though - and with markedly opposite effect - seeing Nilsen sitting down in this nervous state before formally starting the video affords the viewer a certain sense of intimacy. It communicates that what we are seeing here is indeed not a performance, carefully constructed and edited to perfection, but instead the informal act of a visibly nervous person recording a video.

These two effects label Nilsen's video as a marked event outside the realm of everyday vlogging, but they also strip down the walls between vlogger and audience to highlight Nilsen's vulnerability. This display of vulnerability continues after the six-second mark. After stating "okay", communicating that she is about to begin speaking on her topic, Nilsen looks down and inhales sharply. She then looks up at the camera again, raises up her hands, and states "I'm doing this" in a determined tone. She exhales sharply, as if she has been holding her breath, and nods several times while looking down.

These actions (uneven breathing, avoiding looking at the camera) continue to communicate Nilsen's nervousness to the viewer. Her subsequent actions also suggest that she is trying to overcome these nerves by peppering herself up ("I'm doing this" while raising her hands). While barely fifteen seconds of the video have passed, Nilsen has already displayed traits of vulnerability through various modalities. Her visible emotional state, communicated through gaze, gesture, speech, and facial expression, invite the viewer in to empathize with her emotional struggle.

In the next portion of the video, leading up to her statement, Nilsen continues to display markers of emotionality while she verbally performs several pre-announcements ("I guess I am just going to get right to it"; "There's something that I want you to know"; "And that something is..."). The flow of her speech is interrupted by sharp exhales and inhaleds. Her gaze behavior is slightly erratic, as she varies between nervously looking down and looking up again to meet the camera's imagined 'gaze'. Her facial expressions change between worried expressions with furrowed brows and seemingly forced smiles; the effect is almost as if Nilsen is being pulled by two forces, one of which is her nervousness about the topic, and the other which is her desire to perform her usual positive persona on camera.

Finally, Nilsen moves onto making her statement: "I'm gay". The expressions and gestures that Nilsen uses concurrent with the statement are intriguing: she raises her eyebrows, shrugs her shoulders and raises her hands in the air, seemingly performing the iconic 'I don't know' gesture. In the context of this video, this body language is somewhat difficult to assign meaning to. The gesture could imply defensiveness on Nilsen's part, but it seems more likely that it is an expression of the inevitability of this revelation (in the sense of "I don't know, I guess that's just how it is").




After the formal coming out statement has been performed, Nilsen promptly breaks down into tears. Her crying is visible from the contortion of her face and the affected tone of her voice as she states: "It feels so good to say that". Nilsen has not edited out her crying in front of the camera, even though it is arguably a highly vulnerable and emotionally charged moment. It is exactly this open emotionality that is likely to have contributed to the success of this particular coming out video. In this beginning portion






of it, all the different modalities add to each other's effect, producing the end result of an interpersonal authentic stance.



Nilsen's video is a good example of how the separate modalities complement each other and make the resulting effect much larger than a single modality could have achieved. Nilsen is affording the viewer the full spectrum of emotional expression in a way that is typically reserved for close friends and not broadcasted at large. However, as has been pointed out by Jerslev (2016: 5240) and many others: "Attention-creating performances of a private authentic self are the most valuable commodity in social media celebrification". This is indeed exactly what many YouTubers do.

5.2.2 Confident delivery: Connor Franta

Table 4. Multimodal analysis of Connor Franta.

Frame	Time	Facial expression	Speech	Gaze	Gesturing
	00:00-00:04	Laughs	[laughs] I kid you not, as soon as I turned on the camera,	Away → camera → away → camera	None
	00:04-00:08	Smiles	my heart just like immediately started beating really hard, but...	Away → camera	Audibly rubs hands together
	00:08-00:10	Smile turns into a nervous grin	[sighs loudly] Okay.	Away [editing cut] Camera	None

	00:10-00:14	Neutral expression	Hey, what's up, you guys. So today... I want to talk to you guys about something.	Camera	Raises hand in greeting
	00:14-00:20	Neutral expression	So 2014 has been, by far, the biggest year for me. I've done a lot of things and gone a lot of places	Away → camera	Gestures with hands rhythmically along with speech
	00:20-00:24	Neutral expression	and you guys know all about that, but... you don't know the biggest thing that's happened to me this year.	Camera [quick glance away]	Gestures with hands rhythmically along with speech
	00:24-00:32	Neutral expression, then slight smile	So I'm sitting here in front of you with no script, no plan, no fancy editing,	Away → camera → away → camera → away	Gestures with hands rhythmically along with speech
	00:32-00:40	Neutral, earnest expression	and I'm just gonna be really honest. 2014 is truly the year that I have accepted who I am	Camera	Hands stay raised during pause in speech

	00:40-00:44	Nervous expression	and become happy with that person. So today [sharp exhale] I want to talk to you guys about that	Away	<i>None</i>
	00:44-00:48	Neutral expression, then purses lips	and be open and honest and tell you that... I'm gay.	Camera	Raises hands, then lowers them while nodding

For the first ten seconds, Franta's video closely mirrors Nilsen's in several ways. He expresses his nervousness both verbally ("I kid you not, as soon as I turned on the camera my heart just like immediately started beating really hard") and through the avoidance of eye contact. On the ten-second mark, Franta performs a move of seemingly pulling himself together emotionally by sighing loudly and stating "okay" (mirroring Nilsen's "okay").

It is at this ten-second mark that Franta's stance starts differing from Nilsen's. While Nilsen's video showed numerous authentic expressions of vulnerability and nervousness, Franta's style is much more contained. After he has seemingly pulled his nerves together, Franta begins the video like he would begin any other vlog by raising his hand up in greeting and stating: "Hey, what's up, you guys". He then starts providing context to his upcoming confession ("I want to talk to you guys about something. [...] 2014 is truly the year that I have accepted who I am"). Franta speaks quickly and fluidly, which is emphasized by the quick jump cuts in the editing of the video.

Whereas Nilsen frequently avoided eye contact with the camera due to seeming nervousness, Franta's eye contact is steady and at times even intense. While he does glance away from the camera several times, it seems to only fulfill the purpose of allowing him to think. Franta gestures mostly only to rhythmically emphasize his

speech, and his expression stays relatively neutral for the duration of his coming out performance.

In Franta's case, the word performance fits aptly. While he verbally states that his video is completely improvised ("So I'm sitting here in front of you with no script, no plan, no fancy editing"), and there is no reason to doubt this, his confident and fluid delivery makes the video a very different experience from Nilsen's emotional outburst. Franta seems to know exactly what he wants to say and how he wants to say it. He has also edited the video quite heavily in order to delete any unnecessary pauses or hesitations.


It is only the first ten seconds of the video that express any clear intimate stance. In those ten seconds, Franta verbally expresses his nervousness, fidgets, and avoids eye contact with the camera. These are parts of communication that are generally reserved for communication between friends. After this short part, Franta's tone becomes 'all business'. It is interesting to note that he has decided to leave this beginning part in, even though it is a stark contrast from the rest of the video. It could be argued that it is a deliberate effort to create a friendly, intimate stance.

However, it is also likely that the part is included merely to mark that this video is a momentous occasion; Franta's visible nerves function as a sort of primer to warn the viewer of the tone of the topic. Nilsen also left in a similar part at the beginning of her coming out video. These findings seem to suggest that what Barbee (2015) called pre-announcements, interactional strategies meant to prepare the hearer for bad or weighty news, can also have multimodal counterparts. Nilsen and Franta are using these strategies to prepare their fans for the actual announcement of coming out.

5.2.3 Passionate gesturer: Troye Sivan

Table 5. Multimodal analysis of Troye Sivan.

Frame	Time	Facial expression	Speech	Gaze	Gesturing
	00:00-00:04	Neutral expression	Hey, what's up, you guys. It's Troye Sivan, and... this is probably the most nervous	Camera → away → camera	Raises hand in greeting; emphasizes speech with hand gesture
	00:04-00:08	Briefly grimaces	I've ever been in my entire life, um... but I'm going to deal with it, because	Away → camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesturing
	00:08-00:12	Neutral expression	I have something to tell you guys, as you can probably see from the title of this video.	Away → camera	Uses hand to gesture towards audience; emphasizes speech with hand gesture
	00:12-00:16	Neutral expression; briefly furrows brows	The date today is August 7 th 2013, and the reason I'm telling you this	Away → camera → away → camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesture; gestures toward audience
	00:16-00:22	Neutral expression	is because on August 7 th 2010 I told my family	Away → camera → away → camera → camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesturing

	00:22-00:26	Raises eyebrows and smiles slightly	that I am gay.	Camera	Presses hand against chest
	00:26-00:28	Raises eyebrows; earnest expression	And now on August 7 th 2013, I want you to guys to know	Away → camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesturing
	00:28-00:30	Smiles	that I'm gay.	Camera	Gestures towards audience
	00:30-00:38	Furrows brows	It feels kind of weird to have to announce it like this on the internet, but umm... I feel like a lot of you guys are like	Away → camera → away → camera → away → camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesture
	00:38-00:40	Laughs slightly	real, genuine [laughs] friends of mine.	Camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesturing

Troye Sivan's coming out video begins in the same way as the others: with an expression of nervousness. "This is probably the most nervous I've ever been in my entire life", Sivan states in the beginning while grimacing slightly. In the previous analyses, Nilsen and Franta were both found to have visible moments where they stated "okay" with the seeming function of pulling themselves together. Sivan does something similar, although he verbalizes the process more clearly by stating (on his nervousness): "I'm going to deal with it, because I have something to tell you guys".

Out of these three videos, a chronologically occurring pattern is already emerging: statement of nervousness - pulling oneself together - continuing with coming out. It seems to be important to vloggers to state how nervous they are, which is clear evidence of how difficult the task of coming out is. Vloggers could easily delete these declarations out of the video through editing, but it seems that they want the audience to know how they are feeling. This ties in with the finding that vloggers, like most social media celebrities, are expected to express their authentic selves. It seems that it is only after this mandatory declaration is performed that vloggers can continue on with their original goal - that of formally coming out.

Out of the five vloggers in the data set, Sivan is the most active gesturer. He frequently gestures toward the imagined audience while referring to them verbally ("I have something to tell *you guys*"; "the reason I'm telling *you* this"). This creates an interpersonal friendly stance with Sivan addressing viewers as if they were physically in the same room. Sivan uses this same gesture at the point in the video where he states that he is gay. This moment in Sivan's video highlights the interplay between the different modalities:

[Speech] "I want *you guys* to know that I'm gay."
 [Facial expression] Smile.
 [Gesture] Points towards audience.
 [Gaze] Looks directly at camera.



Firstly, Sivan addresses the audience with the friendly expression 'you guys'. This immediately creates the illusion that Sivan is speaking directly to whomever is watching. His facial expression turns into a friendly smile. While he says 'you guys',






his left hand points towards the camera. His gaze is directed right at the camera. Sivan is not merely talking *at*, but *to* the audience and to his fans. In this example, all the different modalities combine to create a unified, friendly stance.




Sivan's demeanor, as expressed through style and gesture, differs significantly from those of both Nilsen and Franta. While Sivan states that he is nervous, his nerves do not show as clearly as Nilsen's did in her video. Sivan is, however, not as seemingly calm and collected as Franta was in his coming out statement. The effect that Sivan creates through multimodal means is that of being passionate. His active facial expressions and gesturing seem to imply that he deeply cares about what he is talking about. Sivan's animated communication style could be construed as performance-like, but it leaves the impression of being extremely genuine. This passionate delivery arguably also contributes to a stance of authenticity.

5.2.4 Calm and friendly: Shane Dawson

Table 6. Multimodal analysis of Shane Dawson.

Frame	Time	Facial expression	Speech	Gaze	Gesturing
	00:00-00:06	Smiles	Hey, what's up, you guys. Um [exhales sharply], so... this is a...	Camera → away	Raises hands in greeting; lowers them on table and interlaces fingers
	00:06-00:12	Neutral expression	really hard video for me to make. Umm... and I'm really scared, and umm...	Camera → away → camera → away	Moves interlaced hands around

	00:12-00:18	Laughs, then neutral expression again	and I never thought I would be making this [laughs nervously] ever [laughs], umm...	Camera → away → camera → away → camera → away	Moves interlaced hands around rhythmically along with speech
	00:18-00:26	Neutral expression	and [inhales] I woke up this morning and I just, I just had to, and um, and I didn't want to turn on my like	Away	Moves interlaced hands around rhythmically along with speech
	00:26-00:34	Frowns slightly	camera and my, my lights and my, I didn't want to do my hair, I just wanted to turn on my computer	Away → camera	Gestures around with both hands, rhythmically emphasizing the different objects he is describing
	00:34-00:33	Neutral expression	and talk to you guys.	Camera	Emphasizes speech with hand gesture
	01:42-01:46	Raises eyebrows	I mean I'm not completely gay and I can't sit here and say that I am	Camera → away → camera	Raises hand

	01:46-01:54	Neutral expression	because that's not real, that's not genuine. But I also can't sit here and say that I'm straight. And, um...	Away → camera → away → camera → away	Knocks knuckles on table
	01:54-02:02	Neutral expression	this is something that I've come to the conclusion through therapy and also just being honest with myself. I am bisexual.	Camera → away → camera → away → camera	Knocks knuckles on table
	02:02	Slight smile	None	Camera	None

As the others, Shane Dawson's coming out video begins with a statement of nervousness: "This is a... really hard video for me to make [...] and I'm really scared". Interestingly, Dawson does not state that he is simply *nervous*, but he uses the word *scared*. This is an interesting admission of vulnerability from the vlogger. Dawson's vulnerability is a stark contrast to his usual style of videos, which often include comedy elements.



"I didn't want to turn on my like camera and my, my lights and my, I didn't want to do my hair, I just wanted to turn on my computer and talk to you guys." This is how

Dawson verbally frames his stripped-down coming out video. Dawson's video differs from the other ones in several key ways. He is not using a professional camera with a good lighting set-up; instead, he relies on a simple web camera. He also has not edited his coming out video in any way, which leads to a rather long runtime before he finally makes his confession at 2:02 minutes.



These actions, or more aptly *lack* of actions, immediately contribute to an interpersonal authentic stance. Dawson is not putting on a performance; he is clad in pajamas, has messy hair, and speaks in a soft tone. He is taking all possible actions to ensure that the video has an intimate, friendly, confessional atmosphere. Dawson adds to this stance further through verbal means. He approaches his bisexuality by saying that he cannot say that he is completely gay, "because that's not *real*, that's not *genuine*". Dawson seems to suggest that he wants to appear real and genuine to his fans, which is evident not only in the act of openly coming out to them, but also in the intimate manner in which he performs this task.

5.2.5 Professional vlogging: Joey Graceffa

Table 7. Multimodal analysis of Joey Graceffa.

Frame	Time	Facial expression	Speech	Gaze	Gesturing
	00:00-00:08	Smiles	[sighs loudly] Well, hello there, everyone. So... umm... holy crap! [laughs]	Camera → away → camera → away → camera	Briefly brings hands to neck, then lifts up arms
	00:08-00:14	Laughs	It's the first thing I can think to say. Umm... so if you guys didn't see, or I'm sure most of you have,	Away → camera	Gesticulates rhythmically with speech

	00:14-00:20	Neutral expression, then cringes	I released a music video called "Don't Wait" and the response has been...	Camera → away → camera → away → camera	<i>None</i>
	00:20-00:24	Grins	Literally so freaking incredible, and I just feel, ahh!	Away → camera → away → camera → away	<i>None</i>
	00:24-00:30	Grins, then neutral expression	I don't know, I just feel... I feel so good and so happy, umm...	Camera → away	Waves hands in the air
	01:10-01:18	Neutral, briefly raises eyebrows	I'm just so blown away by it, at how accepting, and umm... how cool people are, and...	Camera → away → camera → away → camera → away	Gestures rhythmically with speech
	01:18-01:22	Neutral expression	I'm just thinking back to when I was a kid growing up, and...	Camera → away	Gestures rhythmically with speech
	01:22-01:26	Earnest expression	how... well [exhales loudly], I might as well just say it for real, umm...	Away → camera	<i>None</i>

	01:26-01:34	Frowns briefly	obviously this has been taken, umm... away from the video, umm...	Camera → away → camera → away → camera → away → camera → away	Gestures away from his body with hands
	01:34-01:36	Raises eyebrows, laughs	but I'm gay. [laughs]	Camera	None

Joey Graceffa's coming out video differs from the previous four videos in several ways. Firstly, Graceffa does not begin the video by stating how nervous he is. This is because his video is a follow-up to a music video he has released, the content of which already implies that he is coming out as gay. This means that most viewers already know Graceffa's orientation, which lessens the pressure for him to perform a formal coming out.

Secondly, Graceffa spends most of the beginning of his video expressing his happiness and gratitude about his fans' reactions to his music video. It is only at 01:22 that he seemingly decides to formally make the coming out statement ("Well, I might as well just say it for real"). Even then, however, the weight of his statement is lessened by the fact that he says "obviously this has been taken [...] away from the video"; Graceffa assumes that most of the viewers already know.

Interestingly, Graceffa does not address his viewers by the pronoun 'you' as often as the other vloggers in the data. He greets his viewers by stating "Well, hello there, *everyone*"; and while he is talking about his fans' positive reactions to his music video, he does not address them directly like the other vloggers. Instead, he merely talks of 'people', as in: "I'm just so blown away by it, at how accepting and [...] how cool *people* are".

To make more sense of Graceffa's slightly distancing language, we should look at the visual aspects of his video. Graceffa's video is very professionally lit. Whereas several other vloggers from our data have opted to make their coming out video visually distinctive from their other videos (by, for example, not paying as much attention to professional video quality as usual), Graceffa has decided to keep up his professional production style. Coupled with the fact that Graceffa informally came out in a professionally produced music video, his coming out leaves the impression of being more of a carefully constructed publicity stunt than an intimate event shared with his fans.

All of these features together arguably create a slightly distancing stance, which allows Graceffa to come out on his own terms – as part of his vlogging and music career, not as something external to it. However, it should be noted that this stance reveals itself partly through comparison with the other vloggers' more authentic videos. Graceffa's regular viewers and fans may not perceive his actions to be distancing; rather it is the elevated expectation of authenticity placed on vloggers that highlights the unusual elements in his video.

6 DISCUSSION

This study concerned itself with the verbally and multimodally expressed stances put forth by five YouTube celebrities in their coming out videos. Stances are parts of communication that concern alignment: epistemic stances show alignment to the subject matter, whereas interpersonal stances show alignment to another subject(s). In this study, multimodal discourse analytic tools were applied in order to identify and categorize stances. The secondary aim of the study was to examine what implications these stance activities have for the YouTubers' fan relationships. Coming out videos were chosen as the data set, because their intimate nature has the potential to highlight some key social media celebrity practices.

Numerous commonly-occurring epistemic and interpersonal stances were identified from the data, and they were expressed through various means. The *epistemic expert stance* showed vloggers aligning towards the topic of coming out in a manner that posited themselves as the experts. The *interpersonal friendly* and *interpersonal affective stance* showed vloggers positioning their audience in the role of personal friends. Vloggers willingly placing themselves in vulnerable positions relative to their audience expressed the *interpersonal authentic stance*. And finally, the *interpersonal humble stance* was expressed through linguistic means via thanking, which functioned as an equalizing strategy that shifted celebrity-fan power relations in favor of fans.

Stances were found to be simultaneously co-constructed by many modes. The interpersonal friendly stance is an example where linguistic and extralinguistic means frequently added to the same expression of alignment. Linguistic items expressing friendliness included direct forms of address, such as *you* and *you guys*. The use of proxemics, where vloggers sat in front of their 'audience' at a conversational distance, added to the stance; and so did the domestic settings where the vlogs were filmed, giving the impression that the audience was invited to these personal locations. Moreover, vloggers' gaze behavior mimicked communication between friends, their facial expressions often showed overt friendliness, and occasionally they even gestured towards their imagined audience. The effect that these modalities together created on stance was much greater than what could have been communicated by a single mode. These findings underline the need for more multimodally-directed stance research.

While the stances expressed by fans are out of the scope of this study, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the video comments on the five vlogs to determine how they have been generally received. Have vloggers' stance efforts been successful? Have they truly managed to communicate a sense of intimacy and authenticity to their fans? Before delving into analysis, it should be briefly noted that the stances of fans cannot be read from comments in a straightforward way; not all fans leave comments on videos, and the modal and temporal features of comments place some restrictions on *how* fans can express their stances.

The most immediate finding seems to be that fans are also frequent expressers of affective stances. Some examples are shown below. It is difficult to determine whether these affective remarks prove fans aligning to the stance put forth by the vloggers in the video, or if they are simply standard fan behavior that would have occurred in any case.

- [51] ♥ I love you Shane ♥
- [52] I love you, and will always be in your corner! <3
- [53] Luv u Joey! U awesome!!!
- [54] Love you buddy! Hope you nothing but the best!
- [55] I am so so proud of you connor
- [56] I love you Ingrid ♡ ♡

We should also make a note on power relations. Many communicative strategies have vastly different effects depending on whether they are used by the celebrity or by the fan. This back-and-forth swapping of affective remarks can be seen as a process whereby power is constantly being shifted in opposite directions. Fans declare affection toward the celebrity, which shifts the power in the already-powerful celebrity's favor; whereas celebrities making similar declarations is an attempt to shift some of the power back towards the fans.

In addition to 'standard' expressions of fan adoration, many commenters also express feeling *pride* about the vlogger, as highlighted in example 55 above. Comments expressing pride have been left on all the videos in the data. This finding holds interesting implications about the uptake of friendly stance. Pride is an emotion that is generally experienced about oneself and about loved ones; feeling proud of a stranger is not such a usual occurrence. Fans expressing feelings of pride regarding their idols seems to suggest that the vloggers' friendly stances have positive uptakes. Fans seem to feel like they know the vloggers intimately, and are even able to feel pride over the accomplishments of their famous 'friends'. In conclusion, video comments seem to point to friendly and affective stances being readily taken up by fans.

The most commonly-used and salient stances in the data were those of friendliness, affection, and authenticity. The vloggers seemed to constantly be in the business of bridging the distance between themselves and their fans, and this was often achieved by friendly and affective stances. This propensity seems to confirm the findings of

earlier research into social media celebrities by e.g. Marwick (2015) and Jerslev (2016), who noted that these celebrities use a multitude of interactional practices to maintain a sense of connectedness with their audience.

This implied connectedness seems to be a key feature of celebrity-fan relationships in the new media, and it is likely to be one of the drawing forces behind the popularity of YouTubers. On YouTube, the social hierarchies between celebrities and fans are blurred; and even when they do exist, celebrities work seemingly hard to diminish their visibility. The YouTubers in this data were keen to treat their audience not as distant fans, but as friends, mimicking intimate communication practices and taking up affective stances.

The vloggers also placed great value on authenticity. This was expressed from the get-go through the fact that they were coming out to their fans at all, revealing their true selves in the process. They also overtly proved this need by both expressing it verbally (“I just want to be honest”) and by not editing out signals of nervousness from their videos (e.g. averting their gaze, breathing unevenly, or displaying tense facial expressions). The vloggers wanted to appear real to their audience. Whether this desire is a personal preference of these particular celebrities, or whether it is proof of them yielding to what is simply expected of them in the ‘game’ of social media celebrification, is a question that remains to be answered.

It is naturally also difficult to determine to what extent the vloggers were indeed being authentic, and to what extent they were simply using strategies to *seem* like they were. Being a ‘YouTuber’ has gone from being a hobby to being a credible career. Many YouTubers represent professional video production networks (not unlike musicians represent record labels or actors represent agencies), and increasingly often, they also represent commercial brands in the form of brand deals. This means that these social media celebrities are increasingly being influenced by outside forces on how to carry and represent themselves. It is possible that for some, appearing authentic is just a part of conscious image cultivation.

The stance activities identified in this study are particularly common for social media celebrities, such as YouTubers, who are mostly untethered by the traditional Hollywood 'celebrity machine'. Many current YouTube celebrities were, only a few years ago, regular people who simply decided to start making videos on the internet. Making videos is by its nature a rather solitary and unglamorous undertaking. This may be one reason why YouTube celebrities tend to regard themselves as 'regular people' and treat their fans accordingly. However, there are some signs suggesting that these intimate celebrity practices are becoming ever more common for traditional celebrities as well. The most common stances identified in this study - friendly, affective and authentic - bear striking similarities to Marwick and Boyd's (2011: 143) findings about conventional celebrities' Twitter practices. These practices included affiliation, intimacy, and authenticity and sincerity.

This would suggest that it is not only the *source* of celebrity that determines the nature of celebrity-fan relationships, but also the *medium* through which celebrity-fan communication happens. The features of YouTube and Twitter encourage seemingly direct, constant, and unmediated access to stars' private lives. These features clearly encourage the formation of parasocial relationships to a new degree. Marwick and Boyd (2011: 148) even suggest that when fans have the chance to actually interact with their idols - as they do on Twitter and, in the case of this study, YouTube - parasocial relationships are 'de-pathologized' from something a little bit clinical and odd to something more understandable. Considering one's idols almost friends is much less of an odd idea when the idols themselves encourage it.

In summary, we can note that celebrity practices on social media platforms are becoming more similar. This further adds to the findings of Marwick (2015) and Jerslev (2016), who both state that the lines between conventional celebrities, social media celebrities, and micro-celebrities are constantly becoming more blurred. This finding has important implications for the future of research on celebrity communication. There appears to be a great shift taking place regarding how and how much celebrities are expected to share. It might be worthwhile to study, for example, what drives conventional celebrities to engage with their fans in more intimate ways.

The findings of this study demonstrate how LGBT+ YouTube celebrities handle the task of coming out to their fans. For the most part, the YouTubers in the data do not seem to treat coming out as a risky PR move where they are disclosing their identity to a far-off audience of millions. Instead, they use friendly communication strategies and treat the process almost like they are coming out to real-life friends. For this to be possible, it seems that there already needs to be an underlying framework of closeness in the celebrity-fan relationships.

These videos also offer insight into what coming out looks like in the modern digital era. All the vloggers in the data simultaneously both elevate and downplay the act of coming out; they highlight its significance, and yet also express wishes that coming out would not be such a 'big deal'. As Troye Sivan states it: "I'm terrified, I know that some people are gonna have a problem with this, I know that... this could kind of change everything for me, umm... but it shouldn't have to, and that's why I'm making this video". This contradicting attitude mirrors the current state of LGBT+ affairs in the Western world. Coming out is still a marked event for most, but people are beginning to also recognize that it should not necessarily be. In this way, these YouTubers' comings-out reflect the current state, as well as some possible future directions, of disclosing minority sexual identities. Perhaps celebrities of the future will not feel the need to formally announce their coming out at all.

We should note that coming out videos are special occasions that may highlight celebrity-fan relationships in ways that are not as evident in other types of videos. YouTube beauty guru Ingrid Nilsen may appear vulnerable, emotional and authentic in her coming out video, but in much of her other work, she presents in more carefully constructed, performance-esque ways. For this reason, coming out videos offer intriguing windows into the heights of emotional closeness and authenticity that can transpire between YouTube celebrities and their fans, but it should be noted that they are just one specific type of video. Further research could examine multiple videos from a vlogger's catalogue, which might allow for a better overview of their overall communication style with fans.

Another restriction of this study is the fact that while the stances of vloggers can be quite readily analyzed, the stances of fans are more complicated objects for analysis. This means that while this study concerned itself with the relationships between celebrities and fans, fans' voices remained rather unheard. Further research into fan culture on YouTube could include interviews with fans, which could reveal much more about how fans relate to their YouTube idols. Interviews could also provide more insight into the effects of interpersonal stances on fans.

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