



Fluid gender expression-formulas of mainstream artists: A marketing analysis of cis-men's personas.

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“Poetry and art are key influences
in changing how we look at taboos”
– Rupi Kaur, 2016

FLUID GENDER EXPRESSION-FORMULAS OF MAINSTREAM ARTISTS: AN ANALYSIS OF CIS-MEN' PERSONAS FROM A MARKETING/PR PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

Music idols form the Olympus of pop culture. With their statements and products, they influence entire generations. This has been globalized by today's technologies. Therefore, an interdisciplinary analysis is more important than ever. Their gender expression validates and invalidates latent concepts in our society about identity, sexuality and binary behavior in general. Troye Sivan, Mahmood and Conan Gray are three examples of massively successful cis men challenging audiences with formulas of fluid gender expression. Coming from a decade in which masculinity seemed to be less flexible than even before, this thesis seeks to find out how these artists manage to stay true to themselves without losing mainstream appeal. Taxonomy, statistical analysis and expert interviews are conducted in this project to try to discover the optimal way to balance traditionally masculine and feminine elements without being disruptive. Where is the line between that which generates cognitive consonance and that which generates dissonance?

Keywords: fluid gender expression, masculinity, artist, singer, positioning, music

RESUMEN

Los ídolos musicales configuran el olimpo de la cultura pop. Con su discurso y sus productos, influyen a generaciones enteras. Esto se ha globalizado con las actuales tecnologías. Por ello, es hoy más importante que nunca su análisis interdisciplinario. La expresión de género de estos valida e invalida conceptos latentes a nuestra sociedad sobre identidad, sexualidad y comportamientos binarios en general. Troye Sivan, Mahmood y Conan Gray son tres ejemplos de hombres cis de éxito masivo que retan a la audiencia con fórmulas de expresión fluida de género. Viniendo de una década en la que la masculinidad parecía ser menos flexible que incluso anteriormente, esta tesis busca averiguar como estos artistas consiguen mantenerse fieles a ellos mismos sin perder el atractivo mainstream. Una taxonomía, análisis estadístico y entrevistas a expertos se llevan a cabo en este proyecto para intentar descubrir la forma óptima de balancear elementos tradicionalmente masculinos y femeninos sin ser disruptivo. ¿Dónde está la línea que separa aquello que genera consonancia cognitiva de lo que genera disonancia?

Palabras clave: expresión de género fluida, masculinidad, artista, cantante, posicionamiento, música

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of masculinity goes beyond gender and the habits of a certain community. It is an omnipresent set of invisible social grammar rules that has a great impact on how the human world is managed. This might be because “men were once the implicit center of most political discourse, social organization, and intellectual inquiry” (Miller, 2017). From economics, to law, to socio-politics... “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1995), provides “cultural materials adopted [...] in global arenas and utilized in local gender dynamics” (Messerschmidt, 2017, p. 41). Henceforth it conditions the validation, creation and implementation of discourses. Nevertheless, the massive success of contemporary cis-male artists who portray a more fluid gender expression on- and off-stage, seems to indicate new generations are approaching an era of social change. A time where orthodox masculinity isn’t sought and more complex proposals mixing traditional attributes of masculinity and femininity are welcome. However, where is the line of acceptance? When does an artist transition from being perceived as “cool” to “cringey”? The following project will dive into it.

1.1 ORIGINS AND MOTIVATION BEHIND THE PROJECT

Due to a bachelor thesis being a very elaborate project, there needs to be a main driver throughout its development. Please find below a break-down of the reasons behind it:

1.1.1 Relevance of the topic for the industry and society

The psychology of our society has always been both a friend and an enemy for the marketing industry. In order to understand the fan-idol phenomenon and cohesively complete a 360° communication strategy, companies need to deeply understand what stands behind a fan purchase. What drives people into participating in that game between fiction and reality?

The music industry and its on- and off-stage personas are a point of convergence between the audiovisual arts and the most strategic marketing. Sociology, creativity, statistics, synchrony, sensitivity and art in its pure state come together in the launch of an album on a global scale. If it is done well, not only numbers are reached, something else is impacted: culture. The artistic discourse from a performer can become the narrative voice of people's lives and its effect might not only be on material and commercial levels, but also beyond: on the existential.

In this change of decade several status-quo-disruptive cis-male pop musicians have risen to prominence and now it is an appropriate time to break down why some of them obtain external validation while others don't. If the flexible and immovable elements of such gender expression formulas are analyzed, patterns could be drawn. Hence, it could be said that this work brings knowledge to the discipline of marketing (understanding better generation Z and new narratives to be exploited through storytelling) while fulfilling a social function contributing to a more diverse and truthful artistic spectrum that might inspire further.

1.1.2 Personal implication

Pop stars indirectly reflect a vision of the world (Smith, 2011), a way of living, a certain internal and external management, etc., and these tend to be perpetuated by the commercial products of the cultural industry: movies, musical idols, etc. Throughout that process, they give an intangible permission to feel "cool" to the people who can or choose to identify with them.

Since in the last decade the musical world has been more visual than ever, artistic personas have come to redefine the parameters of normality and validity in behavior. Thus, they have the power to bring more diversity into the generational imagination and collective intelligence.

Another intention behind this project is to help throw light on new kinds of pop-stars so that the upcoming generations have alternative role models to feel not only inspired but also represented by. If the industry offers a more varied concept of artist, the chances of kids feeling different and alienated should be less. Moreover, the more different behaviors are normalized by the media the less social phobias and therefore bullying waves there should be (Schott, Søndergaard, 2014). That is also a driver behind this research.

1.2 UNIVERSAL MUSIC GERMANY

Due to the main author of this project being currently employed at Universal Music Germany/ Deutschland (henceforth abbreviated as UMD), direct access to internal statistical data has been granted. This has served as a main motivation to:

- upgrade this thesis to a more ambitious scale.
- analyze the performance within the German market.
- study artists signed under Universal Music Group (abbreviated as UMG) or its subsidiaries.
- base the methodology on the company's resources.

As a digital marketing assistant, the author has interacted with several departments including “Digital Concepts and Creation - Marketing Labs International”, “Insights and Operation” and “Data Analytics”. In collaboration with them, as well as with this project’s external tutor (Josefine Kramann) and the senior director of Data Analytics (Takis Kouretsidis) the realistic boundaries from above have been set.

Taking into consideration that UMG is the “world’s largest music company” (Li, Shevlin, 2019), one could say that their artists will inspire upcoming generations on a global scale. In other words, having the great possibility of collaborating with them indirectly entails working first hand with one of the biggest contemporary culture producers. The conglomerate is also called one of the “Big Three”, together with Sony Music and Warner Music Group (Ingham, 2020), since, according to industry insights, as of 2016, 62.4% of “all music sold, downloaded, and streamed worldwide” comes from them (Resnikoff, 2016).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

During the following section several sources of information from previous literature have been analyzed in order to understand the cultural past around the term of masculinity. During the paragraph 2.1 some relevant theories from the late 20th century will be highlighted to illustrate how masculinity was perceived as a set of features naturally belonging to cis-men. Moreover, throughout 2.2, the conceptual complexity of gender, sexuality and fluid gender expression will be covered. That will set the main conceptual pillars of this body of work, uniting the past that still unconsciously influences current generations, with a contemporary approach that fosters rephrasing the gender landscape to advance towards a more socially progressive future.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW: 20th CENTURY

Among others, authors like Raewyn Connell, Michael S. Kimmel and Élisabeth Badinter laid the fundamentals to comprehend the cultural basis behind the concept of “masculinity”. For the purpose of a greater understanding of the origins of the current patterns of gender expression, the following theories will be broken down.

2.1.1 Raewyn Connell

Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (1944) identified in her publication “Masculinities” (1995) four distinguishable types of masculinity: “hegemonic, subordinate, marginal and

complacent”. From the former four, the first two are of great importance for the further development of this thesis.

“Hegemonic masculinity” (Connell’s concept) is “the form [of masculinity] embodying male domination and exercising power and authority over women (and other men) ... [it] would represent the traditional archetype of virility and male stereotypes in accordance with a patriarchal culture” (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 49). This stems from Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” (notes written between 1929 and 1935 and selected and published by Hoare and Nowell Smith in 1971, p. 12), referring to the “cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life” (Connell, 2005).

“Subordinate masculinity” (Connell’s concept) is defined as a type of gender expression including “behaviours and feelings conventionally attributed to women, so that it is considered inappropriate and effeminate by most men” (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 49). That would also include the conduct which back then was associated to homosexual males due to their statistic tendency towards displaying female-associated values. Some examples would be a caring approach towards others, feminist solidarity and an emphasis on anything emotional or feelings-related.

Moreover, “marginal masculinity” and “complacent masculinity” (both Connell’s concepts) illustrate minorities of men who portray the same behavior patterns of a “hegemonic masculinity”, but don’t have access to power (because of their migratory background or low financial status). In other words, no social agency but still a lifestyle that doesn’t ever question the justice of “male privilege”.

2.1.2 Michael Scott Kimmel

American sociologist Michael S. Kimmel (1951) threw light into this issue in his book “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity” (1997). Different than other authors, he mentions “masculinity” as something men (since back then it was only associated to cis-males) can actively reshape rather than passively coexist with. This first step towards deconstructing the concept of masculinity, marks a direction towards the genderless future this thesis aims at.

Distancing himself from biological determinism, Kimmel defines the cultural perception of “manhood” (synonym of masculinity) and contrasts it with how men could actually act upon it:

“We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man, [...] as a thing, a quality that one either has or doesn’t have, [...] as innate, residing in the particular biological composition of the human male, the result of androgens or the possession of a penis... [however] this idea that manhood is socially constructed and historically shifting should not be understood as a loss [...] in fact, it gives us [...] agency, the capacity to act.”

He describes typical cis-male behavior as something culturally learned in a search for a socially-accepted identity under the careful “scrutiny of other men”, rather than simple human nature (as expressions like “boys will be boys” tend to imply). The fact that he stated that “what men need is men’s approval” (p. 214) meant a shift towards a different approach where masculinity wasn’t sex- or gender-dependent, but rather a survival response by cis-males.

Now that it has been clarified that “masculinity” is learned and hence, also accessible to other genders as a mean of expression, the traditionally associated features will be specified.

2.1.3 Élisabeth Badinter

French philosopher Élisabeth Badinter (1944) explored in her publication “XY, de l’identité masculine” (1992, translated: “XY: On Masculine Identity”), the four fundamental pillars of the male ideal (recognized within her contemporary society).

- Firstly, for the sake of his reputation and dignity, a “real man” should lack any femininity and therefore suppress his ability to profess affection or compassion. That will serve as prove that he is no female, newborn or homosexual.
- Secondly, coming across as “successful” in the eyes of other men. That concept could be translated into achieving power (within societal standards) and triggering admiration in others for the purpose of appropriating the public sphere.
- Thirdly, independence and stubbornness. Power extrapolated to the psychological field becomes determination, self-sufficiency and autonomy. A firm attitude without opinion-swings would be the best reflection of no mental “feminine weakness”. Men have to know what they want and stick to it.
- Last but not least, the underlying omnipresence of potential violence. The backbone of an objectively approved masculinity is physical superiority and the courage to exert

it publicly. That way, the forced subjection of others perceived as threats becomes part of their identity reclamation.

2.1.4 Conclusion on prior literature: 20th century

The scientific authorities mentioned above have significantly contributed to advancing during the first part of this dissertation: understanding what kind of messages were transmitted in explicit and implicit intergenerational flows of communication. Knowing what kids have observed from their parents and integrated into their current identities, has allowed the author of this thesis to obtain valuable insights regarding the complex identities of contemporary young adults. Comprehending how the parents of Generation Z people were raised facilitates the process of identifying how they might decode cultural products and consequently feel cognitive consonance or dissonance when interacting with them.

2.2 GENDER STUDIES

The new currents of thoughts within the discipline of gender studies have brought fresh perspectives to the dimensions of gender identity and its representations. The sentence “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” by the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir (1908) on her book “Le Deuxième Sexe” (translated: “The Second Sex”, 1949) proposes the redefinition of the term “gender” as a social and cultural construct (like “masculinity” and “femininity”), and therefore not as a direct implication of one being a male or a female.

During the following section the details of that paradigm will be explored through its main academic expositors. Afterwards, the definitions of key terms will be listed separately. This order responds to a specific purpose. In order to guide the reader towards a new way of thinking and interpreting reality, the authors below will serve as a transition. Their referents offer a theoretical baseline to deconstruct preconceived notions about gender. At the same time, their conclusions set the fundamentals to understand the organic redefinition of derived terminology. Hence, presenting the theories before the definitions will help to an overall better comprehension of what fluid gender expression is.

2.2.1 Linda Lindsey

American sociologist Linda Lindsey dives into the roots of social constructed realities in her scientific publication “*The Sociology of Gender: Theoretical Perspectives and Feminist Frameworks*” (2015) and traces its origins to the following concepts disclosed below:

“Symbolic interaction” is a “dynamic process in which people continually modify their behavior as a result of the interaction itself” (p. 9). The original term was coined by another American sociologist (Herbert Blumer, 1900–1987) stating that “people do not respond directly to the world around them, but to the meaning they bring to it. Society, its institutions, and its social structure exist [...] only through human interaction” (Blumer, 1969). Hence, reality is in its core what its members agree it to be.

The “social construction of reality” is derived from the aforementioned concept of “symbolic interaction”. Due to the fact that cultural norms bring general guidelines for role behavior, they become a key determinant of social performances, deeming some roles appropriate and rejecting others. However, cultural norms can be modified as a natural result of social interaction where people expose their own definitions of circumstantial appropriacy. This re-shaping of reality’s perception and the understanding behind it is an example of the social construction of reality.

Following this same narrative, it could be interpreted that concepts such as “gender” do not exist objectively but are rather “found in the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin, 1993). If people labeled as “females” or “males” are given a certain set of traits defined as “feminine” or “masculine”, such process has not been the result of an individual determination, but rather something “accomplished in interaction with others”.

2.2.1 Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West

Taking into account the previous concepts, American professors of sociology Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West lead a thorough research into how gender is built in their book “Doing Gender, Doing Difference - Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change” (2002).

Their conclusion is that people are actually “doing gender”. It is done collectively and consequently gender roles are complemented with a certain set of guidelines and scripts for males and others for females. As stated by Lindsey “[between-sex discrepancies are] reinforced when we routinely refer to those of the *other* sex (gender) as the *opposite* sex. Men and women label each other as opposite to who they are, then behave according to that label” (2002, p. 10).

2.2.2 Conclusion on prior literature: 21st century

As a summary of the reviewed literature, a transition could be highlighted. While in the previous century masculinity was seen as an exclusive set of socially-validated patterns for cis-males, current perspectives state that it is a very abstract concept without a natural connection to any sex and that it is built thanks to interaction.

Nevertheless, within the mainstream musical industry, commercial narratives usually maintain a relatively traditional take on gender expression. They predominantly portray orthodox representations of masculinity and femininity as expected from cis-males and cis-females. However, due to the changing social landscape, performers like Sam Smith (openly self-declared non-binary) or Troye Sivan (effeminate persona) are daring to project a more fluid gender expression which is challenging the status quo of 2020's society.

2.3 TERMINOLOGY DICTIONARY

Since the perspectives on modern human sexual behavior have varied drastically over the course of time (and still continue evolving along with our society) it has been deemed essential to gather the most relevant updated definitions. Henceforth, all written neologisms or technical terms should be interpreted following the descriptions stated below. They have been published on the latest edition of the *“Encyclopedia of Sex and Sexuality – Understanding Biology, Psychology, and Culture”* (Armstrong, 2021) or taken from other reliable sources.

2.3.1 Neo-definitions:

- Gender expression: how someone communicates their gender identity. The following quote illustrates how:

“This may be through a variety of outlets, including clothing, speech, posture, nonverbal communications, interests, and self-reference (pronouns that are used). Various forms of expression may present on a masculine or feminine spectrum. Often, gender expression is influenced by one's culture. Some people may also express their gender outside of masculine and feminine spectrums that are defined by their culture, and expression can fluctuate. In addition, gender expression may not necessarily fit in with cultural expectations or norms, which may lead to potential discrimination and stigma. Gender expression may or may not reflect someone's gender identity” (Snedecor, 2019)."

- Masculinity: It depends on the cultural space-time and it has been traditionally assumed that it can only be associated with cis-males. However:

“... social constructionism recognizes the essence of masculinity to be rooted in performance and not biology. Once again, this indicates that it is not inherently related to the male sex or gender but contingent on the active expression of culturally designated attributes. Just as one must commit acts of kindness to be deemed kind, one must act under the scripts of masculinity to be deemed masculinity” (Boseski, 2021, p. 407).

- Feminine traits: Typically linked to “being gentle, empathetic, caring, conflict and anger avoidant, tolerant, submissive, relationship focused, meeting expectations of beauty, and being sexually passive or uninterested” (Armstrong, 2021).
- Sex: It refers to the set of biological features that generally distinguish male and female. Specifically, differences when it comes to physiological components like hormones, genitalia...etc. In other words, “a person’s biological status” (Baez, p. 2, 2017)
- Gender: Dependent on the accompanying cultural space-time, it typically refers to cultural, social and psychological traits linked to males and females through social contexts. “Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned” (Lindsey, 2015, p. 4).
- Sexual orientation: It is a “person’s sexual and/or emotional attraction to another person” (Shively & De Cecco, 1977). It may evolve through “multiple stages of awareness, exploration, and identity through adolescence and into adulthood” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005) and some experience it as being variable or fluid (L. M. Diamond, 2013).
- Gender roles: “Patterns of behavior, attitudes, and personality attributes” (Alters, Schiff, 2009, p. 143) that are traditionally expected in a particular culture from each sex.

2.4 QUEER LEGACY RECOGNITION

Since this thesis’ main theoretical pillars are based on new-generation gender studies currents, it has been deemed appropriate to acknowledge where the redefinition of masculinity boundaries started from. The LGBTQ+ community has globally had a great impact on the mission of deconstructing stagnated notions regarding gender and sexual identity, orientation and expression. Thanks to their decades-long fight and sacrifice, both Eastern and Western societies (from a European perspective) have significantly advanced into a more open-minded

and less restrictive status quo, where new generations are allowed to envision an increasingly diverse and less biased human spectrum. Hence, this project directly benefits from their rich academical, socio-political and philosophical legacy.

2.4 CONNECTION TO GERMANY

Trying to very specifically pin down the parameters of contemporary masculinity is a rather impossible task since in every micro-community, family or even person, it's slightly different. That principle applies to Germany as well. After the socio-political events that took place during the previous century (world wars and their aftermath), the perception of masculinity shifted, and then, after the country was divided and the split regions obtained influences from other countries, it changed again. On top of that, the arrival of migratory masses from East Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and South East Asia, also diversified the status quo. Hence, masculinity, even within the country of Germany can be envisioned through very different prisms and therefore its derived expectations too. That is why, this dissertation is going to focus on those who have been born fully immersed in technology (Gen Z), since social media platforms and their organic phenomena have objectively contributed to partially unifying a Western perception of what masculinity is. As a result of mass online consumption of American pop culture, European artists have generally merged their artistic roots with the new sonic and aesthetic trends expanded by the US. Nevertheless, that doesn't only apply to music and films, but also to values and behavior patterns implicitly omnipresent in cultural waves.

3. HYPOTHESIS & OBJECTIVES

The following hypothesis is the central pillar of this piece of research. Find below the breakdown of main and secondary objectives which will serve as concrete goals to advance towards when designing and implementing the practical method of experiment. Please take into consideration the aforementioned set of vocabulary terms and its implicit connotations for this specific framework.

3.1 HYPOTHESIS

Cis-male performers with a non-hegemonic gender expression can be commercially successful if a balanced formula of traditionally masculine and non-masculine elements is implemented.

In other words, it is not necessary as a cis-male performer to display an on/ off-stage gender expression purely based on traditionally masculine values to be accepted and validated. A queer, more fluid and less genitalia-associated gender expression is also compatible with mass success. To this end, an equilibrium between masculine and feminine traits needs to be achieved (both combining explicit and implicit communication).

3.2 MAIN OBJECTIVE (O1)

Proving that cis-male artists with a non-hegemonic gender expression can also be commercially successful. In simpler terms it could be summarized as confirming if cis-male performers who publicly display behaviors culturally attributed to femininity can be mainstream-friendly products. Although no person's behavior usually consists of purely one-sided traits, the final output of a combination of both sides tends to be inclined towards one.

3.3 SECONDARY OBJECTIVES (O2 and O3)

Although the main objective would somehow already be an answer to the hypothesis, it still leaves a solid knowledge gap. It cannot be inferred if it is a matter of coincidence in isolated cases (queer success) or if there is a certain logic that connects all cases.

3.3.1 Patterns (O2)

The first secondary objective (O2) would be to find out if there are any patterns in the fluid gender expression of cis-male artists. After comparing their personas, being able to detect points of parity or similarities in the proportions of hegemonically masculine elements would confirm the existence of a kind of formula. That could partially also imply that there is a certain margin of tolerance within a society when it comes to unconsciously validating fluid gender expressions. In this case, for the sake of respecting that margin, the "formula" should offer an equilibrium counterbalancing feminine with masculine attributes and vice versa.

3.3.2 Immovable elements (O3)

The second secondary objective (O3) would be to confirm or deny the presence of solid, unconditionally necessary elements of hegemonic masculinity within the "formula" in order to make it work. Are there any must-haves in a mainstream-friendly non-hegemonic gender

expression for cis-male artists? Or are all elements in it flexible in its existence or proportions? More specific examples will be given in the materials of the method.

4. METHODOLOGY

This dissertation will mainly use content analysis to define and delimitate the branding parameters of cis-male artists with a potential mainstream appeal. The additional methodologies used in this project for primary and secondary research will be disclosed in the following section. For the sake of the project's coherence and solidity, a combination of desk research (prior to a taxonomy), quantitative and qualitative research has been pursued. In order to visually illustrate the results, tables and charts will be utilized. All of them will be elaborated by the author. That is why the source of them will not be indicated as a foot note under the aforementioned figures. Moreover, the screenshots added in the annex as evidence to back up confidential data will not include an online access to the source since they are part of UMG's internal server and it is not accessible for external users without member credentials.

4.1 SECONDARY RESEARCH: TAXONOMY

A taxonomy (a system for naming and organizing things, [...]) into groups that share similar qualities) will be drawn by putting together several background information sources such as the artists' official website, social media channels, music videos and official lyrics sheets, special appearances on media and professional review articles.

4.1.1 Collection criteria

The established criteria for the *corpus* of this project are the following:

- Only UMG-signed artists will be analyzed (contractual terms).
- Only the personas of cis-males will be evaluated (This filter exclusively responds to the purpose of narrowing down the number of variables to meet the extension requirements of this dissertation).
- Only three subjects of study will be taken as representatives of different gender expression formulas in order to illustrate a wide spectrum of approaches while still committing to the limited length of this thesis. That does not imply that these performers are necessarily unprecedented trailblazers of such behaviors, but rather

that they exemplify objectively better than others an alternative on/off-stage persona in this specific time-space context.

- Since the origins of this project remain sociological (and therefore linked to marketing-driven insights), throughout this project artists will be conceptually approached as cultural narratives who transcend in society.
- Due to pop culture having become globally mainstream due to the appearance of new technologies (Dor, 2004) like the internet, young fans have access to a wide shared bank of audiovisual material about their idols. Due to this reason, this project will be mainly backed up by digital data and driven by online relevancy. Additionally, due to the international pandemic in 2020, people have been forced to stay at home and therefore the interaction of young generations with internet has increased (Feldmann, Gasser, Lichtblau and Pujol, 2020). That has helped the industry collect a lot of valuable data to accurately depict the fan landscape.
- Since nowadays' artists tend to have a strong online presence and organically connect more with younger segments of the population, Generation Z ("the group of people who were born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s, who are regarded as being very familiar with the internet", Oxford dictionary, 2021) is going to be the audience this study will indirectly revolve around.

4.2 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Although the information gathered through desk research to prove their "success" and validity will be international, the streaming data (quantitative research) will only be from Germany. The reasoning behind such decision is that this thesis is trying to analyze three internationally acknowledged musicians within the specific context of German streaming.

Apart from social media statistics and streaming numbers, a "super-fan" analysis will be carried out in collaboration with the "Data Analytics" UMD team (courtesy of Mr. Takis Kouretsidis, senior director). Such research process is fundamentally a demographic analysis of an artist's Spotify audience (since it is the most used one). In this case the research will revolve around finding out the gender, age range and activity or passivity of the fans (if the listeners of a singer have actively looked for the song or if they passively listened to it randomly because of an automatic playlist they were listening to). The set location will be limited to Germany and the time window will be the 30 days prior to the research (15.04.2021).

This is of great importance because without distinguishing between active and passive listeners, it wouldn't be possible to untangle true fans from casual listeners. Although random,

unintentional “streams” (as in Spotify or Apple Music) do indeed contribute to the growth of an artist, they do not represent if they particularly enjoy the gender expression of the performer, and are therefore fans (which is what this thesis orbits around).

Notwithstanding the fact that becoming a fan isn’t solely based in one reason, but in many, enjoying the singer’s persona remains at the core of the fan-idol dynamic. It’s about cognitive consonance. Humans unconsciously like or reject certain discourses or elements depending on how much synchrony they feel. Otherwise, they cannot feel at ease, but rather disconnected and uncomfortable. In simpler terms, that would mark the difference between something “cool” and “cringey” (see definitions on 4.4.) This follows Leon Festinger’s ideas published in “*A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*” (1957) and states the following:

“...pairs of cognitions (elements of knowledge) can be relevant or irrelevant to one another. If two cognitions are relevant to one another, they are either consonant or dissonant. Two cognitions are *consonant* if one follows from the other, and they are *dissonant* if the obverse (opposite) of one cognition follows from the other. The existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, motivates the person to reduce the dissonance and leads to avoidance of information likely to increase the dissonance. The greater the magnitude of the dissonance, the greater is the pressure to reduce dissonance” (Harmon-Jones and Mills, 2019, p. 2).

In other words, people don’t choose what they like or dislike and are already unconsciously biased by the time they consciously decide to have an opinion about something. Since this project is about finding out how much people can tolerate a fluid non-orthodox gender expression unconsciously, this information is key: Are they listening to you because they like *you*? (consonant with the inputs of information they become from the artist) or because of an external factor? (e.g., the song is catchy and popular but they don’t know who you are and therefore they are not proof of how appealing the persona is to a mainstream audience).

4.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

A set of interviews will be made to three product managers within the music industry (the ones assigned to the three chosen case studies). The insights obtained by the members of the industry will help interpret the results of the surveys as well as contribute positively to the further development of the main hypothesis, adding business-oriented points of view and transgenerational perspectives.

4.4 SPECIFIC DEFINITIONS

In order to unify the selection and evaluation criteria of the aforementioned research, some definitions need to be established. These will apply only to this part of the thesis.

- **Successful:** It can be very different and discussable depending on the context, there will be a paragraph called “Justification” for every selected artist. In it, their career achievements will be highlighted, as well as their numbers.
- **Cool:** “used to show that you admire or approve of somebody/something because they are/it is fashionable, attractive and often different” (Oxford’s dictionary, 2021). Due to how widely the word is used, it does not always have to imply admiration per se, but rather affinity and cognitive consonance. Additionally, since it is informal jargon, it tends to be only applicable to socially-validated subjects. If a person expresses publicly something being “cool” it may indirectly mean it is worthy of social approval and acknowledgement.
- **Cringe:** “tending to cause one to cringe (to recoil in distaste [...] as out of embarrassment or discomfort)” also known as “cringeworthy” (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2021). In a nutshell, something a person can’t enjoy, triggers unconscious rejection and detachment (cognitive dissonance) and leaves an awkward aftertaste.

The descriptions above have been elaborated by combining several sources of information. A semantic analysis on comments by netizens has been carried out to fully grasp the connotations of the two last terms, since they mostly depend on the generation and other demographic characteristics.

5. TAXONOMY

Since artists are a record label’s products, they need to be marketed in a way that their value proposition (Fifield, 2009) is well communicated. However, it is not only about their core benefit, but also about the whole experience they offer to the different kind of music consumers: casual radio listeners, avid fans, identity-seeking teenagers, etc. Due to that same reason, analyzing their audio is not enough. Nowadays artists go beyond the acoustic dimension: they are more visual than ever through music videos, live performances, interviews and sponsored ads. To the end of offering a complete scan of their characteristics (in terms of

gender expression, which is what this project is focusing on), both the explicit and implicit inputs of information they offer will be scrutinized. That will be condensed into three different content categories: visual material, audio and lyrics and interviews (or other promotional real-life interaction).

Objectively, the audience obtains a final product consisting of intertwined sensorial and informational outputs (as in a song with lyrics, interpretational voice, instrumental, music video, cover artwork, persona highlights and its relation with the circumstantial environment). That fact could trigger the question of why this dissertation is analyzing its elements isolated from each other if it is their reactive combination what creates an illusionary product for the consumer. The answer to such inquiry is that the objective is precisely to untangle those ready-to-consume formulas, tracing back their original elements, identify how re-arrangeable they are and examine their potential.

Since this thesis bases its theoretical origins on “masculinity” and “femininity” being two main labels under which attributes were traditionally classified, it is assumed that gender expression can be constructed by combining elements from both “sides” (this metaphor does not reflect the opinion of the authors and has only been implemented to simplify the conceptual complexity behind the taxonomy for the sake of its overall comprehensibility). Nevertheless, since the lines between gender roles have started to blur in Western societies, every person’s gender expression tends to contain elements from both sides. The differences lay in the proportions in which their attributes are highlighted both consciously or unconsciously.

That paradigm organically leads to the concept of “balance”. Connected with the previous conclusions on Gramsci (cognitive dissonance and consonance), it could be inferred that a successful mainstream appeal is based on harmonically matching an audience’s mental status quo by counterbalancing cognitively disruptive elements with socially accepted ones. If that equilibrium is achieved through a formula (different in every case), this taxonomy should serve to gather all the necessary information to identify any patterns. As stated before, all charts and tables will not indicate the origin of their sources since they all have been elaborated by the author.

5.1 FICTIONAL VISUAL MATERIAL ANALYSIS

This is the first module of the taxonomy and all visual materials belonging to the artist’s pre-recorded narrative will be analyzed as well as the video-exclusive audio additions (brief

introductory speeches which don't belong to the original songs and can only be found in the trailers). That includes teasers, artworks, lyrics visualizers and music videos. The table consists of 5 different columns. The first one explains the technical category of the content piece, the second one the name, the third summarizes the elements that could be attributed to hegemonic femininity (as a synonym for non-hegemonic masculinity), the third hegemonic masculinity, and the fifth condenses the final balance taking into consideration all aspects.

The criteria that will be followed to determine if something is masculine or feminine will be the principles by Élisabeth Badinter exposed on the theoretical framework (lack of affection or compassion, successful in the eyes of other males, psychological stubbornness or independency and a physical superiority driven by a daring attitude). Although such standards belong to the 20th century in its purest forms, nowadays diluted gender identities stem from them. The derived behaviors are obtained through trans-generational learning as well as through hegemonic media narratives that echo old content formulas. That is why they will still be used as parameters to identify possible spin-offs of traditional masculinity. Consequently, elements that embody the cultural opposite will be under the category of "feminine" (such reductive approach has been taken to prioritize the simplicity of the taxonomy but does not reflect the current views of the authors behind this thesis). Nevertheless, other conceptual features which have no link to that binary will not be mentioned in the analysis since they don't contribute to the gender expression.

The final column of the table will reflect the final impression of the audiovisual piece in terms of conceptual disruptiveness. In other words, the psychological aftertaste it hypothetically would leave on an average audience which believes in the aforementioned definitions. Such result is obtained by analyzing the proportions and overall impact of the highlighted elements. For example, if a man kisses the torso of another man during three seconds in a music video of five minutes, the mathematical proportion in terms of camera time is one percent. Nevertheless, the impact it has on the whole narrative and on the unconscious decoding process of the viewer is way greater and fully conditions the end perception because of its contextual amplified meaning.

The personas in music videos are analyzed separately from the ones in live events since it is common within the music industry for performers to embody an artistic alter ego in their music videos that differs from their personality in interviews. Additionally, the table will feature shortened terms for a quicker reading. Please find below the abbreviations' legend to properly interpret the initialisms.

VMC	Visual media content	GEF	Gender expression formula****
MV	Music video*	VFU	Very femininely unbalanced
LV	Lyrics/ Visualizer**	FU	Femininely unbalanced
TE	Teaser***	B	Balanced
EP	Extended play record	MU	Masculinely unbalanced
LP	Long play record	VMU	Very masculinely unbalanced

Table o: Legend of initialisms of analysis' tables.

* includes also mini-films.

** includes also visualizers without lyrics or static cover artworks.

*** includes trailers.

****the rating under the gender expression inclination scale does not imply any kind of connotation. Neither the term “balanced” nor the opposed “unbalance” entail a better evaluation since this dissertation does not intend to judge any kind of gender expression formula. Both FU and MU include from being slightly inclined towards one of the sides to an explicitly queer or hyper-masculine statement.

5.2 AUDIO AND LYRICS ANALYSIS

This second category will focus on analyzing not only the explicit meaning of the written verses of the songs, but also the implicit concept they enclose. All of them will be obtained from the official source “Genius.com”, where lyrics are uploaded, artists reveal secrets behind their own songs and fans actively collaborate in the breaking down of it. Notwithstanding the fact that pop music consists of both lyrics and sounds, instrumentals won't be taken into consideration, since music production belongs to a very different scientific branch and approach. Regarding the table, it will include only key verses. Due to the fact that pop radio-formulas usually include repetitive sentences in a very short period of time, any sample of lyrics will play an important role within the song. Besides, the same initialisms of the first category will be applied to this table and external and own projects will be separated in order to be able to distinguish which lyrics directly reflect the main narrative of the artist and which don't (because of it being part of another artist's creative universe or other cultural products such as movies or charity causes).

Additionally, there will be a brief paragraph addressing the voice and attitude the performers regularly sing with and how it impacts or transforms how they come across as personas. An illustrative example of this would be how the exact words “I love you” sound totally different in Sam Smith's “Not In That Way” or in Machine Gun Kelly's “The Break Up”. The first one

croons from the deepest vulnerability and fragility while the second one vocalizes it with an emotionless contempt. Both approaches to the same chain of words equal a very different combination and therefore listening experience, also in terms of gender expression. While not all males would probably be willing to sing out loud the first version (Sam Smith's), the second version (Machine Gun Kelly's) would possibly be a potential safe option. Rather than a clash between cognitive dissonance and consonance, it is about discrimination and peer pressure as in not wanting "to be perceived as unmanly" (Morrison, 2011). Hence, the link between finding balance in artistic gender expression and accessing mainstream validation.

5.3 INTERVIEWS/ PROMOTION ANALYSIS

This category will take the top ten most viewed interviews of the artist (available on YouTube) and will use the same table as on the previous two parts. Other important aspects will be taken into consideration, like for example their approach to affective and sexual interests publicly, their potential advocacy for certain causes, their gender expression through fashion and body language...etc. Nevertheless, since online challenges and "channel-takeovers" have become very popular during the last years (especially during the pandemic), this category will also include that kind of contents. From a marketing perspective, they resemble an interview: They are supported by mass media outlets, staged as a public relations action and casually spread through the Internet to contribute to that persona's reputation and credibility.



Press photo 1: Troye Sivan, 2018. Credits: Jason Kim for GQ magazine. Source: <https://bit.ly/3aG8isa>

5.4 STUDY CASE 1 TROYE SIVAN

Troye Sivan Mellet (1995, age 25, henceforth abbreviated as “TS”) is a cis-male singer-songwriter, actor and YouTuber. Born in South Africa but raised in Australia, his music mixes pop, synthpop, electropop and dance-pop and is signed under EMI Australia/ Capitol. He started being popular at a very young age as a singer on YouTube and in Australian music contests. His biggest hits are “YOUTH” and his collaborations “I’m so tired...” and “There for You”. He came out as homosexual in 2013 via his popular YouTube channel and has always been very vocal about it (bit.ly/2RVYQKx). While promoting his single “My My My!” on the “Radio 1 Breakfast Show” with host Nick Grimshaw, he stated: “I really wanted it to sound gay” (2018). Several expert publications including “Rolling Stone” considered his album “Bloom” one of the best of 2018 (Spanos and Sheffield, 2018) and he has been called “the perfect pop star” by “TIME” (Brunner, 2018). Other achievements include a “Billboard Music” award, three “MTV Europe Music” awards and a “Golden Globe” nomination for “Best Original Song” for “Revelation” (“Boy Erased”, 2018). Outside of music, he played young “Wolverine” in “X-Men Origins: Wolverine” (2009). All of the information from above has been retrieved from his updated EMI Music online profile (bit.ly/2PhIAT9).

5.4.1 Justification

The author has decided that Troye Sivan could be a good study case since his gender expression formula is quite unprecedented within mainstream culture: a post-teenager who is openly gay and makes it part of his art, performs at awards shows, tops Billboard’s Dance charts, has a world tour and an online massive fandom. Across his most important platforms, TS has a total of 24.3 million followers (Instagram, Twitter and Facebook; please see annex), apart from his over seven million followers on his original YouTube channel (bit.ly/3emSZFK), where he also uploads his current music. Precisely because of the fact that his attributes are rare for a cis-male music product, he can offer a very illustrative example of a non-hegemonic gender expression formula that is successful. The origins of this information can be found in the corporate data screenshots at the end of the annex. That applies to the three paragraphs of justification.

5.4.2 Fictional visual material analysis of TS

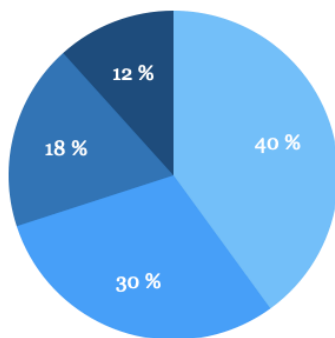
Please find in the annex the first table with all of his music videos, trailers, teasers, artworks, films and lyric visualizers. The original soundtrack’s songs “Revelation” (from “Boy Erased”, 2018) and “Strawberries & Cigarettes” (from “Love, Simon” 2018), are not included in the

visual analysis since the aesthetic of the cover artwork or lyric visualizer follow the color guidelines imposed by the movie's storytelling and therefore do not reflect Troye's vision. That also applies to the collaborative tracks "Papercut" (Zedd, 2015), "Hands" (various artists, 2016) and "Love Me Wrong" (Allie X, 2019) which have been left out since Troye only offered his vocals but did not creatively take part in the visual conceptualization. As seen from here onwards, all pieces of graphic aid representing TS will be blue.

5.4.3 Conclusions on TS's fictional visual material analysis

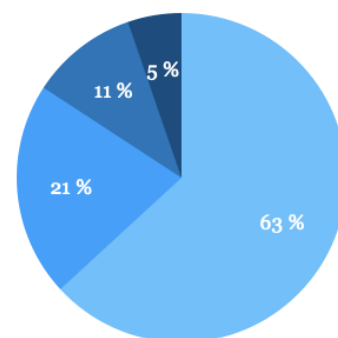
Sivan's portfolio (left graph) is composed predominantly by "very femininely unbalanced" imagery (40%), followed by "femininely unbalanced" (30%). Less than a 20% is at the middle of the spectrum and there is no trace of "very masculinely unbalanced". In general terms, it could be said that TS's visual board is in a 70% culturally feminine. Taking into consideration that music videos display the most promoted singles that are sent to a mainstream audience and due to its extension leave more room to an artist's creativity to explain their narrative, they have been measured in a separate sub-statistic (pie chart 2): From all his music videos, a 63% is "very femininely unbalanced" and an 84% in total is feminine-inclined. That means that the masculine or balanced materials where mostly cover artworks and lyric visualizers which per se are limited content "vehicles".

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 1: "TS VMC"

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 2: "TS MVs"

As explained before, explicit queer statements have a very big impact on a cis-male's gender expression due to the fact that our society still associates any kind of non-heteronormative practices to unacceptable femininity. That is why, even in songs where there was a high percentage of hegemonic masculine features, a relatively small "gay" portion totally outweighs the rest. Hence, the average VFU grade.

5.4.4 Audio and lyrics analysis of TS

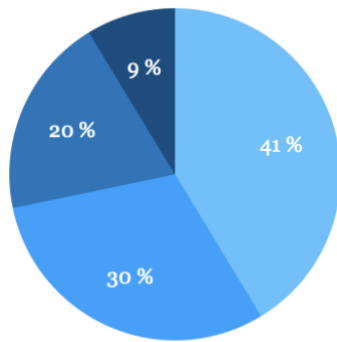
In the second table (Annex) all songs from Troye Sivan have been listed (all tracks published after he signed to a major record label, previous independent releases are not included). The remixes have been excluded since they don't bring any new lyrics and re-distribute the original ones, giving it a different structure than the one written by the author. Moreover, in the case of songs which have a hidden meaning for the singer but it cannot be guessed from listening to the lyrics without background information, they will be analyzed from the superficial point of view of a mainstream audience. All lyrics obtained from his "Genius" profile (bit.ly/3eJroia).

The song "Papercut" from Zedd's album "True Colors" featuring the vocals of Troye Sivan was written by Zedd's team and Troye did not contribute as a writer. However, since he has published the song under his name, it still contributes to his brand as an artist and adds up to the wide public's general perception about his persona. That is why it will also be included below. Alessia Cara's remix of "Wild" will be left out since her own lyrics don't add to Troye's narrative and her symbolic presence is already analyzed in the music video. "This this" and "Running shoes" have not made the final cut either since they are only to find in the exclusive "Target" edition of the album and mainstream listeners don't have access to it (not available on streaming platforms). Therefore, it is not an important part of his branding for his positioning (Clark and Montgomery, 1999) within the general market. "Somebody To Love" has also been left out because it was a covered "Queen" track for a charity event.

5.4.5 Conclusions on TS's lyrics analysis

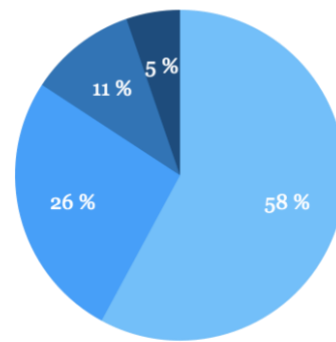
Similar to his visual analysis, TS's balance is inclined towards the feminine pole (71% FU plus VFU) and predominantly VFU with a 41%. Besides, from the promoted singles on radios and with music videos (which is what a mainstream audience usually knows an artist for), around 60% of the songs are VFU (please see pie chart 4). Additionally, from the fifteen songs which build up the "feminine" sector of the pie, eight include explicit references to male lovers (through male pronouns like "he", "him" and "his" or terms like "boy") and two implicit ones ("buzz cut"). This is due to this artist's own will: "I just wanted to write normal pop songs and when the time comes to use a pronoun, I'll use the word "he". One of the most powerful things I think that any LGBTQ+ person can do is just live" (Frank for "The Fader", 2015).

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 3: "TS Lyrics"

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 4: "TS Singles"

Moreover, TS's voice and attitude play also their part. Considered a "natural baritone" who "leaps up into upper registers with an easy elasticity" (Breihan for "Stereogum", 2018), worldwide renowned publications have also highlighted the following. According to Jamieson Cox from "Pitchfork", "the gentle lilt of his voice warmly hugs" (2018), and his voice's "tender naivety (...) pairs perfectly with (music) that tackles a variety of First Times: sexual, emotional and otherwise" (Degrasse for "Rolling Stone", 2018). In other words, his natural voice is commonly associated to childhood, innocence and delicacy. Due to this reason, it could be concluded that his voice increments the weight on the feminine pole. In technical terms, the equivalent of introducing his voice into his gender expression equation could entail the partial feminization of his products. However, since the impact is different on every song because the accompanying music (apart from the lyrics) is also changing, the consequences cannot be accurately calculated within this dissertation's reduced-scale-focus.

5.4.6 Interviews/promotion analysis of TS

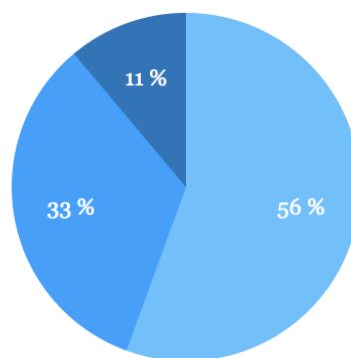
Having TS been a YouTuber in the last nine years, it has been deemed highly relevant to analyze his most watched "vlog" clip: "COMING OUT" (2013). Although it is not a piece of promotional material per se, it has played a key role in the definition of his public persona and the kind of values associated to him. Additionally, such "outing" statement may have conditioned the way in which his music is decoded and perceived. Find the break-down in the annex (table 3).

5.4.7 Conclusions on TS's interviews/promotion analysis

Sivan's interviews reveal very interesting contrasts between verbal and non-verbal communication. On the one side he is vocal and explicit about his homosexuality as well as

anything related to it or the LGBTQ+ community and sometimes has a culturally feminine aesthetic such as floral prints, platinum blonde hair or painted nails. On the other side, his voice is naturally low, he shows himself in control and in comfort to talk about everything explicitly and his laughter, sitting position and body language in general is quite masculine. If it was analyzed only from a technical perspective without taking into consideration the predominantly “queer”-related content, it would not reach the pole of “very femininely unbalanced” and rather remain on the mild “femininely unbalanced” part. However, including both content and appearance, his balance is definitely “VFU” (please see pie chart 5). Another interesting fact is that, out of the 10 analyzed clips, he has mentioned something related to his homosexuality in 6 occasions. This is valid, fair and licit, but it is highlighted in this analysis as another parameter of comparison with the other case studies.

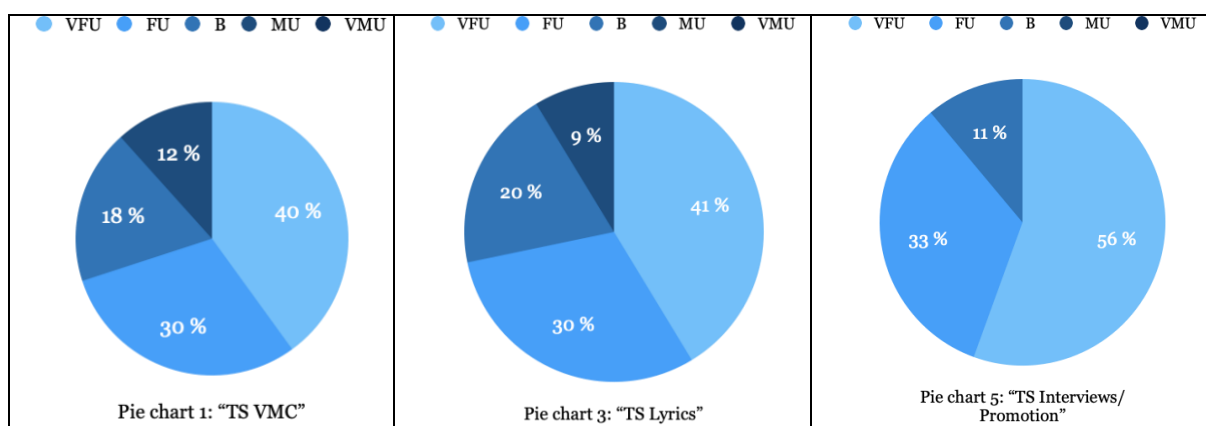
VFU FU B MU VMU

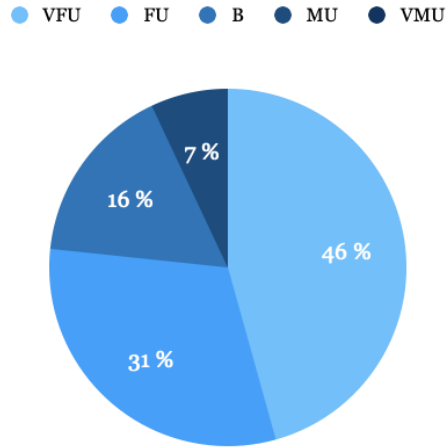


Pie chart 5: “TS Interviews/
Promotion”

5.4.8 Regressive conclusions on TS’s taxonomy

After analyzing Troye’s proposal from the once coined definitions for femininity and masculinity, the following pie charts have been formed. From a superficial glance it can be already observed that there is a clear pattern in all of the studied expression channels.





Pie chart 6: "TS total"

When combining the three of them, TS's general gender expression formula consists of two halves (approximately). One of them being VFU and the other one being mostly FU, but with some notes of B or even MU. That of course does not include the impact of the voice pitch and the instrumentals. Although it is true that a mainstream audience usually dedicates a very short attention span to discovering all the discography or videography of an artist, long-term success is based on the fandom enjoying most of the content of an artist, not only the promotional singles. That is why all of his content is being taken into consideration. On a scale where VMU would equal 1, MU 2, B 3, FU 4 and VFU 5, the average value would be **4,153**.



Press photo 2: Mahmood, 2019. Credits: Sharif Hamza for GQ Style magazine. Source: <https://bit.ly/3dPVRMo>

5.5 STUDY CASE 2 MAHMOOD

Alessandro Mahmoud (1992, age 28, henceforth abbreviated as “MM”) is an Italian cis-male singer-songwriter. Born in Milan to an Egyptian father and Italian mother but raised by the latter after their divorce when MM was five years old. His music mixes pop, R&B and hip hop and is signed under Universal Music Italia. He started being popular as a contestant of the Italian edition of the music competition “The X Factor” and then won the Sanremo Music Festival. What skyrocketed his status was performing on the stage of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2019 representing Italy and obtaining the second spot. His biggest hits are “Soldi” and “Barrio”. Regarding his sexuality, his approach has always been ambiguous and non-revealing by neither confirming, nor denying it. Riccardo Tisci (current chief creative officer of fashion elite brand “Burberry”), has called him “a rising star in more ways than one” due to his “incredibly sophisticated understanding (...) of different cultures, beliefs and languages” as seen in his “music, videos, performances” and his “brave sense of style” (Borrelli-Persson for Vogue Italy, 2020). Moreover, other achievements include a “Marcel Bezençon” award, and an “MTV Europe Music” award. The previous information has been retrieved from the artist’s updated Universal Music Italy online profile (bit.ly/2Pj8Hcx).

5.5.1 Justification

The author has decided that Mahmood could be a good study case too. Although his gender expression formula is preceded within mainstream culture, his way of narrating stories through his art is ambiguous and leaves room for interpretation. That is because a key part of traditional hegemonic masculinity is the explicit interest towards females and the rejection of emotional vulnerability. Nevertheless, he does not abide by that code throughout the majority of his career and still manages to be appealing to the mainstream market. Regarding this side of his life, he stated the following: “gay, straight... I think there shouldn't be any more distinctions like that. (...) Declaring 'I'm gay' doesn't get you anywhere except to be talked about. (...) if we continue with these distinctions, homosexuality will never be perceived as a normal thing, which it is” (Vanity Fair Italia, 2019). Such neutral answer together with other apparent hints such as him being vocally supportive of the LGBTQ+ community on interviews and his several performances on queer “Pride” festivals (bit.ly/2QFFbyt) have led the public to different assumptions.

Although the scale of his success is not comparable to the one of Troye Sivan, it has to be taken into consideration that that he is an Italian queer male artist from Egyptian descent singing fully in Italian (Vitali, 2019). That per se makes it considerably harder for him to reach certain

levels of popularity internationally. Hence, his achievements should be approached proportionally. In total he is followed by 1.4 million people on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter together (please see annex, corporate data) and his YouTube subscribers approach the million as well (bit.ly/3aBpr64).

5.5.2 Fictional visual material analysis of MM

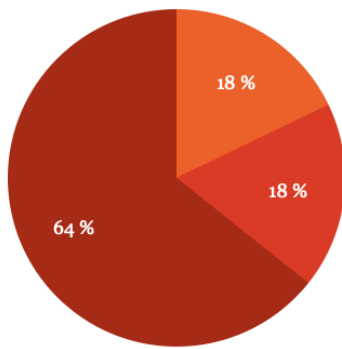
Please observe table 4 in the annex. The table includes all of his music videos, trailers, teasers, cover artworks, films and lyric visualizers. Songs prior to his official major label debut as part of Universal Music will not be analyzed. The visual concepts of “NON SONO MARRA - La Pelle” (with Marracash), “Luna” (with Fabri Fibra), “Doppio Whisky” (with Guè Pequeno) and the rest of his external collaborations where he is featured as a guest artist will not be listed either since MM did not partake in the conceptual visualization of it and it therefore does not represent him. An exception may apply if he personally appears in the music video or on the cover artwork. In that case only his footage will be broken down. As seen from here onwards, all pieces of graphic aid representing MM will be red.

5.5.3 Conclusions on MM’s fictional visual material analysis

Mahmood’s portfolio (please observe pie chart 7) is composed predominantly by “very masculinely unbalanced” imagery (64%), followed by “masculinely unbalanced” and “balanced”, both with a respective 18%. He does not have any kind of femininely unbalanced content. Since even in those visual materials where he adds childish nuances or flamboyant outfits, he manages to counterbalance it out through other imagery.

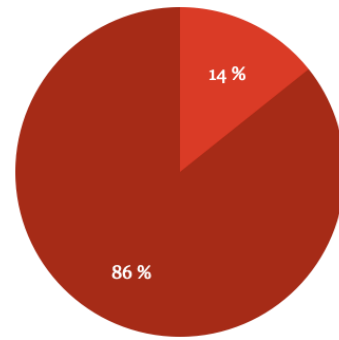
Since his music videos are the most viewed compared to the rest of his portfolio (including teasers, lyric videos, visualizers and others), they have been analyzed in pie chart 8. From his music videos, over an 85% are “very masculinely unbalanced”. Hence, mainstream audiences who might not follow the artist and therefore only randomly see the promoted clips of the music videos, will have an exclusively hyper-masculine view on him.

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 7: "MM VMC"

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 8: "MM MVs"

However, there are several elements that make MM stand out compared to his other hip-hop male peers. Visually, there are some unusual patterns. The presence of cars, suburbia, muscles and violent accusing arm moves are indeed typical and belonging to that specific scene's status quo. Nevertheless, what is different about him is the absence of some precedented must-haves of that genre: females. Throughout history male performers have justified their vulnerability with females and confirmed their success with them too. Regardless of the more than debatable legitimacy of using these clichés, what is striking is that Mahmood manages to create a stimulating visual proposal that makes the viewer not notice the absence of females. He gives the audience a very convincing slice of suburbia life filled with implicit violence, explicit manliness and tough-upbringing scenarios.

Due to that, he even discreetly introduces an unorthodox narrative between two males. In "Barrio" (2019), a group of friends is presented. But the two main men in the clique exchange glances continuously. Especially one of them looks at the other with admiration, joy and all of his attention. At some point throughout the video, they engage in a private conversation, distanced from the rest. The follow-up shot to that is a close-up burst of sparks. The music video ends with their two cars meeting in the desert in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, on the first visualization of the video it is hard to remember what car belongs to whom since there is not much attention dedicated to it visually.

The practice of introducing underlaying LGBTQ+ narratives without acknowledging them without any obvious supporting evidence is called "queer-coding" (Benshoff, 1997, p. 5). It has been done since decades ago "to get queer characters past censors alongside approval and a widespread audience" (Hutton, 2018, p. 8) and as Alexander Doty writes queer readings are indeed not "alternative, wishful or willful misreadings, or 'reading too much into things' (...). They result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has

been in popular culture texts and their audiences all along"(1997, p. 16). It helps create room for viewers to read characters and situation as queer, but such practice rarely leads to valuable representation.

The reason that might still happen nowadays in Mahmood's Italian hometown could be found in Fiorenzo Palermo's words, a senior lecturer in popular music at Middlesex University. He states that for the LGBTQ+ community queer-coding "is by and large a result of the stigma and shame that has been attached in the past to same-sex desire and the difficulty in finding popular songs that openly and explicitly expressed it" (2018). Due to that, coming to terms with both commercial and personal commitments might be a challenge when trying to reach a mainstream audience.

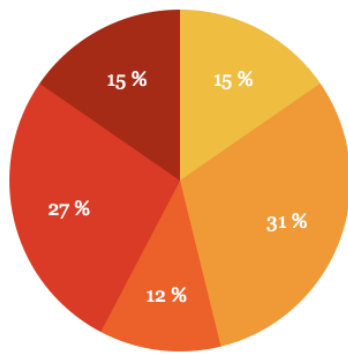
5.5.4 Audio and lyrics analysis of MM

In the table 5 (annex) all songs from MM have been listed (all tracks published after he signed to a major record label, previous independent releases are not included). Just like with Troye, remixes and covers have been excluded and the exact same criteria will be applied to evaluate the different contents. The selected lyrics will be directly translated to English for the sake of this project's overall comprehension and coherence. All lyrics have been obtained from his official "Genius" profile (bit.ly/3vCPOk6).

5.5.5 Conclusions on MM's lyrics analysis

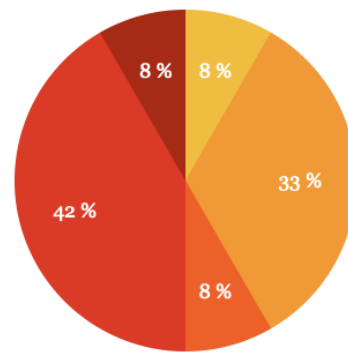
In contrast to Mahmood's visual analysis, his lyrics' balance is very broad and varied. Being "FU" the most predominant category (please see pie chart 9). It is closely followed by "MU" (27%) and surprisingly, both poles have the same weight, "VFU" and "VMU". Nevertheless, those proportions are destabilized when only the promotional singles are analyzed in a sub-statistic. The masculine side of the spectrum grows from the previous 43% to a 50% and the feminine one decreases its volume from the previous 46% to a 41%.

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 9: "MM Lyrics"

VFU FU B MU VMU



Pie chart 10: "MM Singles"

Surprisingly, the artist does not gender his lover in any song, not even in the ones where he collaborates with other male artists who do explicitly mention women (for example "Dorado"). Besides, he never provides the listener with any descriptive traits that are culturally linked to femininity, but rather with ambiguous hints that could apply to both, such as "you'll come back, with the usual pair of Nikes" (Rapide) or "You can keep the blue and white sweatshirt" (Uramaki). In fact, when paying attention to the possessive pronouns, he does not even explain who the sweatshirt belongs to, leaving it to the imagination of the public if it maybe is his own one ("the" instead of "your"). This gender-neutral approach might be taken on purpose, since this ambiguity is the reason why he idealizes one of his biggest inspirations, Frank Ocean: "[His music] is very free and in which everyone can identify themselves, gay or straight, because the essential is the person and the energy that he transmits and not the sexual orientation" (Rolling Stone Italia, 2018).

Music publications have stated that he, being a tenor with a flexible mastery of the "*falsetto*" technique, has a vocal range which allows him to swing between high-pitched and low-pitched sounds effortlessly. Consequently, his voice is "the perfect protagonist of the catchphrases (summer and otherwise), but it also goes well with the melancholic introspection and personal rhymes of the artist" (La casa del rap, 2019). This review implies that, firstly, MM expresses himself through both culturally feminine (falsetto) and masculine (low pitch) sound waves. Secondly, he comes across as credible on laid-back tracks with a non-emotional approach (traditionally masculine) and also on emotionally intense songs (associated to femininity). That contrast is summarized as a "continuous dualism that is created and destroyed, in which the moments of loneliness are transformed into resentment as when he sings" (Nasto, 2021). That method of channeling vulnerability through more aggressive outlets such as anger is a classic trope throughout the whole male-lead urban scene of music (Herd, 2005; and Stewart, 2020). It could be seen as a socially-validated way for cis-males to be allowed to feel and create

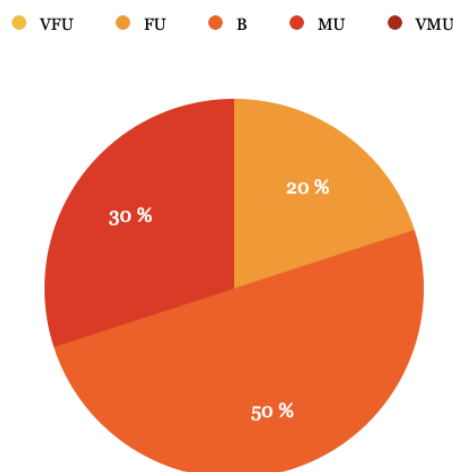
art around it, without it being decoded as cheesy, since violence and its derivatives are socially assumed to inherently belong to men's emotional development (Badinter, 1992). Due to the previous characteristics, MM's vocal performance perception remains rather inclined towards the masculine side since proportionally he spends more time singing on a low voice register and only occasionally ascends to the highest ones.

5.5.6 Interviews/ promotion analysis MM

Please find in the annex (table 6) the most watched ten interviews hosting Mahmood available on the online platform YouTube. Since the content is purely in Italian, it will be directly translated to English when referencing specific sentences. In the case of certain Italian slang words, an approximated English jargon term will be used.

5.5.7 Conclusions on MM's interviews/promotion analysis

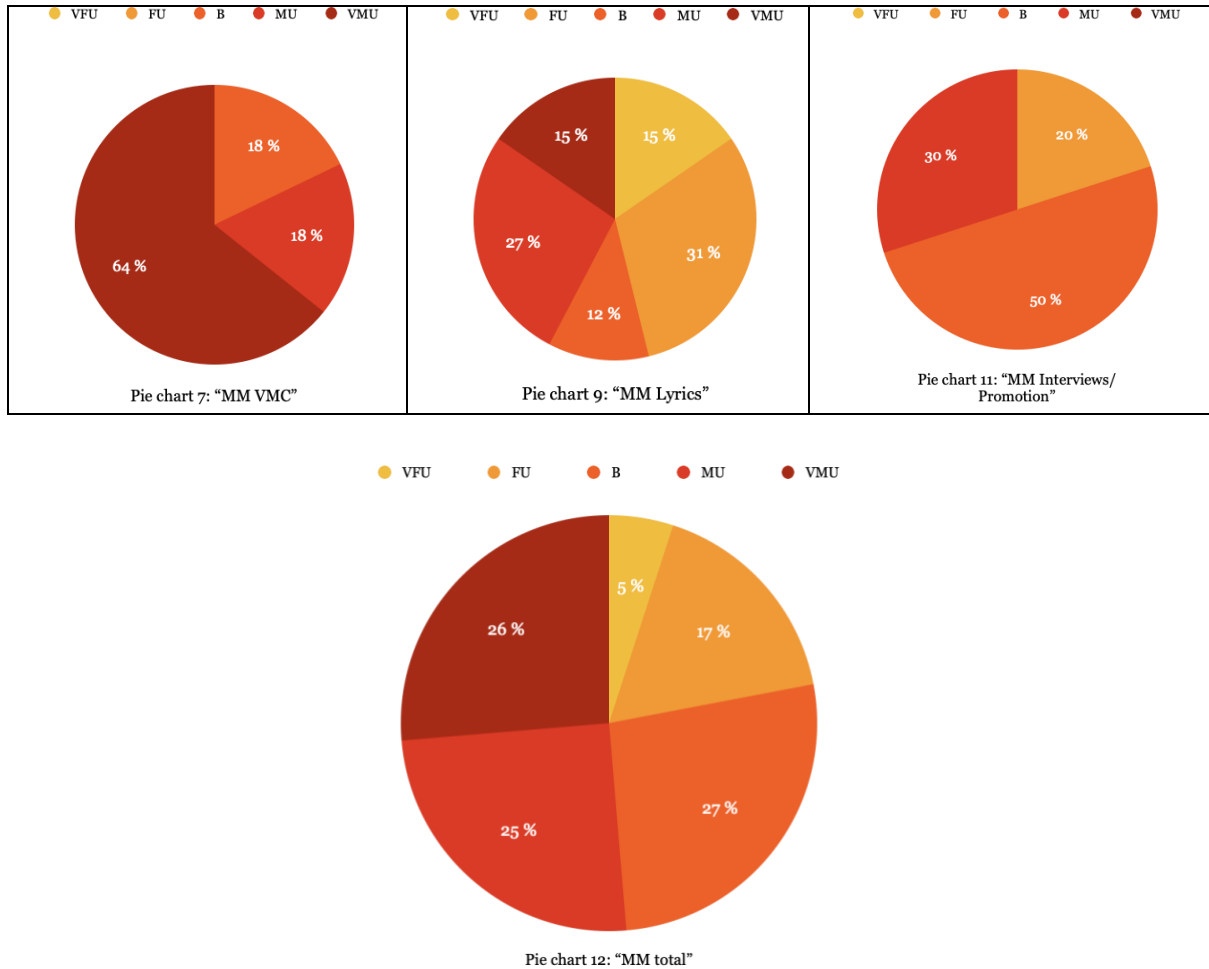
MM's persona on interviews is quite equilibrated and never too risky. It's balanced half of the times with light swings towards both sides (of the GEF spectrum) depending on the nature of the interview, the host and the audience. His discourse never gets into LGBTQ+ or feministic topics unless he is directly asked about it and he makes his mum and dad the protagonists of his stories and inspiration. Through that, he fills up the void left by the absence of an incognito lover. His appearance contributes a lot to him being perceived as masculine since his facial features per se are protuberant and big, which on top of his muscled body communicate non-verbally a certain kind of identity. That also applies to his low pitch voice and buzzcut hairstyle.



Pie chart 11: "MM Interviews/ Promotion"

5.5.8 Regressive conclusions on MM's taxonomy

Please observe in the following pie charts the total balance of MM's fluid gender expression formula. The procedure will be the same as applied for Troye Sivan above.



Mahmood gender expression's palette offers all colors. Although the biggest portion belongs to B, more than half of his attributes are masculine and half of those are even VMU, which outweighs his feminine side. His lyrics do indeed include fewer masculine nuances like vulnerable emotions and the lack of genders. On a scale where VMU would equal 1, MU 2, B 3, FU 4 and VFU 5, the average value would be **3,250**.



Press photo 3: Conan Gray, 2019. Credits: Nagib Chtaib for Clash Style magazine. Source: <https://bit.ly/2QvIMQv>

5.6 STUDY CASE 3 CONAN GRAY

Conan Lee Gray (1998, age 22, henceforth abbreviated as “CG”) is an American cis-male singer-songwriter and social media icon. Born in California to an Irish father and Japanese mother. His music mixes indie pop, “dream pop” and pop rock and he is signed under Republic Records, a division of UMG recordings. He started being popular as a YouTube content creator and as Khan writes: “He’s created a little world that serves both him and his fans” (Vogue US, 2019). He started in 2013 with “vlogs” portraying life in a small-town in Texas and it wasn’t until 2017 that he released his first single “Idle Town” talking about it. His biggest hits are “Maniac” and “Heather” and by the end of 2019, he had already amassed the impressive amount of 250 million combined streams on online platforms (bit.ly/3ngL4oE). Moreover, other achievements include a “Shorty” award for “Best YouTube Musician” and a “Streamy” award nomination for “Breakthrough Artist” (both in 2019). All the aforementioned data has been retrieved from Conan’s Republic Record’s updated online profile (bit.ly/2PhIPxx).

5.6.1 Justification

The author has decided that Conan Gray could be a valuable study case since its persona has very interesting points of parity and difference when compared to the previous two subjects (TS and MM). His gender expression formula is difficult to label and he does not fall into any binary-friendly category when it comes to self-definition. However, he still manages to be “one of the most promising new artists to emerge from a pandemic-stricken year” (J. Lipshutz for Billboard US, 2021). How he interacts with different genders around him generates disruptiveness within the unmovable frame of traditional masculinity. Neither does he abide by the usual visual motifs of a self-declared gay-male, nor does he approach heteronormative tropes. Instead, he plays with both and broadens the horizons of Generation Z pop culture by offering an unprecedented combination of traditionally masculine and feminine elements. About this topic, the artist took to social media to express his outrage:

“y’all are so annoying all y’all ever wanna do is place a label on me just let me f*ckin exist what the f*ck (...) here’s the f*cking deal. if labels on sexuality and gender and beliefs and all that great stuff are helpful for u, i’m all for it. u do u. but the second u start trying to shove everyone else into a neat little easy to understand box, i get mad. stop! please! f*cking stop!” (Twitter, 2018).

In other words, from a marketing and PR perspective, he explicitly and implicitly presents himself as “too” queer to be narrowed down to an existing market “positioning”. Being that narrative relatively unexplored within the current musical landscape (since other “unlabeled”

artists like “Yungblud” implicitly offer mostly heteronormative content) he has proved to be appealing enough to the new generations. Hence, his "Heather" performances on both “The Late Late Show with James Corden” and “The Today Show” (2020), his combined six million followers on social media (see annex) and nearly four on YouTube (bit.ly/3tNoQ8V). Once again, he is not on the same success-league as his peers Sivan and Mahmood, but rather in the middle. As seen from here onwards, all pieces of graphic aid representing CG will be gray.

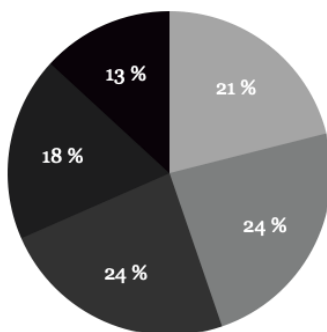
5.6.2 Fictional visual material analysis of CG

Please find in the annex the complete table 7 with all of his music videos, trailers, teasers, cover artworks, films and lyric visualizers. Trailers which do not contain any kind of extra material out of the music video will not be included. Just like with MM and TS, external projects where the artist has not taken part in the creative process will be excluded.

5.6.3 Conclusions on CG’s fictional visual material analysis

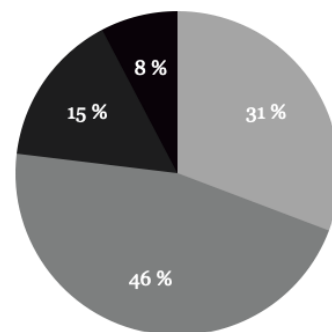
Gray’s portfolio (please observe pie chart 13) is one of the most interesting ones. His visual proposal not only offers both extremes (including “VFU” and “VMU”), but also displays them in similar proportions. His palette of graphic resources is predominantly composed by middle grounds (24%) and lightly unbalanced equal parts. This is the result of having music videos that contain very different tropes and out of that collision of cultural standards, a confusing, unexplored but relatively neutral aftertaste is left on the viewer.

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 13: “CG VMC”

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 14: “CG MVs”

When focusing on the music videos though, the majority of footage has a rather feminine connotation (close to 50%), followed by “VFU” (close to a third, 31%). In other words, although

the totality of his artistic work mixes images that are very distanced from each other on the gender expression spectrum, his most emblematic materials remain rather feminine.

However, there are some very interesting cases in his music videos. To start with, both “Checkmate” and “Wish You Were Sober” offer ambiguous narratives in regards to Conan’s sexual orientation, since he seems to have the same intimacy with a female than with a male, however, quick camera shots and external characters distract the viewer. Besides, he himself does not provide any confirming evidence and therefore partakes in an act of queer-coding. But that is not unprecedented, as we have already seen when analyzing MM.

Nevertheless, the plot of his “Overdrive” music video is quite uncommon. His fashion choices are very feminine like high-waisted pants, a corset, a top net, glitter and make-up. That would lead the audience to assume he is gay and the female co-star an accompanying friend. However, through the video there are several moments where the characters share a degree of intimacy that is culturally exclusively associated to a romantic couple. He hugs her (00:24, 01:59), lays in bed with her (00:36), leads her by the hand (00:41), feeds her (00:46), has a traditionally couple dinner with her (01:15), grabs her by the waist (01:36), dances with her (several occasions) and even pulls her closer to his chest (03:09). In all of the cases she reciprocates and they exchange intimate glances that confirm there is indeed a special bond. All of those scenes of mutual prioritization escalate but don’t climax in an expected kiss that serves as evidence for the viewers to decode it as a heterosexual love-affair. Instead, they exchange gender roles in multiple scenes where males and females have had fix positions during decades of cinematic development. For example, she is the one driving at a high speed during the whole clip while he throws his hands in the air and gets lost in the frenzy (02:50). On another moment, they dance with their hands tied and CG follows the moves a female would do, like letting himself fall back expecting his partner to pick him up (01:12) or spinning around until being embraced by his partner (02:05). Additionally, both the beginning and the ending portray a typical scene of teenage love with Conan acknowledging her presence at the other side of the railways, as if she were indeed his “crush”.

All of these contradictory moments confuse an audience that has for years being exposed to the same patterned narratives over and over again. It forces a less simplistic and more abstract reading of the scene. His socially assumed homosexuality due to his clothes is challenged by how he physically interacts with her and his role as a boyfriend is revisited when he embodies female-associated gender roles during certain key couple rituals. By doing that, the dimensions of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are separated and recombined. That lack of predictable binaries results in a very unexplored representation of a

fluid gender expression. Consequently, the line that is usually drawn to distinguish a friendship between “opposed” genders from a sexually-charged heterosexual love relationship, blurs. Hence, the aforementioned concepts get redefined or at least become as fluid and dynamic as the characters in it.

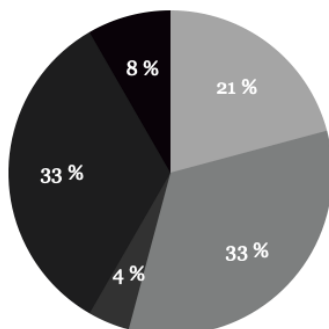
5.6.4 Audio and lyrics analysis of CG

Please observe in the table 8 (annex) all analyzed songs from CG. As before, only tracks published after his major label debut are listed and remixes and covers have left out. While the first classification includes his debut era, the second one includes his full-length album, the newly released single “Overdrive” and the external collaboration “Fake” with US singer-songwriter Lauv. Again, all lyrics are from his official “Genius” profile (bit.ly/3eQPUoH).

5.6.5 Conclusions on CG’s lyrics analysis

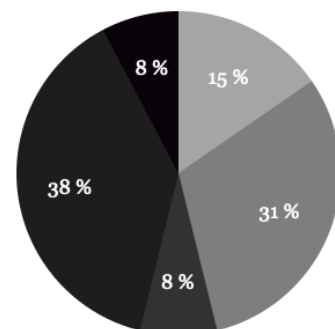
Just like with his visual palette, his lyrics portray also a very wide spectrum when it comes to gender expression. His proportions of femininely and masculinely unbalanced materials equal one third each, but in the extremes, there is almost three times more “VFU” than “VMU”. Besides, there seems to be a pattern in how he crafts his art: there is always a contrast that unsettles the viewer and airs the question of how that situation could be decoded alternatively, since standard readings do not apply to his narratives. For example, how he plays with pronouns. He very rarely will gender the lover he is referring to (except for the interlude “Online Love” where he uses “he”), but instead he will hint at his lover being able to replace him with a girl (“her”). Using our current society’s binaries as a theoretical base to elaborate conclusions on, that leads the listener to either think that he is loving a girl who is bisexual or a guy which would imply that Conan is not heterosexual.

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 15: “CG Lyrics”

● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 16: “CG Singles”

In regards to his promotional singles (see pie chart 16), the balance remains quite similar except for “MU” and “B” increasing their proportions in contrast to his pie chart 15 (total). Given the fact that our society is still unconsciously homophobic and that might lead to an underlying cognitive dissonance, it would be interesting to consider if rather “masculine” songs have been strategically promoted as singles for the sake of a mainstream-appealing branding. Nevertheless, since “Heather” has been his biggest hit up to the current date, it can be seen that the non-hegemonic narrative has proved successful for the artist and has probably influenced the choice of “Overdrive” as a follow-up single, which indeed states “don’t give a f*ck about labels” on its second verse. That could maybe imply that queer-coded lyrics are compatible with the rest of his elements (visual material, voice, persona) and contribute to an attractive gender expression formula for his audience.

Just like in the previous two cases (TS and MM), his voice also plays a role in how the song is delivered. Music publications have written that “Gray glosses over millennial ennui with an innate, laid back charm; dreams are made and hearts are broken as he navigates the woes of adolescence with wistful nuance” (Akingbade for NME magazine, 2020). Others have said that “his lyrics are biting, dancing between being amused and being hurt” and “breaths are included in the song, adding a level of emotional vulnerability to a piece that’s primarily cold and sharp” (Ehrlich for Affinity magazine, 2019). These reviews imply, once again, that his voice is also full of contrasts and that even bitter verses are sung from an innocent, breathy voice including even “*falsestos*” (The Musical Hype, 2020). Similar to Troye Sivan, the song’s final outcome combining lyrics and voice could actually gravitate towards the feminine pole due to his high-pitched and delicate vocal performance.

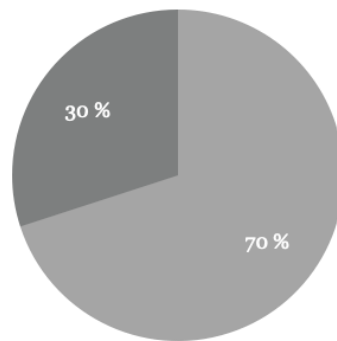
5.6.6 Interviews/ promotion analysis of CG

Please find listed in table 9 (annex) the most watched 10 interviews with CG available on YouTube. Although the author is focusing on interviews since they show how the artist behaves when interacting with other people in real life, his YouTube video “i’m a girly boy and i don’t care (kinda)” will also be included since it his most watched one (and third in the total ranking) and it is a very clear statement. It summarizes what values and ideas he has stood for throughout his time as a YouTuber.

5.6.7 Conclusions on CG’s interviews/promotion analysis

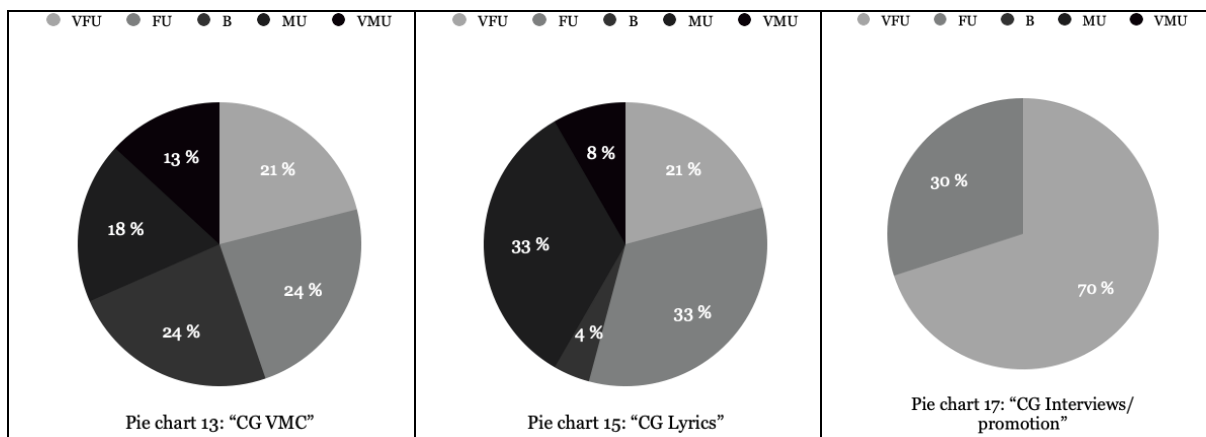
Gray's persona on interviews has experienced an evolutionary transition throughout the last two years. From his EP to his full-length album, he seems to gradually decrease the number of childish elements in his verbal and non-verbal communication. His constant references to his female idols or friends as well as his explicit statements regarding how he is not successful in a lot of things such as love and he being not proud of it, do not help in his construction of masculinity. Nevertheless, his raw honesty could come across as confidence and control of the situation, which are skills indeed traditionally associated to masculinity. In his case though, it is arguable if his straight-forwardness balances out the heavily feminine content of him, as well as his hand gestures and aesthetic. It could be assumed that expressing his romantic interest for females would somehow help him gravitate towards a more balanced gender expression, but since he never genders his lovers and always expresses his fascination for females, the audience faces a normally gay-associated narrative.

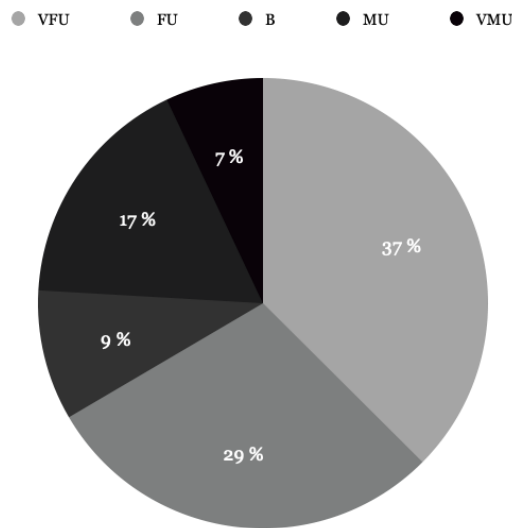
● VFU ● FU ● B ● MU ● VMU



Pie chart 17: "CG Interviews/promotion"

5.6.8. Conclusions on CG's Taxonomy





Pie chart 18: "CG total"

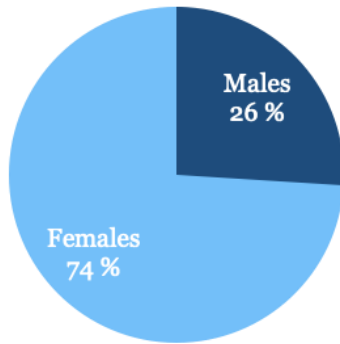
Following the orthodox parameters that have been established throughout the entire experimental part of this project, Gray's total gender expression would be mostly culturally feminine. However, he still shows masculine elements that manage to challenge the viewer. On a scale where VMU would equal 1, MU 2, B 3, FU 4 and VFU 5, his overall average GEF value would be **3,727**.

6. SUPER-FAN ANALYSIS

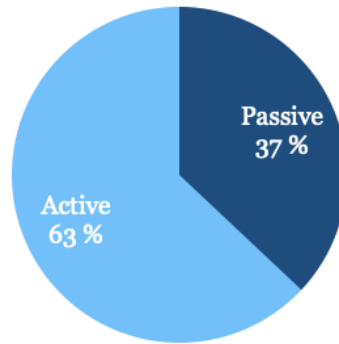
In the following paragraphs the author will analyze the gender percentages, age groups and amounts of active and passive listeners for each of the three study cases. The parameters that have been set are: Germany as the geographic location, Spotify as the scrutinized streaming platform and the last 30 days as the analysis period (17.03.2021 - 16.04.2021). Please observe the results in the charts and descriptions presented below. All necessary support evidence can be found in the corporate data on the annex.

6.1 SUPER-FAN ANALYSIS TROYE SIVAN

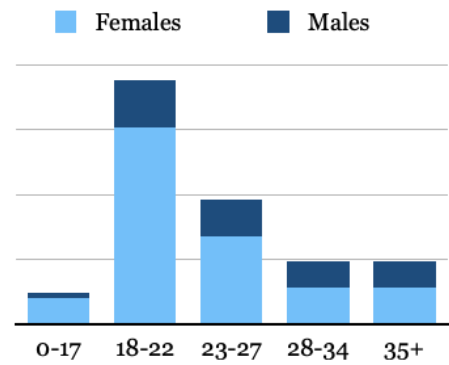
From his 23.106 average daily listeners in Germany, a 63% come from active listeners, while 37% of people discover his music through playlists and the algorithm. From his active audience, his core streamers are females (74%) aged between 18 to 22 (38%). In the case of all listeners (both active and passive), females still account for a 72%.



Pie chart 19: "TS Gender"



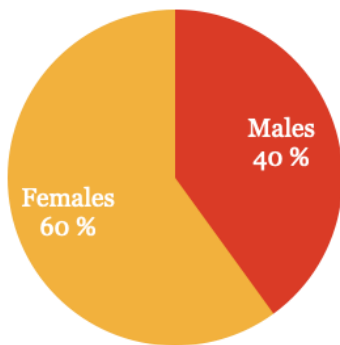
Pie chart 20: "TS Stream"



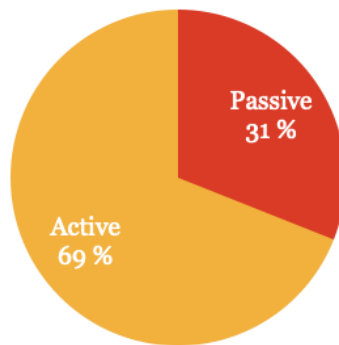
Bar chart 1: "TS Age"

6.2 SUPER-FAN ANALYSIS MAHMOOD

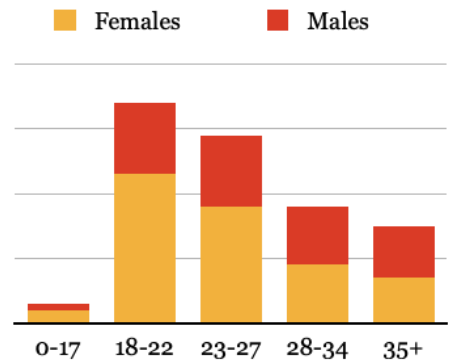
From his 7.039 average daily listeners on German ground, a 69% seeks actively his music (the rest are passive streamers). Females add up to a 60% of his active listeners (especially between 18 and 22,) and 56% of all of his streamers. From all his audience, his core audience spans between 23 to 27.



Pie chart 21: "MM Gender"



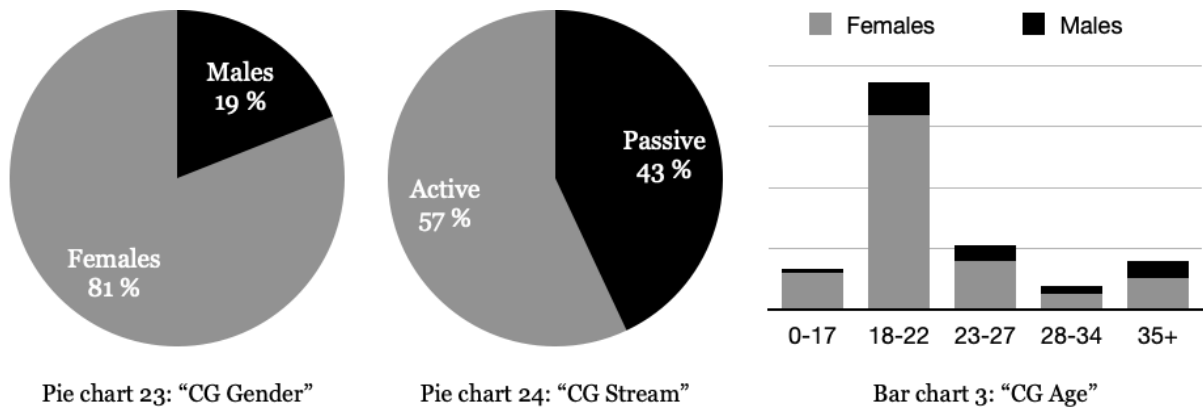
Pie chart 22: "MM Stream"



Bar chart 2: "MM Age"

6.3 SUPER-FAN ANALYSIS CONAN GRAY

From his 50.946 average daily listeners within Germany, 57% find him actively while 43% discover him passively. Females between 18 to 22 embody his core audience both among active listeners (81%) and listeners in general (76%).



7. INTERVIEWS TO EXPERTS

Thanks to the academic and professional collaboration with Universal Music, the author had the privilege of interviewing three members of the international marketing and artists management team. The original interviews were held in German and have been translated into English. They took place between the 12th and the 13th of April of 2020 and their full-length versions can be found at the end of this dissertation. The following paragraphs include selected quotes which have been partially summarized and recontextualized.

7.1 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION WITH TROYE SIVAN'S PRODUCT MANAGER FOR GERMANY: KATHARINA LEWIS

The first question was: "Some musicians tend to remain ambiguous, they don't use pronouns, but Troye does the opposite (by using male pronouns). He is very clear with his own story. How do you think he manages to find balance between such a queer narrative and being appealing for the mainstream market? What is his combination of elements?".

To that Mrs. Lewis shared her personal thoughts and replied that Troye is an extremely uncommon case due to the fact that he was one of the first significantly popular YouTubers that managed to turn his career into a musical project. Additionally, his music is of supreme quality and approaches unprecedented topics in a very natural and nonchalant way. Hence, the first step to understand his success is to acknowledge his authenticity and merit in paving his own path as a queer cis-male. Nevertheless, when it comes to his gender expression, there is indeed a certain tendency in him:

"Regarding his music, personality, stages, style... let's start with his music (...) he approaches very big topics in a very natural way, just how they come up on our daily lives. It is not about him

being a loud colorful drag-queen, but rather him talking about being lovesick. Also, I personally find he has an incredibly good taste for style and he adds a little queer note on top. For example, if he wears heels, it won't be female heels, but rather male shoes with an uncommon height or with a discreet sheen on top. (Such aesthetic) does not scream "I'm a drag-queen" and I think that may allow him to access the mainstream (market) because he doesn't set himself in any kind of niche."

She hints that on the opposite, having a very flamboyant gender expression does indeed shrink the market possibilities from a product management point of view. However, that does not apply to Troye since his queerness it's not his main identification trait. Therefore, he does not scare any audience automatically off. Proof of his compatibility is that they could always "collaborate with music press, queer press and teen press like 'Bravo' magazine" to promote him. On top of that, she implied that due to his past as an actor and his own charismatic personality, it could be assumed that he knows how to read situations and behave accordingly. What the author has interpreted out of such statement is that TS's ability to slightly adjust his communication depending on the interviewee has helped him being likable.

The second question dived into the thin line between coming across as "edgy" and "cool" through cognitive consonance or being seen as "too queer" triggering cognitive dissonance ("cringey"). Has Troye managed to both appeal to minorities while still being compatible with the mainstream market?

In regards to that, Mrs. Lewis shares again her personal opinion. She presumes that his advantage is that he "does not rely on stereotypes" and consequently "cannot be judged from a superficial level". Being able to move past barriers of internalized phobias and getting the chance to introduce himself individually sets a challenge for an audience that is used to having a pre-set opinion on queer individuals, regardless of knowing them or not and mostly unconsciously. To that unique balance she added that "If you discover him through a runway or a cover magazine photoshoot, he looks cool (on high-fashion). But if you see private photos (on his social media), he is wearing denim pants and a white T-shirt". She reflected about that duality being beneficial for him. What the author has interpreted out of it, is that illustrating the multidimensionality of an individual might allow the viewer to discover more aspects that trigger cognitive consonance and that might eventually outweigh those triggering dissonance.

Regarding his persona on interviews, she summarized that he comes across as calm, mature, at peace with himself and confident: "He is not somebody who necessarily needs to scream on every interview that he is "queer and proud". The fact that he does not thematize himself makes it (his persona) sustainable".

7.2 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION WITH MAHMOOD'S RECORD LABEL EMPLOYEE:

A full transcript of this second interview has not been possible since it was an improvised and relatively short telephonic call. However, its content was extremely valuable due to that person being familiar with MM's international career development.

The interviewed worker shared their personal thoughts regarding MM's success formula and the highlighted elements were the following: his voice, unique music, dance skills, sophisticated fashion style, overall charisma and stage presence. When trying to dive into the strategy behind his musical collaborations, the employee stated the following: "Everything comes from him, he writes his own lyrics and when jumping on a track with somebody else, it has to make sense to him". That question was asked to figure out if at some point it had been advised to him to accept collaborations and artistic proposals that showed a very masculine side of him, in order to "compensate" the fact that he does not gender. Nevertheless, the answer was fully negative, stating that Mahmood is in full control of his creative development and the record label would not take such approach.

The next question the interviewee answered was: "Taking into consideration that some Mediterranean countries (MM is Italian) are still very rooted in gender binaries and roles, it has been sometimes assumed that some artists were advised in the past to fit into a certain standard of "masculinity" so they could have access to a mainstream audience. Do you feel like there is always a "hyper-masculine" ingredient in Mahmood's creative expression to make sure he comes across as masculine in order to make him both attractive for the Italian and the international market?". To that they replied again with no, there have been no creative proposals discarded or adjusted for the sake of the singer's masculinity and it could not happen nowadays because our society has evolved and people do not care anymore about certain gender stereotypes or especially his fans. Summarizing, there has been no intent to consciously make his persona look more masculine and his success rather stems from him being a very complete artistic package.

7.3 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONVERSATION WITH CONAN GRAY'S PRODUCT MANAGER FOR GERMANY: EVA WITTMANN

The questions for Conan Gray are very similar to the ones previously put for Troye Sivan's interview since their gender expression formulas are inclined towards femininity. Mrs.

Wittmann explains that, from her subjective point of view, Conan's success potential resides in how loyal his audience is to him. Having been an incredibly honest YouTube vlogger from a very young age, he and his fans have grown up together developing a very intimate bond.

In order to dive deeper into his gender communication, the following question was put: "Judging from the music video for "Overdrive", it seems like he creates his art on an ambiguous ground. During the clip it is not clear if the bond represents a romantic interest or a friendship, which would usually lead the audience to a typical reading of the narrative (if heteronormative or queer). Do you think that from a mainstream product management perspective, it could be risky if he increases the degree of experimentation in his future releases and therefore comes across as 'too queer'?"

To that Wittmann replied that, in general, CG plays on a very thin middle-ground because of several reasons. On the one hand, because his musical direction needs to both satisfy his original indie fandom but at the same time offer him the possibility to expand into a wider audience. On the other hand, because he neither denies nor confirms anything regarding his romantic or sexual interests:

"He plays on a very fine line, he never reveals the gender of his lover, he always refers to them as "the person I loved". In this case, "Heather" might have benefited from the uncertainty and the relative controversy that originated after it. When people listen to "Heather", they don't know if they should assume that Conan was in love with a man who was in love with Heather, or if he was in love with a woman who was in love with Heather. I think that kind of game can also be interesting for the youngest audience, especially in a time where there are more artists who define themselves as non-binary like Sam Smith."

She expresses that she does not think it would make sense to try to sell as Conan Gray as more "heteronormative" than he is because his fans are young and that generation does not really need a label from him. The whole online discussion revolved around finding out who "Heather" was but it never was about figuring out CG's gender identity or sexual orientation. In other words, there is no need of bringing hyper-masculine elements to the table to "counterbalance" anything since his degree of gender fluidity is valid for his fandom and Spotify's consumers are any way under 35. Neither would it be logical to try to appeal to older audiences, nor does he need it.

Regarding the idea of him being a challenge to promote on German ground because of his queerness, she does not agree. Successful feminine advertising materials about him have

proved it all is about targeting the right fandom clusters on TikTok or Instagram Stories. Even if homophobic people get to know him, they probably will not get triggered since he has a rather “cute” approach to gender fluidity. Wittmann says that although “he does play with classic feminine attributes and accessories (...) it is never sexual. It is always sweet (...) they might even say ‘Oh well, he paints his nails and has long hair but rock stars did it also in the past’.”

8. REGRESSION ANALYSIS: CORRELATION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section of the project will focus on gathering the previously accessed information and finding non obvious links that might contribute to understanding these artist’s mainstream potential key while remaining relatively queer-coded. Everything solely relates to Germany.

8.1 TROYE SIVAN

TS has the most feminine GEF compared to the other two case studies: 4,153. While being VFU, he is successful (23.106 daily average listeners on Spotify without any big release). In his case it might be because most of his active listeners are females (75%) and young (18-22). Culturally females tend to feel affinity towards effeminate males and the younger, the more flexible their tolerance bar is when decoding queerness (Dasgupta and Rivera, 2006). Moreover, the expert interview reveals he is “queer but not too much” and his “queerness does not stand in the front center”, but his music. That statement proves that, although his GEF is indeed very feminine on traditional terms, the new generation (the ones who also grew up watching him on YouTube), has different parameters and for them a VFU proposal does not trigger cognitive dissonance.

8.2 MAHMOOD

MM is a “safer” option for a mainstream status quo (3,250); however, he plays on a very discriminatory league at home (hip hop, urban pop). Despite of that, he manages to remain successful (7.039) and attract both females (60%) and males (40%). Once again, his core active audience is equally young as TS (18-22). His still feminine but also balanced GEF proves to be able to attract more males than his peers (TS and CG). Nevertheless, females keep on playing a greater role and it might be due to the same reasons as Troye plus an additional one: as the interview revealed “he is a full package”, including attractiveness. Last but not least, his

“queerness” is not in the center but rather left aside by his Moroccan pop and style. However, the fact that the interviewed employer has declared there is no intention of adding masculine elements to MM’s proposal, does not imply it might have been done unconsciously, even from the artist’s own perspective, since preferences are natural and deeply ingrained in our decision-making processes, as mental shortcuts (Dasgupta and Rivera, 2006).

8.3 CONAN GRAY

CG is traditionally more feminine than MM but less than TS (3,727) and due to his recent releases, he is the most successful (50.946 daily average listeners). In his case the key role of young women (81% of active listeners, 18-22) for the support of his artistic proposal is the most striking. Although he does navigate very queer topics, it is never a political claim, but rather just CG credibly being himself as his YouTube fandom can prove. From a product management perspective, he is also “queer, but not too much”. That might illustrate once more, that although he would be indeed “too much” for the past generation which set the definitions of “masculinity” of “femininity”, he is not for his current fans’ generation. They have a higher tolerance degree and therefore remain feeling cognitive consonance. That might have allowed them to follow his evolution throughout YouTube during the last decade too.

8.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

They have in common the following aspects:

- A loyal fanbase founded in the past (YouTube and Eurovision).
- A very young audience (18-22) which outnumbers other age ranges on the most important streaming platform currently (Spotify). That means having their support in this moment in time allows artists with a less masculine GEF to access the mainstream, since youngsters dominate the charts and the online trends that grant visibility and validation.
- Being “queer but not too much” for Generation Z.
- Not having “queerness” as a central discourse but rather as an accompanying element which is naturally integrated in their art and circular communication.
- A fanbase lead by females.

- Being very complete artists with a healthy personal branding: credible and sustainable.

They are different in less relevant aspects such as their musical genres (electro-pop, Moroccan pop and bedroom pop), their degree of openness regarding their sexual orientation (Troye being explicitly vocal about his fetishes, Mahmood never gendering and Conan using smart wordplays) and their physical attributes (slim adult but fit, muscled and teenager).

8.4.1 Conclusions on comparative analysis

In order to be able to reach full circle with the conclusion of this dissertation, the original hypothesis and objectives will be mentioned. That will provide the reader with conceptual closure, remembering the original question and disclosing its respective answer.

The original hypothesis was: “Cis-male performers with a non-hegemonic gender expression can be commercially successful if a balanced formula of traditionally masculine and non-masculine elements is implemented”. After months of research, the main hypothesis has been proved true: all three performers did indeed display respectively different gender expression formulas and their numbers prove their success. Although a traditional analysis shows they do not reach any kind of “balance” by combining feminine and masculine elements (from a purely objective point of view), they have access to mainstream acknowledgement because their fanbase has a higher degree of tolerance towards gender-fluidity. However, that does not mean that a fully feminine behavior would have potential from a product management perspective. A balance still needs to be achieved, but not for millennials or baby boomers. Spotify depends on the standards of Generation Z and that allows artists to navigate, explore and experiment with their GEF.

Nevertheless, it would not be appropriate to forget that such massive acceptance in all three cases has been led by females. That could mean that mostly is only Generation Z women who are compatible with that degree of queerness. Oppositely, males might need longer to get rid of old masculinity standards. From the studied performers, only Mahmood has a similar amount of female and male active listeners and his masculinity is also proportional to that. Summarizing, there seems to be a formula for cis-male artists with fluid gender expressions wanting to conquer the mainstream:

Female-lead support + 18-22 audience + “queer but not too much” for Generation Z + emotionally attached fanbase (artist known as a person) + being a complete product as a performer: charismatic, credible and visually stimulating.

The main objective was proving that cis-male artists with a non-hegemonic gender expression can also be commercially successful. Such purpose has been fulfilled: the streaming and social media numbers prove success in artists with an average of “Very Femininely Unbalanced” and “Femininely Unbalanced” GEFs.

The first secondary objective was finding out if there were any patterns in the fluid gender expression of successful cis-male artists. It has indeed been confirmed and the patterns have been listed in the comparative analysis and the formula above.

Regarding the second secondary objective, which was to confirm or deny the presence of solid, unconditionally necessary elements of hegemonic masculinity within the “formula” in order to make it work, the answer is negative. Although the three are “queer but not too much”, they achieve that status through very different combinations and there is not one single element repeated in all of them.

9. LIMITATIONS

Throughout the development of this project some obstacles have been encountered. That has led to several conceptual readjustments over the course of its elaboration.

9.1 INCLUSIVE TERMINOLOGY AND CHANGE OF APPROACH

Due to previous literature pieces having approached masculinity from a rather male-centric point of view (as stated before on this project), the main narrative of this thesis was initiated from a biased and outdated perspective. As time went by and the author had the chance to transition from analyzing theories from the 20th century to exploring further updated research on gender studies from the last decade, a shift took place. Pondering on the desired societal contribution behind this body of work and the real-life impact the usage of words and heavily-connoted terms have, the mindset of the author changed. Hence, an improvised modification of the title, theoretical framework and direction of the thesis had to be urgently enforced during the second trimester of the preparation.

While the first concept revolved around defining “new masculinities” and assuming it meant new socially valid behaviors for “men” (outdated definition, but still present and validated within the entertainment industry), the second concept addresses the issue of gender identity from a more progressive perspective (masculinity being a specific choice of gender expression for both trans- and cis-gender people regardless).

9.2 COVID19 PANDEMIC

Due to the current global situation, sources to become information have been limited. Throughout the winter (2020/2021) Germany has been under lockdown and implementing very strict anti-contagion policies. This has led to libraries and physical book-stores being closed, the live-entertainment industry being paralyzed and all work-life becoming virtual. Therefore, information for this research has exclusively been dependent on online content availability. Specifically, when it came to analysis of the artists’ gender expression: There was no new content about the artist interacting with the fans in person or on tour, which would have helped get a more updated 360° vision of them. Consequently, information from 2019 has been very valuable to counterbalance the lack of material from 2020.

9.3 EXCLUSIVITY AGREEMENT

Being under the conditions of an exclusivity contract with Universal Music is an absolute privilege. Nevertheless, it also entails zero interaction with other record labels for the sake of confidentiality agreements. Hence, the absence of other potentially illustrative study cases such as Harry Styles or Frank Ocean.

9.4 DATA OBTENTION

Valuable psychographic and demographic information from netizens can only be obtained from streaming platforms (such as Spotify...), but not from online music stores like iTunes, where songs are actually purchased. That has significantly limited the number of sources to obtain insightful data for a better profiling of target personas.

9.5 SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Although it was firstly considered to include the analysis of Instagram posts, since it is the most used social media platform globally for Generation Z people (Saputra and Jonson, 2020), it was discarded. The main motivation behind using it was to observe how fans get an insight

into the private lives of their icons and even communicate with them. However, since this project is about analyzing the inputs of information mainstream audiences receive, social platforms have been left out because only people who are already fans follow such artists. Additionally, it would surpass the limited extension of this dissertation.

9.6 SURVEY

In the first draft of this dissertation's structure, an additional survey was planned as part of the experiment section to prove the suggested hypothesis. Nevertheless, it was deemed unnecessary during the third trimester of elaboration. The reasons behind it were that it exceeded the limited allowed extension for this project, it was not possible to execute it because it would entail a high monetary investment with no return guarantees for the author's company and it would not bring much added value to the project. This is due to fact that when it comes to analyzing internal phobias, prejudice and culturally-biased preferences, people usually do not offer transparent responses and qualitative research tends to be more efficient.

9.7 NO ACCESS LINK FOR STATISTICS

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10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to the broad nature of this topic and the limited extension of a bachelor's thesis, several further research paths could be suggested:

10.1 GENDER SPECTRUM

Only cis-males have been analyzed in this research. However, the current gender spectrum includes other kinds of genders. The chosen "masculinity" of cis-females, trans-females, trans-males, genderfluid and non-binary people could also be analyzed. That would help the

industry understand how to make their gender expression proposal compatible with society and consequently integrate them into mainstream media.

10.2 ALPHA GENERATION

From all generations, people belonging to the “Alpha generation” (born from the early 2010s onwards, Perano, 2019) will interest the most to the world, since they are the future. Applying a similar kind of research to younger targets would allow the scientific community to foresee Alpha values and perceptions and bridge intergenerational gaps.

10.3 IMPACT ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Artists become messiahs for angsty teenagers looking for role models to follow. They state new normality codes through every public action and it could be interpreted that they indirectly contribute to validate or invalidate certain social behaviors. Taking that into consideration, wouldn't a more varied representation of fluid gender expression formulas on mainstream music, help marginalized minorities out and consequently decrease bullying? Diving deeper into this experimental field would be the last but perhaps most humanly relevant suggestion.

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Please find it attached on the following page(s).

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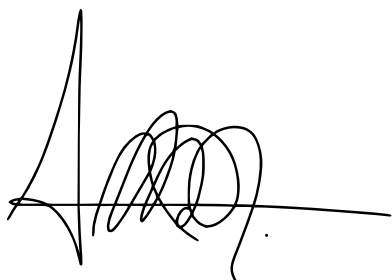
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13. APPENDIX/ ANNEX

13.1 TROYE SIVAN PRODUCT MANAGER: KATHARINA LEWIS, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GERMANY

Some musicians tend to remain ambiguous, they don't use pronouns, but Troye does the opposite (by using male pronouns). He is very clear with his own story. How do you think he manages to find balance between such a queer narrative and being appealing for the mainstream market? What is his combination of elements?

"These are only my personal thoughts. His case is an extremely uncommon one. He comes originally from this YouTube world and he has taken at a very young age very smart decisions for his YouTube career, including finding a very good team. Back in his time, he was one of the first big YouTubers to approach certain topics (queer issues) from such an unbiased perspective. That's, to start with, a big proof that his topics are 100% authentic and that for him it is a priority to talk about them. He doesn't use these topics because he is looking for a platform and he wants to become a superstar, but because he feels the need to talk about it. That already screams authenticity.

Secondly, regarding his music, personality, stages, style... lets start with his music. His lyrics are written by himself, which shows once again his authenticity, and he approaches very big topics in a very natural way, just how they come up on our daily lives. It is not about him being a loud colorful drag-queen, but rather him talking about being lovesick. Also I personally find he has an incredibly good taste for style and he adds a little queer note on top. For example if he wears heels, it won't be female heels, but rather male shoes with an uncommon height or with a discreet sheen on top. (Such aesthetic) does not scream "I'm a drag-queen". And I think that can be the point where he can access the mainstream because he doesn't set himself in any kind of niche. As an opposite example, MNEK, another artist, wants to be a very loud, colorful voice within the industry. And that is shown in his painted nails and makeup. From a product management point of view, his market shrinks, since it is a loud proposal. In the case of Troye, he brings those topics into his package, but it's not his main introducing characteristic. From my point of view, his biggest drive is to make music, which then he also nurtures with his own themes, but I think he is firstly a musician and then a storyteller. And I think that for a mainstream market, that means that there are several sources from which he can be discovered. Let's put it in the following way: For people from a little town, he is not scary, they can peacefully find out about him on the radio while commuting. Very at the beginning of his career, we could collaborate with music press, queer press and teen press like Bravo, for the little girls who wanted a gay best friend. He did not discard anything, but was rather compatible with everything.

I think he is very intelligent, he says great things in interviews. He is charming. From a product management perspective, he is an actor, he knows how to step on a stage, how to enter a room

and get the right register. And that is positive from a product management perspective. In other cases, it can be necessary to shift an idea from an artist because for them it makes sense but not for a marketing department.

All artists need their "USP" so that people get to know them. The driver behind his Australian record label signing him back then made total sense with such a huge online YouTube fanbase. While being fifteen, he has shown himself incredibly honest on his channel. That could be seen as a kickstart for his career. But it would not make him justice to say it was all about that. Because in terms of quality, he is very sustainable. He makes extraordinary music that lasts really long and he makes music history. Due to it, he has moved on from his YouTube past."

Let's speak about cognitive consonance and dissonance. Has Troye managed to draw the line between being edgy and cool but not too much to scare the mainstream audience off? In other words, has he managed to both appeal to minorities while still being compatible with the mainstream market?

"Yes. I agree with you. I would add that it is due to the fact that he does not rely on stereotypes... Because (when it comes to prejudice towards the LGBTQ+ community) you cannot really get rid of it. In the case of mainstream audiences, people are already biased and positioned for it or against it. It can go from a very negative to a very positive preconception. And since he has his very individual path, he does not trigger this automatic bias in people of "I like it or not". He cannot be judged from a superficial level. And through that he gets the chance to introduce himself individually as a blank canvas. It does indeed "shine", but not "too much".

If you analyze the clothes or the hair, he also looks cool. If you discover him through a runway or a cover magazine photoshoot he looks cool. But if you see private photos (on his social media), he is wearing denim pants and a white T-shirt. So people can distinguish: one thing is a performance, but another thing is how he is out of the stage. Through that, the mainstream audience might notice that, although he doesn't play a (fake) persona on stage, there is indeed a difference in between both though.

Do you think that his bravery of unapologetically being like that is received as an underlying way of being masculine, and that it therefore compensates his explicit femininity?

I think he oozes a lot of confidence and it comes across as if he would be at very good terms with himself, there is indeed some kind of bravery in it. Moreover, the fact that he is so tranquil

and calm, makes him look even more mature. He is not somebody who necessarily needs to scream on every interview that he is "queer and proud". The fact that he does not thematize himself makes it (his persona) sustainable."

Berlin, 12.04.2021

13.2 CONAN GRAY PRODUCT MANAGER: EVA WITTMANN, UNIVERSAL MUSIC GERMANY

Conan Gray has a rather feminine gender expression. He does not bring many elements to counterbalance how emotional he is or the fact that he does not "gender" in his songs. What is his potential as a mainstream artist based on?

Conan was always a YouTube star, I think he was less than ten when he uploaded his first video. From the beginning he has tried to be himself. I don't think it was a strategy, I just think it was him being himself and that is why he opened that online diary. That is why his fans know him that well, because during years they have followed him. Also, he has been very unique as in, for example, explaining how he has felt painting his nails as a male in Texas and reporting how people have reacted to him and so on. I think that when the record label signed him, they trusted his decisions because he knew better than anybody else what his fans wanted.

In general terms, record labels do usually try to help new musicians by proposing new strategies to advance towards. However, since Conan is the one who knows his fans the best, he is an exception. For example, for his debut album the songs the record label suggested for promotion were very different from the ones that Conan highlighted. And at the end Conan proved to be right, because "Heather" was never meant to be a single, but he always said it would be the most successful song on the album. At the end the label had to switch to "Heather".

Judging from the music video for "Overdrive", it seems like he creates his art on an ambiguous ground. During the clip it is not clear if the bond represents a romantic interest or a friendship, which would usually lead the audience to a typical reading of the narrative: (if heteronormative or queer). Do you think that from a product management perspective, it could be risky if he increases the degree of experimentation in his future releases and therefore comes across as "too queer"? (For the mainstream appeal).

I think in his case the problem is rather that as soon as he gets too mainstream, his original fans may not like him anymore. So I think he struggles to find a balance between satisfying the fandom and expanding as a musician: "how can I not let down the people who discovered and supported me back then, while still growing as a musician for a broader audience?".

He plays on a very fine line, he never reveals the gender of his lover, he always refers to them as "the person I loved". In this case, "Heather" might have benefited from the uncertainty and the relative controversy that originated after it. When people listen to "Heather", they don't know if they should assume that Conan was in love with a man who was in love with Heather, or if he was in love with a woman who was in love with Heather. I think that kind of game can also be interesting for the youngest audience, especially in a time where there are more artists who define themselves as non-binary like Sam Smith.

Nevertheless, I imagine that his true fans do not really care about it. The TikTok challenge was about who Heather really was or who had a Heather in their lives, but the generation of his fans does not really need a definition from him, they know him personally enough. They might assume he is an open person when it comes to labels. I think that has to do with a difference between how youngsters who have not reached their twenties perceive sexuality. They are way more fluid. On the contrary, people above twenty might have grown up with the habit of needing to categorize people's sexuality clearly.

Other interesting aspects about his "Overdrive" music video include that he takes the role of a girl when dancing and the girl plays the man. Moreover, she is the one driving. He also embraces her in a very intimate way but does not kiss her. It seems like he is constantly switching sides on the gender expression spectrum in order to keep the viewer confused regarding how to read the content. And in that uncategorized chaos, he finds his balance. Do you think if he ever gravitates towards one side of the other, it will harm his branding?

I think what he is trying to communicate is that there are no more roles. No more "traditionally feminine" or "traditionally masculine" and if the girl drives, it has no impact on who he is. There are no "sides to switch" because these barriers only exist in the heads of people. I personally think that the fact that there is a girl as a protagonist in "Overdrive" has to do with the fact that people mostly assumed through Heather that he was into guys. Through that change, I imagine that he continues to let his fans dream about it and keeps the game alive.

To be honest, when analyzing the online conversation that has taken place until now, there is not much discussion regarding what Conan's sexual orientation is. I only see people saying "oh

my god Conan, you are so beautiful", and that comes from both men and women. So if he ever starts a relationship with a female, I don't think that his fandom is going to let him down. They grew up together. I think it is really beautiful that he is a trailblazer for a generation that sees life as "everyone is a person and If i want to fall back while dancing, that has nothing to do with the concepts of masculinity or femininity".

Is it within Germany a challenge to promote him due to the ambiguous nature of his narrative?

It is a challenge because he does not want to be promoted as a regular artist with advertising campaigns because he does not want to be perceived as a mainstream artist. In general the usual standard rules for artist promotion do not really apply to him. Moreover, having to find ways to make his popularity rise while making it look like it is organic can be complicated.

If he at some point decides to accept being promoted like others, would it be a challenge to target a mainstream audience?

If we look at the charts right now, "Lil Nas X" is leading with "Montero", a clear queer statement. Spotify's users are usually below 35 (years of age). I do not think that Conan wants to attract fans above that age, and neither does he need it probably.

So to be honest, I don't think he would necessarily be a challenge. We do not try to show him more "heteronormative" than he is. On a piece of promotional material we did for "Heather", he portrays a very feminine side of him. It worked incredibly good but the right audiences and channels had to be picked. After thinking about TikTok or Instagram Stories, the next step would be to try to figure out what other fan-clusters would find him interesting, like for example Lauv fans. But not everything slightly related to the artist works. For example, regardless of Conan being very vocal about his admiration towards Taylor Swift, targeting her fans does not really guarantee brilliant results since her fandom is so large, that it also includes a percentage of maybe more traditional people. We have to be very specific.

Besides, he plays it "cute", wearing a skirt or hair-clips. He does play with classic feminine attributes and accessories, but it is never sexual. It is always sweet. I imagine that even for people who are homophobic, they would not feel triggered because it is not that "aggressive" and "in your face". They might even say "Oh well, he paints his nails and has long hair but rockstars did it also in the past".

Berlin, 13.04.2021

13.3 CORPORATE DATA: STATISTICS' PHOTOS

Please find below the images that serve as evidence to back up the streaming statistics and social media numbers.

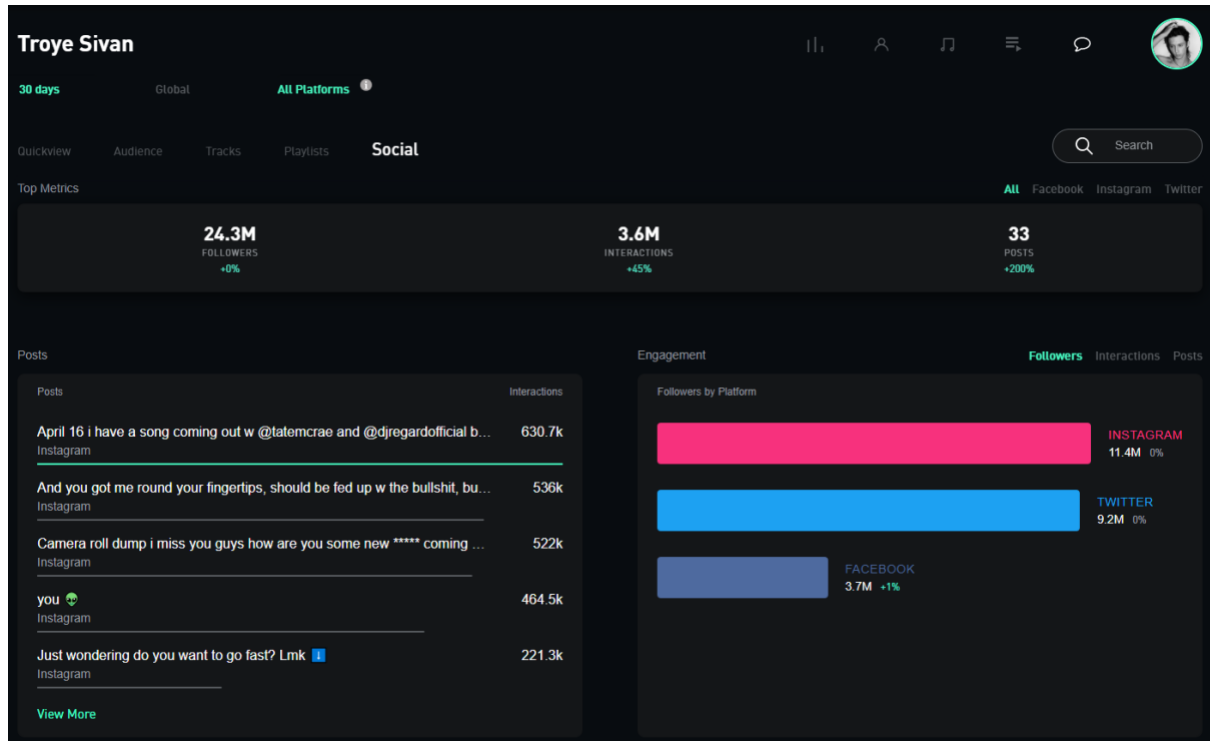


Photo 1. TS social media statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

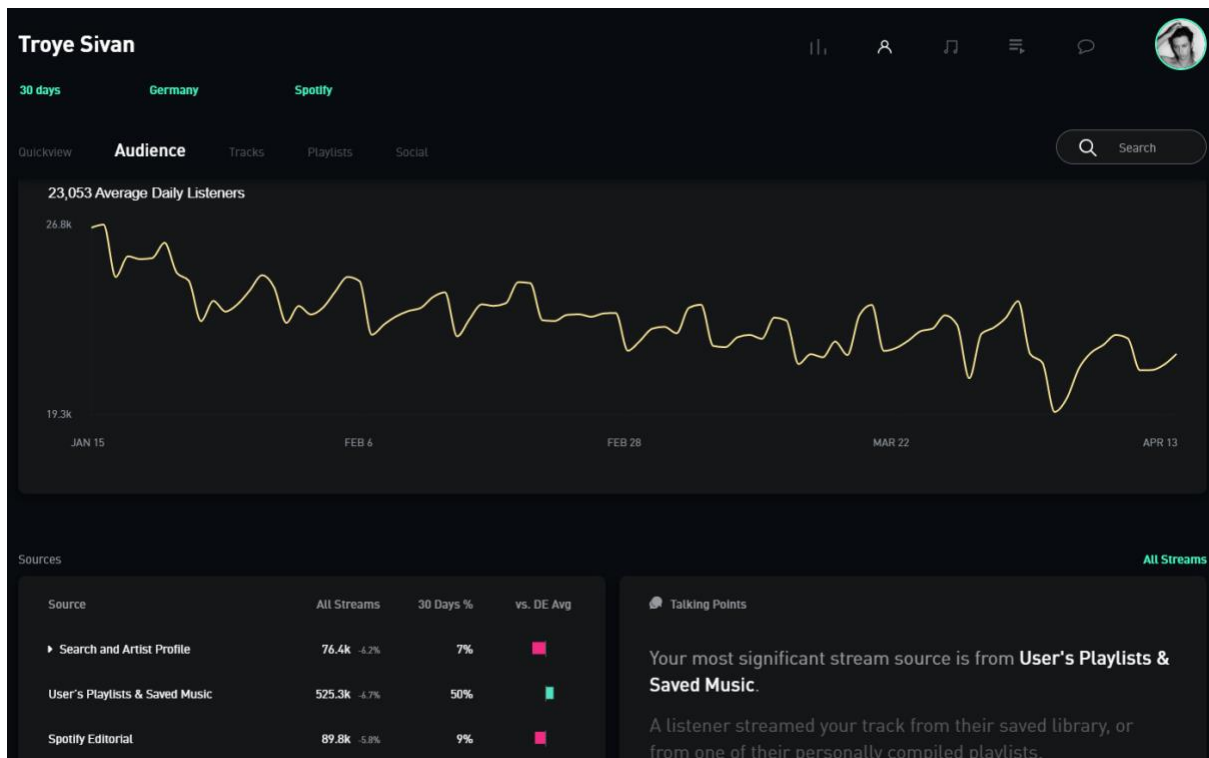


Photo 2-A. TS streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

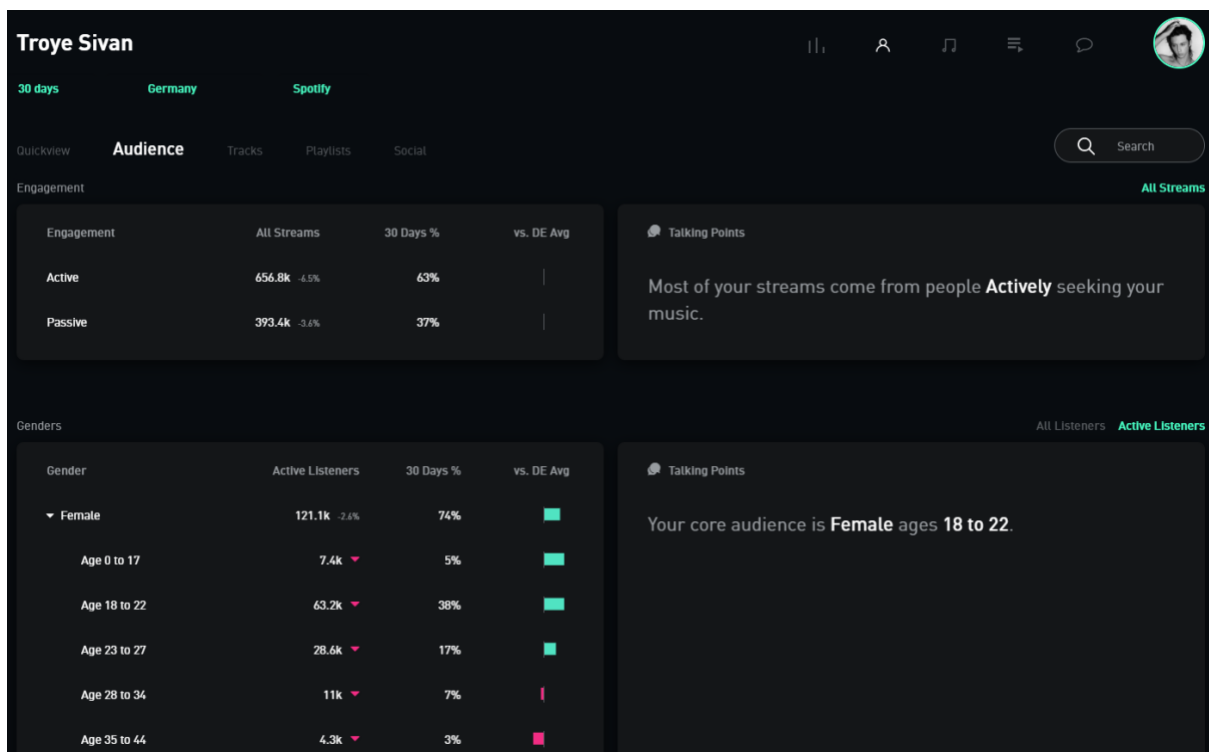


Photo 2-B. TS streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

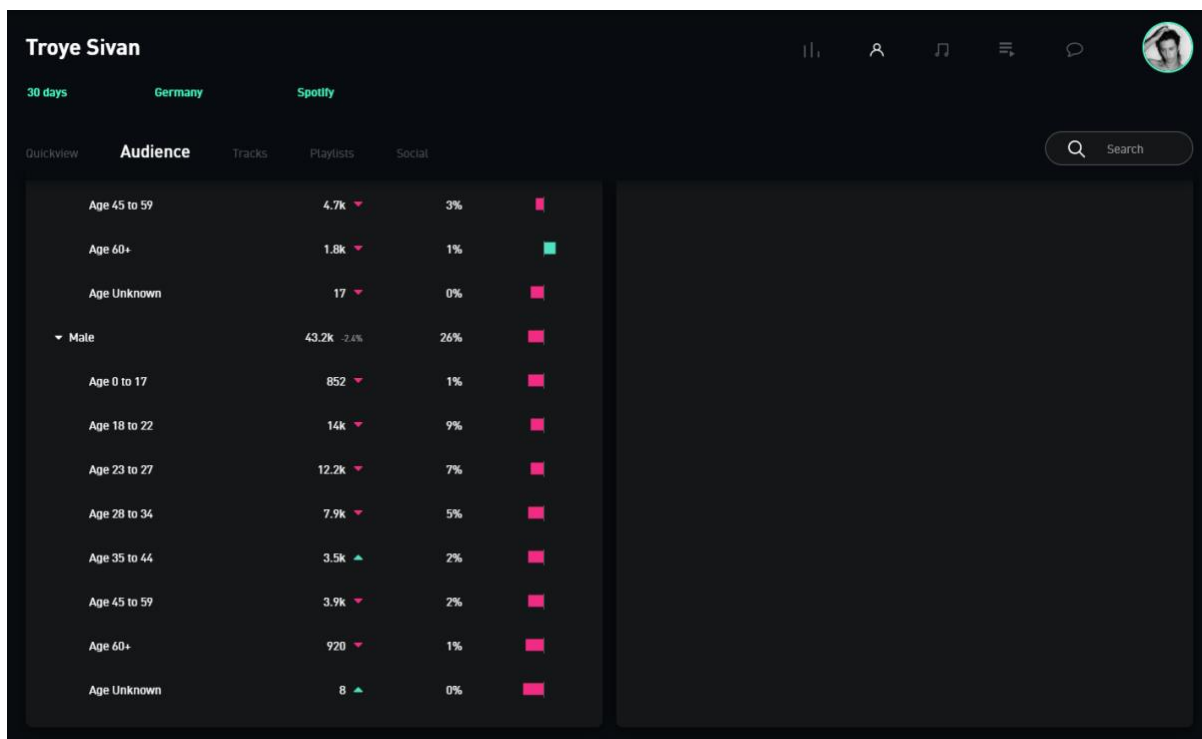


Photo 2-C. TS streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

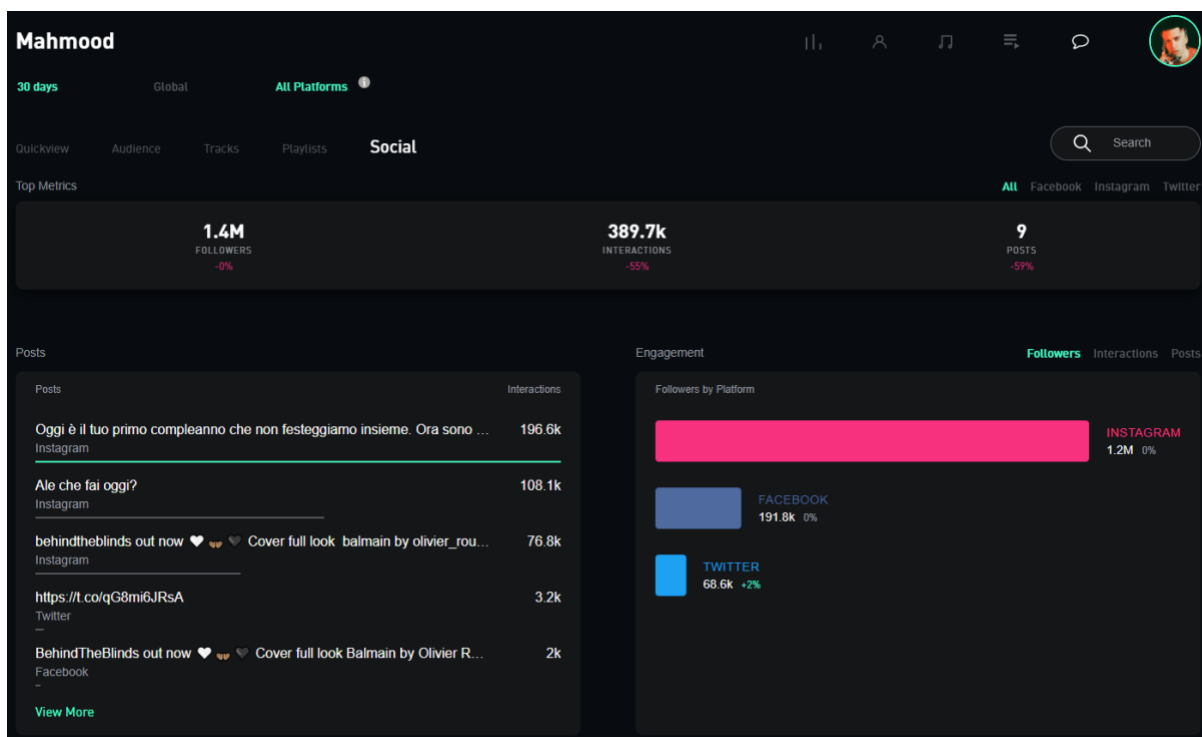


Photo 3. MM social media statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

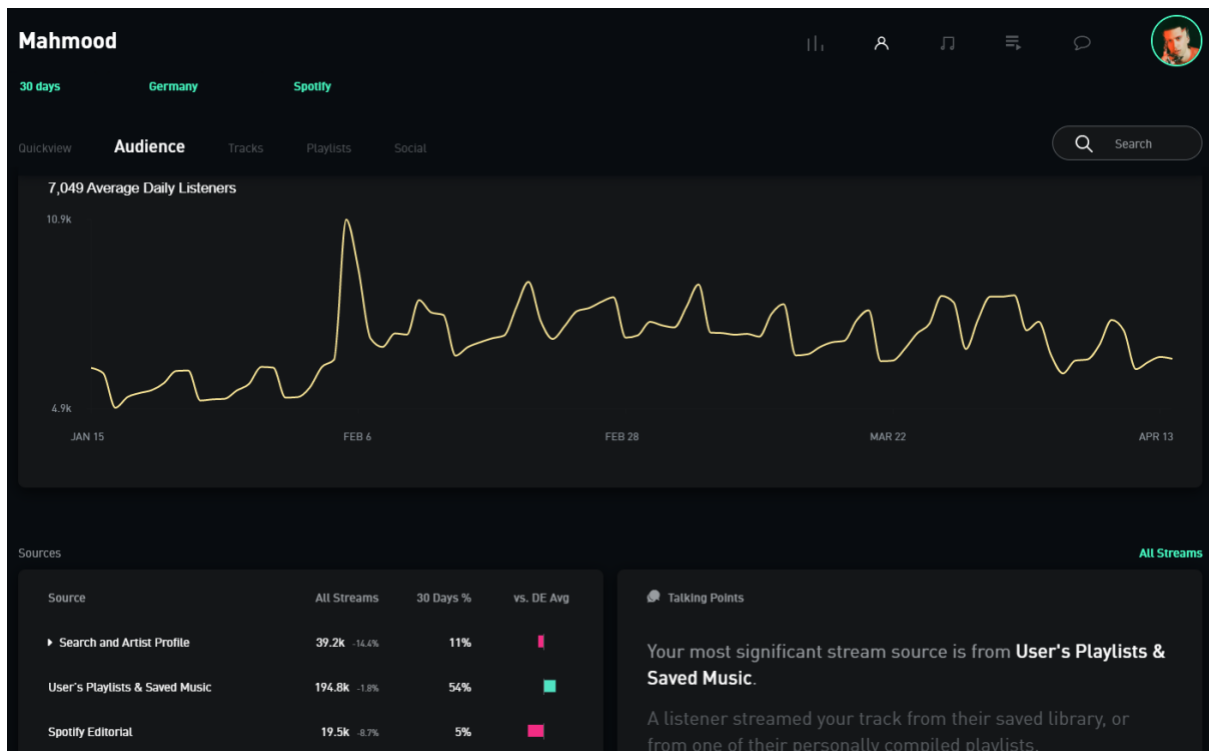


Photo 4-A. MM streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

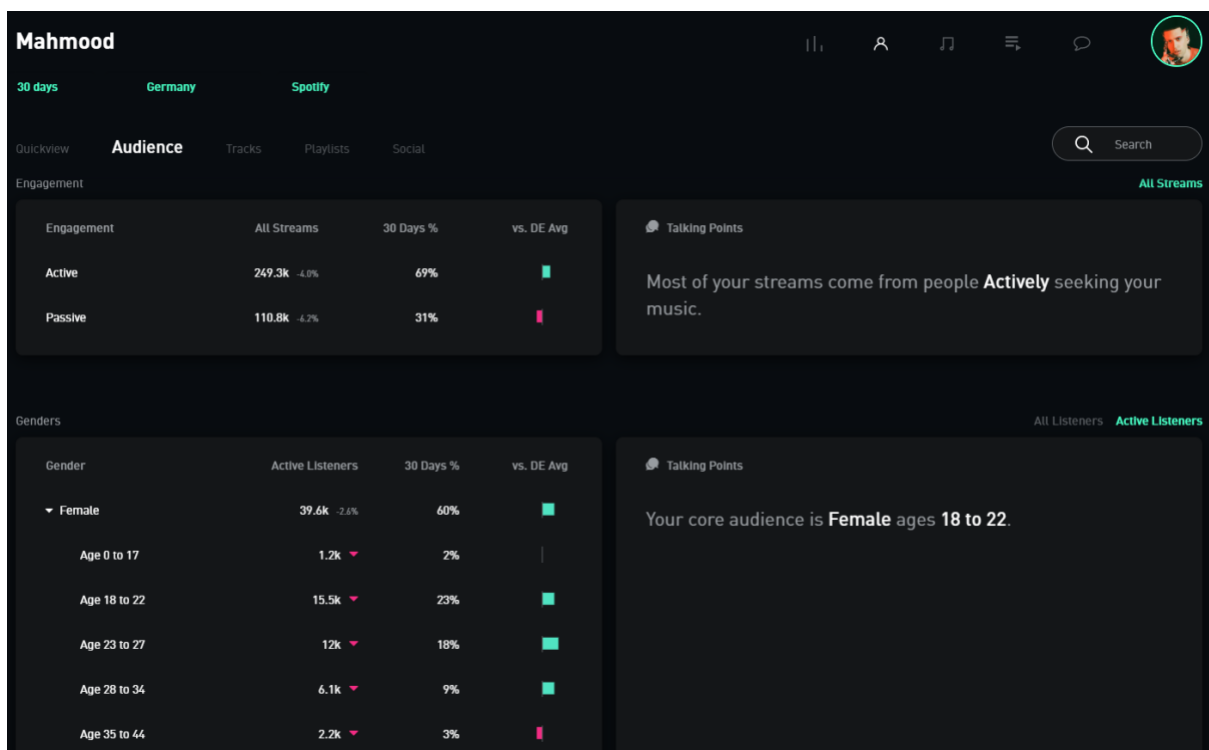


Photo 4-B. MM streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

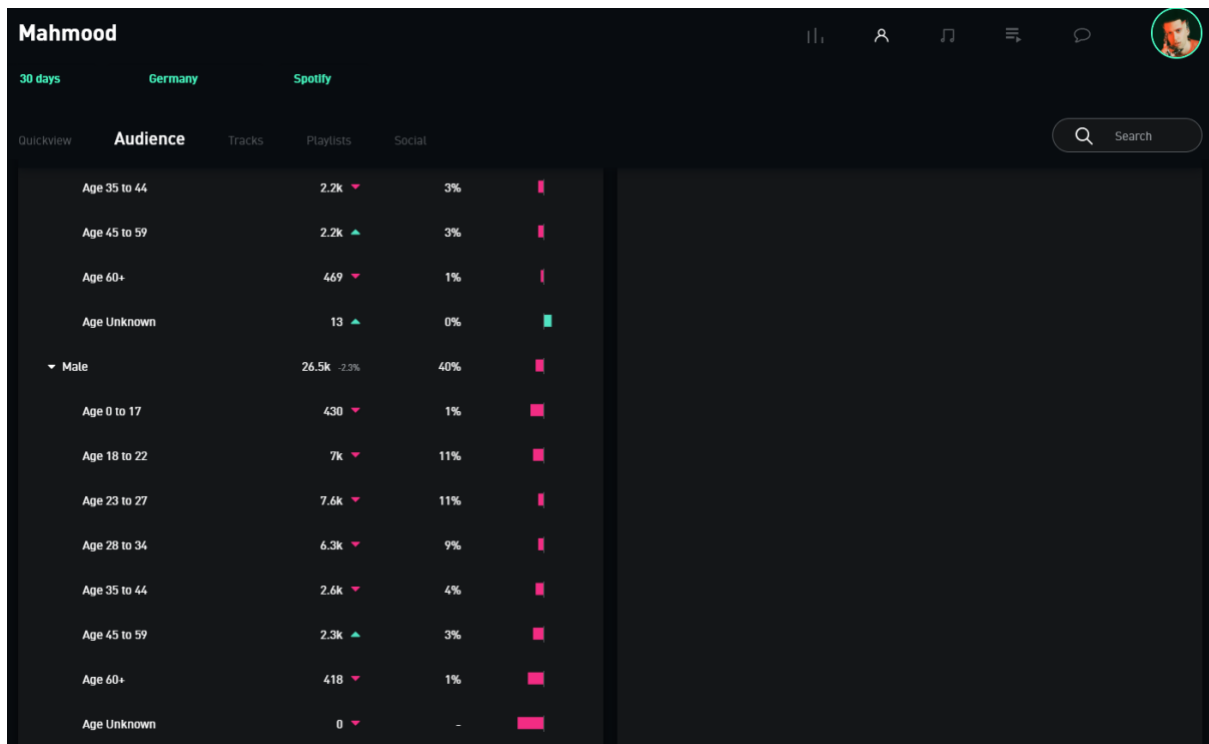


Photo 4-C. MM streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

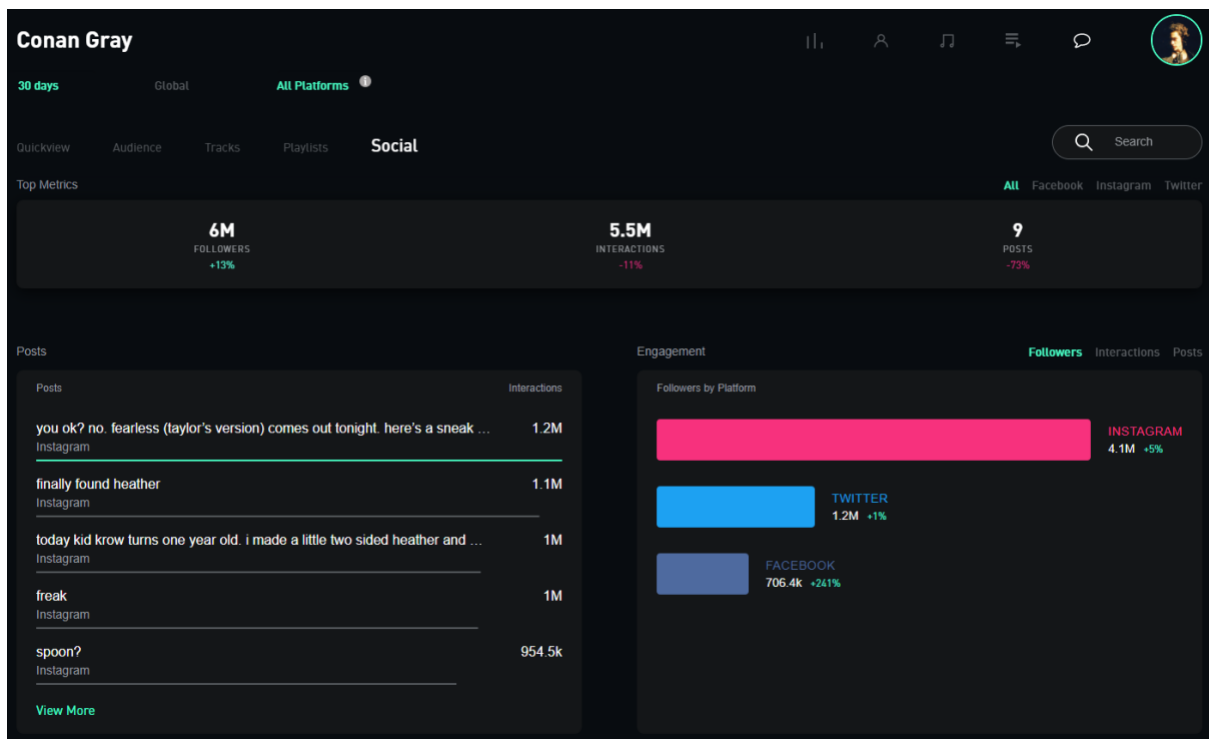


Photo 5. CG social media statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

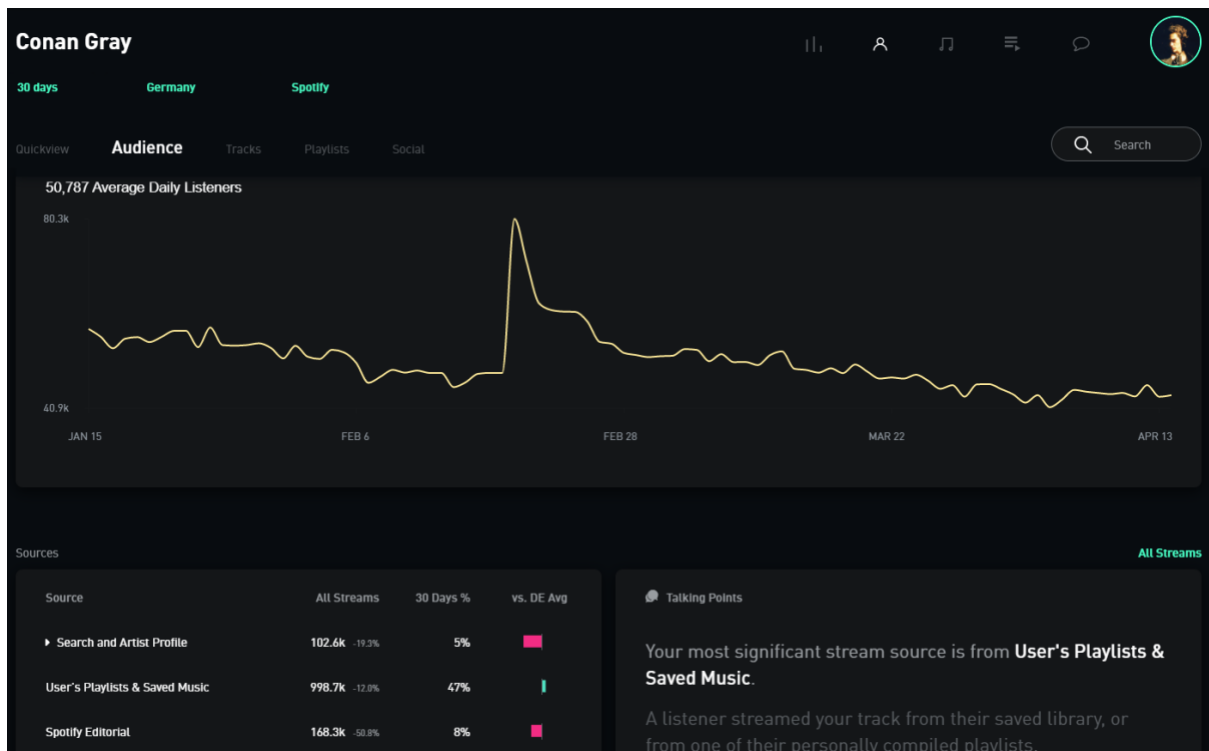


Photo 6-A. CG streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

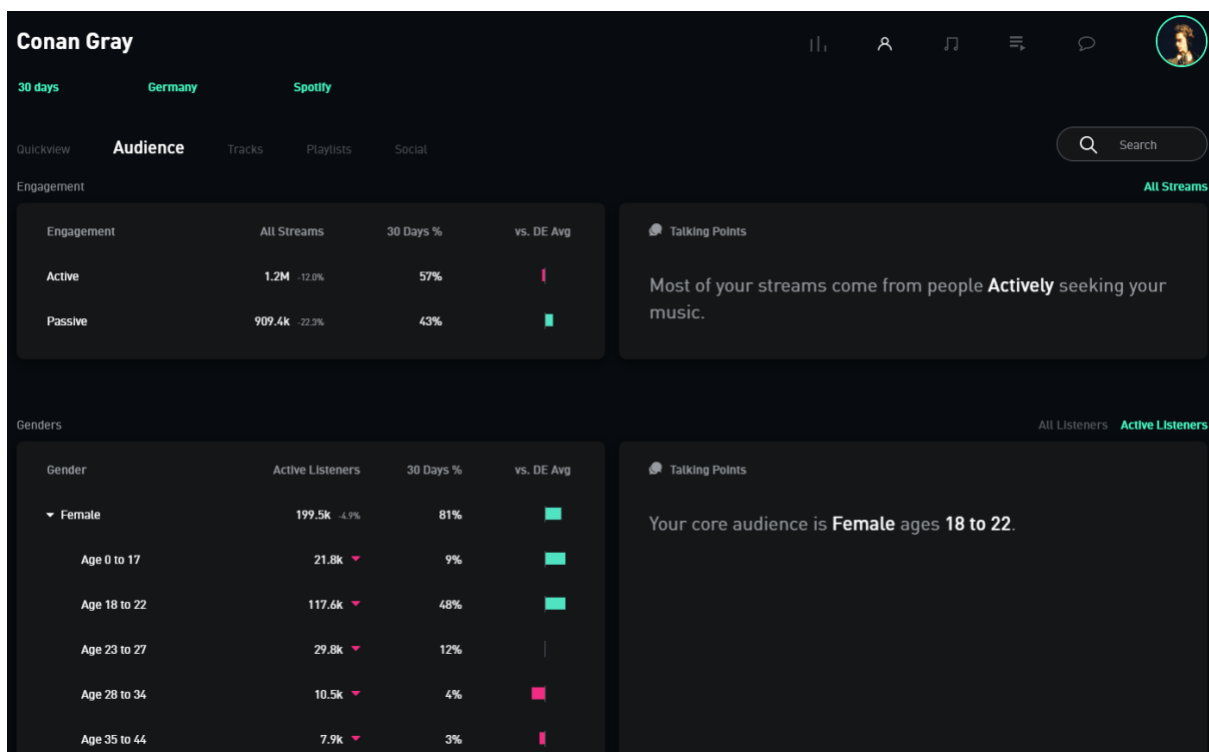


Photo 6-B. CG streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

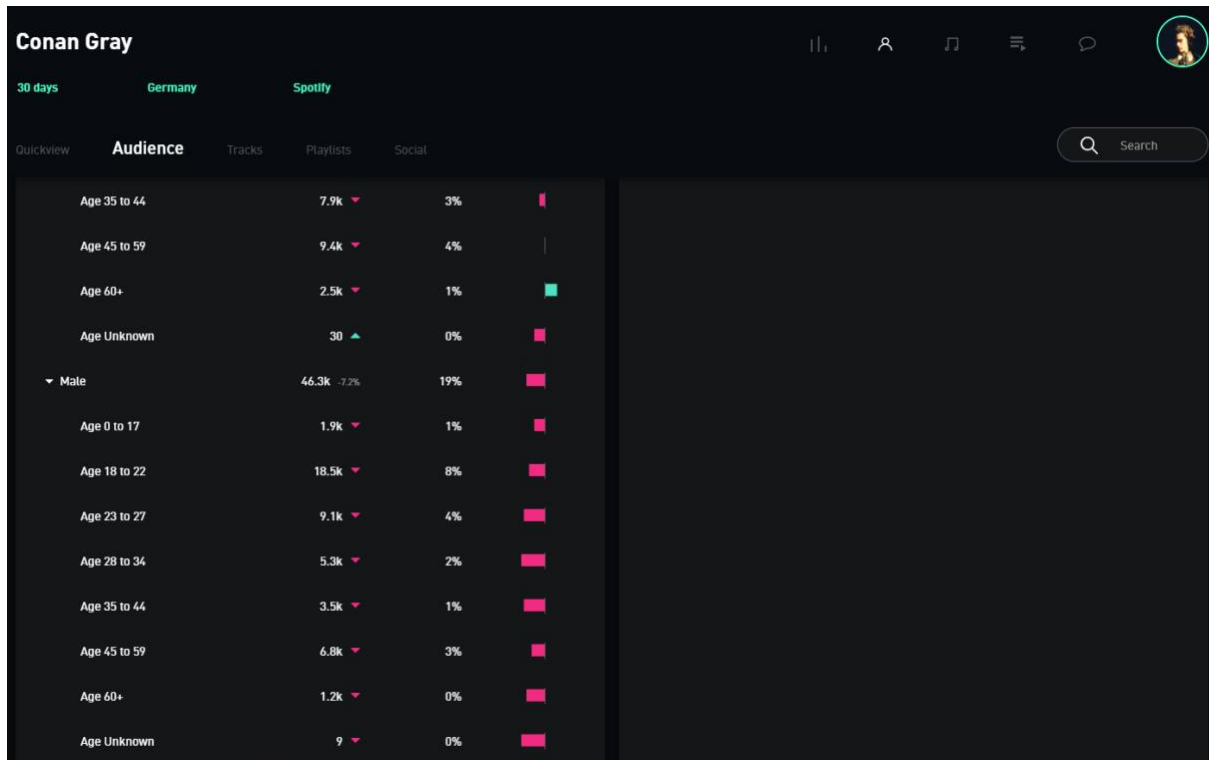


Photo 6-C. CG streaming statistics. From UMG's own monitoring tool.

14. LIST OF TABLES

14.1 TABLES OF TS'S FICTIONAL VISUAL MATERIAL.

VMC	TRXE EP	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
AV	Happy Little Pill	Pink/ purple, clouds in slow-motion	Straight bold sans-serif font with corners	FU
MV	Happy Little Pill	Pastel colors, buttoned up shirt, female characters, flying bird, skinny complexion with clothes that highlight it, well-groomed and shaved	Straight couple kissing, standard short haircut, lack of emotion in the singer (empty gaze) football court, boy with a bike, no dance	FU

Table 1-A. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

VMC	BN LP (2)	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
TE	Welcome to Blue Neighbourhood	Opens up about emotions: warmth of growing in a family.	Confident gaze into the camera and heteronormative clothes (except for the print).	B
MV	TALK ME DOWN (Blue Neighbourhood Part 3/3)	Flashbacks from their time kissing. Troye caresses his face, gently hits his chest and ushers his head onto his own shoulder. He sings fearlessly very emotionally. It is a homosexual narrative.	Both guys are dressed in a hegemonic-masculine way and behave so. Troye is stubborn with his feelings.	VFU
LV	FOOLS (Filous Remix)	Constant aesthetic: flower petals and pastel paint.	Brush typography	FU

TE	Suburbia	Affection “All I care about is making the people I care about feel proud”.	Strong will and pride.	MU
TE	YOUTH	“loving too hard and hope it is okay, but it was not”. Do everything for love. Sweet and tender memories. Dancing with girls and singing.	Typically masculine clothes and activities riding bicycle, dressing as a pirate)	FU
TE	HEAVEN (ft Betty Who)	Self-determination and images portray gay-rights activism throughout decades. Queer fight.	Self-confidence and self-worth: “maybe I don’t want heaven”.	VFU
LV	YOUTH	Painted finger nails (discreet color), bonding with female fans.	Masculine clothes and set.	FU
LV	WILD (Grey Remix)	Pastel color painting and dynamic typography.	masculine appearance and facial expression.	B
TE	YOUTH	(Short flashes of shots listed below)	(Short flashes of shots listed below)	VFU
MV	YOUTH	Pink lighting, heart-shaped balloons, christmas lights, plush-animals... very skinny jeans and colorful outfit. Feminine dancing (raising his arms in the air while moving his hips passionately). He locks his arms around the neck of another boy/ slow-dances/ plays with his hands/ they approach to kiss.	A straight couple kisses. Troye is confident in the middle of the party. The rest of people act in a culturally “straight” (heteronormative) way.	VFU
TE	WILD (ft Alessia Cara) -Chosen Family	Affection towards each other. Troye hugs a boy from above and from behind.	Most people act straight-passing. Troye’s voice is displayed in the background, his voice is low (culturally masculine).	VFU
MV	WILD (ft Alessia Cara)	Homoerotic narrative: Troye shows friendly affection towards Alessia Cara and romantic and sexual affection towards another boy. He and his lover record themselves on bed and explore each other sexually. His nails are painted black and his body is thinner and slimmer than the one of his lover.	There are a lot of other guys in heteronormative outfits and flirting with girls.	VFU
MV	Blue Neighbourhood Trilogy - Director’s Cut	homophobic critique: “are you a fag?... If he is back here one more time I’ll kill both of you!”. - The highlighting of this kind of obnoxious behavior is a symbol for queer fight and prioritizing love.	Mostly masculine outfits, manners and sets, apart from minimal exceptions.	VFU

Table 1-B. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

VMC	BN LP(3)	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
LV	WILD (Young Bombs Remix) ft. Alessia Cara	Floral motive.	Artist name is written in bold, sans-serif straight letters.	VFU
LV	EASE (Lontalius Remix) ft. Broods	Pastel colors and slow-motion snow falling.	Serious expression of the character and plain outfit. Blue chromatic palette.	B
TE	The Suburbia Tour Visuals 1 & 2	Trailer featuring homoerotic motives, skin-ship between semi-naked men, sensual smoke exhaling and contemporary dance on the floor expressing passionate fondling.	Male protagonist, colorless, raw aesthetics.	VFU
MV	HEAVEN (ft Betty Who)	Footage of old Lgbtq+ rights activism. Troye is seen embracing a man and finding shelter in his chest. He is placed below him, he has to look up for eye contact. He embraces his vulnerability, relative inferiority and confort as the one physically under control rather than exerting control. He unapologetically sings the lyrics to the camera and dances passionately. He kisses the boy very briefly and hugs and gets hugged.	Outfit and haircut are masculine.	VFU

MV	There For Me Too (with Martin Garrix)	Silver jacket, purple nails and the passionate dancing towards the third hook of the song).	Superficial brotherhood. Fashion, behavior and interaction with his male colleague follow a very orthodox approach to masculinity	MU
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Table 1-C. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

VMC	BLOOM LP	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
TE	My My My!	The poses are feminine and the walking style.	Colorless filter, emotionless.	FU
MV	My My My!	Troye fondles his body, dances fearlessly shaking his hips: "immediately recognizable: The private dance of a would-be diva alone in his bedroom" (Schneier for "The New York Times", 2018) He is wet, wearing very tight clothes revealing his slim, skinny and fragile figure. He has platinum blond hair and boots with heels. He leans back on walls and crawls sensually over them. Lather accessories and in the dark, he encounters semi-naked men (gay dark room). There are zoomed-in shots on torsos. Queer and homoerotic. Inspired by the MV aesthetic of Christina Aguilera's "Dirrty" (Daw for "Billboard", 2018), cultural gay icon.	The colors of the outfit and the set are very raw and distanced from his previous childish colors.	VFU
LV	The Good Side	Intense eye contact with the camera with relaxed facial features. He is unprotected and vulnerable, hugging his blanket.	Deem colors	FU
LV	My My My! Remixes	Intense eye contact with the camera with relaxed facial features.	Deem colors	FU
TE	Bloom	Gay romantic narrative: "It's about flowers" (regarding the song "bloom" about anal sex).	Confident look into the camera.	VFU
LV	Bloom	Virtual avatar: thin, skinny clothes, glowing skin resembling porcelain. Fragility, opposed to orthodox male avatars.	Plain outfit colors, the garden looks rather wild and abandoned: hostile.	VFU

Table 1-D. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

VMC	BLOOM LP	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
MV	Bloom	Gender-blending fashion [flower-printed crop-tops, skirts, platform-heels, eye-popping eye make-up, lipstick (zoom-in shots)...]. Hairless body. Flirty with the camera using culturally feminine facial and hand gestures. He embodies delicate flowers. He snaps, fondles his own body, plays with his hair and his choreography is based on his hips, fingers and shoulders (generally feminine). There are close-up shots of male muscles.	Hairy armpits. Confidence in his attitude: stubbornness.	VFU
LV	Dance To This	Friendly attitude, no seduction intended or constructed sexual tension. Collaboration/ camaraderie (similar height, same pose both leaning on each other.	Outfit and face gesture, hand over her shoulder. Typography and colors.	FU
MV	Dance To This (ft. Ariana Grande)	Dances femininely with Ariana Grande as friends. They seem to understand each other perfectly without communication gaps. Both are passionate about the music and help each other out of the judgmental gazes of the rest of people. He is shy and insecure.	His outfit and the set.	VFU
LV	Animal	Nothing remarkable.	Typography, set, outfit, confident gaze into the camera.	MU

MV	1999 (with Charli XCX)	Collaboration with a female as friends, no sexual tension, they are equal and share a passion for music. They celebrate playing with different gender roles.	Confidence to imitate other hyper-masculine performers such as Eminem or the Backstreet Boys or mainstream-romantic icons such as Leonardo DiCaprio. The set and outfits.	FU
MV	Lucky Strike	Shyness, naïf angst and admiration towards a hyper-muscled male. He explicitly worships him, literally lets him squeeze his heart to make him happy and eventually to flex his muscles. He wants him to take the lead (any drink he wants) and the direction (the one leading the floating boat). He doesn't dare to look him in the eye and is not brave: he is overwhelmed (relatively inferior) by his beauty, sex-appeal and probably the social benefits it entails: social power and acceptance.	Outfit.	VFU
LV	i'm so tired... (with Lauv)	He isn't the one driving and he enjoys himself to the song moving his arms.	In a car accompanying his "straight-passing" (behavior and appearance culturally associated to heteronormativity) and singing along to their song.	B
MV	i'm so tired... (with Lauv)	Two out of three are queer couples. The fact that two male artists purposefully include explicit representation of two men kissing is traditionally feminine per se.	Song is sung by two males but their verses don't interact. He sits on a car-roof carelessly and his outfit is standard masculine.	FU
LV	2099	Foto: Porcelain glossy skins and their faces are touching but normalizing sin-ship rather than glorifying tension between the cultural roles of females and males.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
MV	2099 (with Charli XCX)	He lets Charli drive the water motorcycle and hugs her from behind as a symbol of teamwork. Their non-sexual dynamic is presented as cool and valid as any other.	Outfit and sport-related set.	FU

Table 1-E. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

VMC	EASY EP	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
TE	Take Yourself Home	High heels, side-fringed pants and a tight tank top that highlights his skinny complexion.	Classical villain pose in a dangerous set, decisive gaze.	B
LV	Take Yourself Home (10 Lvs)	Korean and Thai LVs: glowing skin (similar to porcelain in the Bloom LV or the 2099 cover artwork) and a hand-drawn illustration of himself (Blue Neighborhood water-colors era).	Serious gaze and simplistic and moody footage of cities. Aesthetically emotionless.	B
LV	Easy	Round shape in the middle.	Emotionless colors and straight lines.	B
MV	Easy	Emotional fragility and vulnerability. Make-up and drag-queen aesthetics. Dancing and male company. He passively burns.	Blue dark colors. Serious gaze. Straight lines and steadiness. Alcohol and well-taking of the pain and suffering: lit up on fire and drowning.	B
(LV)	Easy (slowed n reverb)	Same video but with slow-motion and a blurry filter (will be left out of statistics).	-	(B)
MV	Rager Teenager	Expresses emotions while playing with paper cranes, rises his arms and combs his hair. Several times. His name is written with a star.	Typography, no decoration, plain outfit, confidence for an open shirt.	B
(LV)	Easy (10 LVs)	Same video but with pinkish and warm colored pastel filters (will be left out of statistics).	-	(B)
TE	Idk if I'm even awake anymore (4)	Monologue about vulnerability.	Blurry, emotionless visuals, low-pitch.	MU
LV	STUD	Fondles his body, shows his buttocks flirting and gets naked seducing with his slim figure. It is a homoerotic clip.	Distorted footage of a webcam, dark and blurry. Hostile facial gestures.	VFU

TE	IN A DREAM	Emotionally demanding discourse, dancing naked on camera in underwear.	Low pitch voice, dark colors, glitch, hairy armpits.	VFU
LV	IN A DREAM	Naked, raising his arms, fondling his neck and zooming-in his facial features.	Red, aggressive colors.	FU
LV	Could cry just thinking about you	Zoom-in: Eyelashes and tear, emotions.	Glitchy, dark fast-paced aesthetics	B
LV	10/10	Drowning, weakness, helpless facial gesture.	Aggressive colors.	MU
TE	EASY with Kacey M. & Mark R.	Colorful, rounded typography. Driven and lead by a female. Collaborating with a girl without sexual tension between them. His lips are glowing.	Cars, speed, darkness, mullet, outfit.	FU
MV	EASY with Kacey M. & Mark R.	Find comfort for heartbreak in female friend. Troye wants to get in the arms of other males. His way of looking sexy is by wearing low-waist shorts, very skinny tops and clothes that reveal his plain belly and fragile figure. In the flashes he looks up to conceptually superior male lovers always positioned lower. He dances throwing his arms to the air. He wears clothes as short as her female partner and lay on bed chatting, like “girls” culturally do. He plays with a lollipop (phallic reference) and lets a drag queen sing his song. <i>Queer</i> ,	Cars, speed, loss of control, mullet, hyper-masculine side characters, drives in the second part of the music video, carries the luggage (not the girl), hairy armpits, serious gaze.	VFU

Table 1-E. Analysis of fictional visual material TS.

14.2 TABLES OF TS’S LYRICS.

External Projects	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Papercut (with Zedd)	“Right now, don't know why I love you” - not in control of his own emotions.	“It was just a paper, just a paper cut” - regains emotional solidity and self-sufficiency.	B

Table 2-A. Analysis of lyrics TS.

Songs (TRXYE EP)	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Happy Little Pill	“Take me away, dry my eyes, bring color to my skies” - passively demanding something to save him from his emotions.	“Tight skin, bodyguards, Gucci down the boulevard” - success, although toxic.	B
Touch	“my eyes start to roam to the curl of your lips” - irresistibly being attracted, losing control.	“I reach out and touch” - strong will.	B
Fun	“Well, don't you want to see the world, boy?” - directly appealing to another guy, “my son”.	“Shootin' at rocks bullets cocked” - vocabulary from military imagery.	B
Gasoline	“In the same spot I watched him rest his head” - male pronouns - explicit affection “Please bathe me now, wash me clean” - begs for a savior to fix his mistakes.	Strong words: “Fucked up for nothing”.	VFU

Table 2-B. Analysis of lyrics TS.

Songs (Blue Neighbourhood LP)	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
WILD	“You're driving me wild/ too long till I drown in your hands” - loss of emotional control.	Nothing remarkable because the dependent nature of the song is non-masculine per se.	FU

BITE	"Kiss me on the mouth and set me free, But please don't bite/ Drape me in your warmth" - inferiority, longing and begging for protection.	"Don't you wanna see a man up close?" - will of reaching success, grants the term "man" with grandiosity.	VFU
FOOLS	"Only fools fall for you/ Only fools do what I do" - no emotional superiority.	"I see a little house on the hill and children's names" - emotional, but descendants-related.	FU
EASE (ft. Broods)	"I'm down to my skin and bone, and my mummy.../your touch, my comfort and my lullaby" - seeking protection and warmth. "I'd never ever though that I'd say..." - regrets.	Nothing remarkable.	FU
THE QUIET	"Anything hurts less than the quiet" - affection.	"Than have this silence fuck me up" - Strong words. "I'd rather be black and blue, than accept that you withdrew" - stubbornness. "All I want is a fight to fight" - confident superiority.	MU
DKLA (ft. Tkay Maidza)	"Wrapped your body around mine/ you know I'm bound to choke/ said by someone stronger than me" - physical inferiority. "So what do I do now?" - psychological doubt.	"I don't keep love around" - decisive. "We were a fire with no smoke" - lack of compassion.	FU
TALK ME DOWN	"I wanna sleep next to you/ Come over now and talk me down" - affection and asks passively to help him out, inferiority.	"I like to draw the line when it starts to get too real/ I'll walk that line" - decisive, stubborn.	VFU
COOL	"I was just trying to be like you/ I'm a spark and you're a boom" - dependency	"Drinks in bars and boys in cars" - success in the eye of males.	FU
HEAVEN (ft. Betty Who)	"Trying to save face, and daddy heartbreak/ Trying to keep faith and picture his face staring up at me (pronoun)/ Feeling like my heart's mistaken/ Without changing a part of me, how do I get to heaven?" - lgbtq+ fight	Awake, wide eyed, I'm screaming at me" - lack of compassion towards oneself	VFU
YOUTH	"My youth is yours, a truth so loud you can't ignore" - he gives himself in the name of love.	"What if we said goodbye to safe and sound/ we'll be fireproof" - confident, adventurous will.	VFU
LOST BOY	"As the smile fell from your face, I fell with it" - compassion. "There's a heart stain on the carpet, I left it with you" - affection.	"I'm just a lost boy, not ready to be found/ before I fly away" - psychological stubbornness.	B
for him. (ft. Allday)	"Sickening sweet like honey, don't need money, all I need is you" - affection over money (social success). "for him." - gay love.	"We are runnin' so fast, and we never look back" - stubbornness, physical and social superiority.	VFU
SUBURBIA	"Can't help but feel I've lost what's mine/ and mama's good eats" - affection and regret.	"The boys fix their cars and girls eat it up" - heteronormative gender roles. "Have you heard me on the radio? Did you turn it up?" - success in front of society and other males.	MU
TOO GOOD	"Too good to be good for me, Too bad that that's all I need" - dependency. "I'm so scared/ I'm wasted on you" - inferiority.	"Fingers walk your thigh" - strong will and action.	VFU
BLUE (ft. Alex Hope)	"When I'm looking up at you/ I want you, I'll color me blue, anything it takes to make you stay"	"All your lights are red, but I'm green to go" - independency and selfsufficiency.	FU
SWIMMING POOLS	"Cause I just wanna be at the start of after loving you" - affection.	"I can't get there till I go through all of this pain" - physical endurance. "So tell me how I'm gonna get past this wave to empty swimming pools" - prioritizes getting rid off emotions.	B

Table 2-C. Analysis of lyrics TS.

External Projects	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
There for You (with Martin Garrix)	"So when your tears roll down your pillow like a river, I'll be there for you, But you gotta be there for me too" - Affection and compassion. "Boy, I'm holding on to something" - gay love.	"I woke up pissed off today, and lately, everyone feels fake, Somewhere, I lost a piece of me, Smoking cigarettes on balconies" - masculine habit, stubbornness and lack of compassion.	FU

Strawberries + Cigarettes (for "Love, Simon" OST)	"And I could already feel your kiss/ I've been a fool/ Remember when you taught me fate?" - not in control. "Blue eyes, black jeans" - jeans tend to be highlighted in males outfits.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Revelation (for "Boy Erased" OST)	"Won't you liberate me now?/ Your hand I know, now" - passivity and affection.	"I will liberate you now/ There's no hell in what I've found" - strong will.	FU

Table 2-D. Analysis of lyrics TS.

Bloom LP	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
My My My!	"Spark up, buzz cut, I got my tongue between your teeth", "Living for your every move" - loss of control for gay love.	"Don't make me wait another day, 'cause passion is passion, you know it just as well as me" - strong will.	VFU
Bloom	"And boy I'll meet you right there, we'll ride the rollercoaster, 'cause it's true, baby I've been saving this for you" - sexual implications to seduce another male.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Lucky Strike	"Short days, long nights, boy, tell me all the ways to love you/ You drag, I light, boy" - worship of a superior male lover.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Seventeen	"Can't tell a man to slow down, he'll just do whatever, do whatever he wants" - loss of control in the name of gay sexual love.	"Heard the whispers, now let's see what all the talk's about" -strong will.	VFU
The Good Side	"But I sympathize, and I recognize, and baby, I apologize" - compassion and affection	"I got the good side of things/I got the good side of you" - control and success.	B
Dance To This (ft. Ariana Grande)	"You still look like dynamite, and I wanna end up on you" -worship of someone else. "Push up on my body" - passive sexual interaction.	"We can just dance to this, You know what I wanna do" - initiative and stubbornness.	VFU
Plum	I'm wasting my time just pressing rewind, to all the nights we shared" - affection.	"I was summer and you were spring, you can't change what the seasons bring" - control.	B
Postcard (ft. Gordi)	"let me be everything that you need/ I don't sleep unless your body's on me" - inferiority.	"You didn't give a fuck" - strong language.	FU
What A Heavenly Way To Die	"Because forever is in your eyes/ what a heavenly way to die" - affection and sacrifice.	Nothing remarkable.	FU
Animal	"An ode to the boy I love, boy, I'll die to care for you" - sacrifice for gay love.	"I want you all to myself, don't leave none for nobody else, I am an animal with you, No angels could beckon me back" - strong-willed, wild.	VFU

Table 2-E. Analysis of lyrics TS.

External Projects	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
i'm so tired... (with Lauv)	"Buzzcut Season like you're still around, can't unmiss you, but I need you now" - gay love.	"Tired of love songs/ just wanna go home/ killing my lonely nights with strangers" - no affection.	FU
1999 (with Charli XCX)	"Best friends, all night, no phone" - affection. "sing "Hit me, baby, one more time"" - feminine song and action of singing.	"My room singing M. Jackson, never under pressure, those days it was so much better, feelin' cool in my youth" - pride and male icon.	B
2099 (with Charli XCX)	"Don't care what she talk about, nah All she wanna do is my style, yeah" - competition with another female.	"I pull up, roll up, fuck up, fast like a Nascar, never touch us, got visions, levels, they don't get me" - strong language and stubbornness.	MU
Love Me Wrong (with Allie X)	"I'll never be how you remember me, so I'd rather be in your memory" - compassion.	"I know you love me, 'cause I'm there in your wallet, and your locket, I heard you talk about me in the kitchen" - control and carelessness.	MU

Table 2-F. Analysis of lyrics TS.

In a Dream EP	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Take Yourself Home	"And boy, I know you're eager" - interaction with himself/ another male (not clear).	"If I'm gonna waste my time, then it's time to go Take yourself home" - stubborn and careless.	FU
Easy	"Cause he made it easy, please, don't leave me/ Now I'm vulnerable, so sad and alone" - gay romantic affection and begging.	"...don't cry for me, 'cause everyone knows you reap what you sow, my darling" - no emotion. "Wood is warping/ this house is on fire" - rough.	VFU
Could cry just thinkin about you	"I could cry/ every guy I want looks something just like you" - gay romantic inferiority.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
STUD	"Hey, stud/ you got all the muscles and the features I want" - gay sexual inferiority.	"You can come and you can come and meet me out front" - strong-willed.	VFU
10/10	"Cause I wanna be a ten out of ten for you" - affection and sacrifice.	"I should say I don't have a shred of doubt" - confidence.	FU
Rager teenager!	"just ride in your car tonight/ "I just wanna lose myself in a crowd, in your arms tonight, or in his arms tonight" - gay sexual inferiority.	"I just wanna do some shit just to try" - strong-willed. "I just wanna fuck shit up" - strong language.	VFU
IN A DREAM	"But you still show up in a dream/ I still have to see your face" - romantic dependency.	"Put my shoes on and run away" - strong-willed.	FU
Easy (with Kacey Musgraves feat. Mark Ronson)	"We knew what was under the surface, and lived like it wouldn't hurt us, but it hurt us/ he made it easy" - gay romantic affection.	"Wood is warping/ this house is on fire" - rough. "What the hell did we do?" - strong language.	VFU

Table 2-G. Analysis of lyrics TS.

14.3 TABLE OF TS'S INTERVIEWS.

Interviews/ Promotion	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
COMING OUT	"I am gay", "I cried my eyes out" - queer explicit emotional content.	Heteronormative hairstyle, clothes and room. Very discreet hand moves.	VFU
Troye Sivan's Epic No Makeup-Makeup Routine Beauty Secrets Vogue	Make-up and beauty focus, platinum blond hair (dyed), "my boyfriend doesn't like this", "Vogue" magazine collaboration (culturally associated to beauty and therefore females).	Hairy armpits, plain white t-shirt and simple background, pride in the way he tells his story and how he bravely exposes himself as male make-up lover.	VFU
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH TROYE SIVAN	"My type are boys", "maybe" as an answer to "would you guys record a sex-tape?" (With another male).	Rejects a kiss, not emotional answer to "how is it like to be gay", short hair, plain clothes, low voice, no hand gestures, male friendship.	VFU
73 Questions With Troye Sivan Vogue	"Oh my god", suggests friendship to a female, talking about his hair. Shows affection towards dog. Gay boyfriend makes a cameo, physical contact and talk about male crushes. Paints nails to the interviewer and smells candle. Talks about the issue of gay conversion therapy and coming out".	Plain, simple outfit. No feminine hand moves. Low voice and masculine body language. House has plain colors and decoration.	VFU
Troye Sivan Reads Thirst Tweets	Does not react negatively to gay sexy messages ("bussy"), uses his hands to fan himself, expresses being overwhelmed. Wears a colorfully printed outfit and bleached hair.	Gives plain unemotional answers like "okay" and "dope".	FU
Troye Sivan Explores ASMR W Magazine	"Oh my god", Colorfully printed shirt and bleached hair. Interacts with flowers. One finger nail is painted. Talks about gay conversion therapy "I'm scared of...".	Barely any hand moves. Strong language "fuck", "holy shit".	FU
Chatting with Troye Sivan	Flower-print t-shirt. Painted nails and hand moves. Talks about coming out an helping others out.	Low voice, leaned-back attitude, success and control of the interview.	VFU

10 Things Troye Sivan Can't Live Without GQ	Plays with his lips, "I'm scared of...", "If I imagine a boy wearing this, I'd be like: 'that's hot'" - explicit gay statement. "I can't live without my dog/ her (mum)" - emotional.	Dark-colored outfit, no shyness. Blue background. Nothing too feminine in his items.	VFU
"Memories" with John Cena and Troye Sivan	Lifted by another male - inferiority. Skinny clothes.	Collaboration with other males.	B
James Corden Crashes Troye Sivan's House Party	Glittery jacket, painted nails. "Oh my god" and hand gestures.	Cocky attitude, control of the situation, taller than the other conversationalist	FU

Table 3. Analysis of interviews TS.

14.4 TABLES OF MM'S FICTIONAL VISUAL MATERIAL.

VMC	Singles	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
LV	Dimentica	Nothing remarkable.	Short hair, straight sans serif typography, grey emotionless colors, beard, baggy clothes, heavy ropes with knots and control over it.	VMU
MV	Dimentica	Expression of emotional suffering and therefore vulnerability. Taking care of a goldfish - empathy and compassion.	Dirt, destruction, aggressivity in the gaze, neck twisting, dark, brown and grey color palette. Wild forest, steady postures, hands in pockets. Muscles, violent hand gestures and chaos.	VMU
LV	Pesos	Warm colors, jewelry.	Gaze expressing superiority: high chin, serious face and mouth slightly opened . Beard, heteronormative Arab clothes, sans-serif bold typography - weight, steadiness and solidity. Bites a necklace and is positioned on a bill - money, social power and self-importance.	VMU
MV	Pesos	Covering himself from the sun - looking for protection. His pants at the beginning are so baggy that resemble a dress. Wears a Western kimono with an open cleavage and a genderless cut and glitter on his cheek while being surrounded by color lights.	Dark clothes, muscles, pixellated screen (aggressive, chaos), industrial buildings, emotionless and grey, serious gaze, and barely looks into the camera. No smiles, kicks in the air and rapid arm swings, On an empty skater park, grabs his crotch to express himself.	MU

Table 4-A. Analysis of fictional visual material MM.

VMC	Featured artist	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
MV	Karate (with GEMITAIZ & MADMAN)	Flamboyant animal print.	Sport baggy clothes, sitting spreading legs with heavy sneakers mustache, finger-gund, self-sufficient arrogant attitude and standard male hip-hop hand gestures. Accompanied by female next to him. Laid-back attitude, short haircut, karate and smoking hand moves, raised eyebrows and surrounded by people who respect his position and expensive clothes - social, physical and psychological superiority. Collaboration with straight-passing males.	VMU
MV	Calipso (with Charlie Charles e Dardust, Sfera Ebbasta and Fabri Fibra)	Briefly dances to the music and smiles to the camera.	Chains, traditional white tank-top, hip-hop male hand gestures. Regular-fit clothes, short hair, Daring gaze into the camera. Mainstream validated head-shake to feel the beat without dancing to it. His moves express strength and control of the situation, confidence. Collaboration with straight-passing males.	VMU

Table 4-B. Analysis of fictional visual material MM.

VMC	Gioventù bruciata	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
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MV	Uramaki	Suffering due to emotional vulnerability, prints on some clothes. Shoulder moves to express pain.	Short hair, shot of female mannequins, denim and grey color palettes. Working class neighborhood, shots next to rusty fences and parking slots. White tank top, regular-fit clothes, hip-hop arm swings, serious face gestures.	VMU
TE	Milano Good Vibes	Serif typography, white with colorful background.	Aggressive red.	FU
MV	Milano Good Vibes	Prints on shirts.	Suburbs, denim, Palin t-shirts, muscles, chains, short hair, male straight-passing actors with masculine behaviors: shirtless, throwing water on themselves without caring about getting wet, doing drugs in a car. Daring hand moves expressing superiority and control power Careless attitude, rejecting emotions, laid-back.	VMU
MV	Gioventù Bruciata	Glitter on one t-shirt, suffering.	Suburbs, plain colors, oversized urban-fashion, muscles, serious gaze, barely looking into the camera - no emotional connection. High way and cars, violent and accusing hand-gestures.	VMU
MV	Soldi	Little kid - tenderness and mother protection (although separated from his adult version). Clapping as part of the choreography.	Sitting with spread legs, baggy dark clothes and violent shoulder swings and accusing hand gestures. Barely gazing into the camera avoiding emotional connection. No suffering or pain from aggressive snake tattoo.	VMU
LV	Gioventù Bruciata	Cover artwork with vivid background colors and round typography. Childish print on t-shirt. "Make-up" on the face.	Serious gaze, laid back attitude with an uncovered shoulder, Painting on face resembles a shot or a target. Pokemon as a boyish reference but still masculine. His position is steady and his face is serious - no weakness.	MU
LV	Uramaki	Female hand approaches his face.	No emotions, beard and masculine haircut. Sans serif typography, plain colors.	MU
LV	Milano Good Vibes	A baby angel, serif typography and he holding himself as mother and son replicating the "Pietà" of the Vatican. He is shirtless and takes care of himself.	Aggressive red background, emotionless facial expression.	B
LV	Soldi (remixes)	From the five versions, one is pink and gold. Female profile in the middle (Nefertiti).	Four versions out of five portray bold colors but never pastel, always neon.	B

Table 4-C. Analysis of fictional visual material MM.

VMC	Singles (also collaborations as main artist)	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
MV	Barrio	Two guys are exchanging glances during the whole music video. All of them are friends but their connection and gazes is highlighted. At the end of the song, they meet in the darkness. This could be a hint towards a homosexual encounter or bond. Risky full-leather fashion (males tend to go for safer choices).	Car, working class fashion. Heteronormative males. Working class hairstyle. Chains, suburbs, baggy pants, sneakers, trucks, smoke, ruins. Choreography includes weaponized gestures, glorification of violence, aggressiveness. Fire, no emotions, no sensitivity, male salute.	VMU
LV	Barrio	Serif typography.	The typography is distorted in a way that looks metallic and aggressive. No emotions, he gives his back with plain clothes, an urban-styled haircut and a hostile landscape.	VMU
MV	Rapide	Pearl earring. Discreet floral, semi-transparent print on the long sleeves below the white sweatshirt. Rides a gold tortoise, which could be seen as childish. Light-fabric headscarf. Falls to the ground in defeat with a designer denim outfit (risky choice that could be ridiculed without a hyper-masculine performance). When everyone seems to have ended victorious, he remains sad, drowned by the pain - vulnerability and emotional inferiority.	Muscles, haircut, baggy sweatshirt and pants. White tank-top and denim pants. Heavy sneakers and spread legs while sitting on the turtle. No gaze into the camera, violent hand moves, anger, knife-through-heart tattoo. Breaks a column and hits his chest and steps hard on the ground to express frustration. Doesn't move when he is about to be hit - no fear. Surrounded by hyper-muscled males. No physical interaction, they are serious until they scream like warriors under the rain, raising his fists celebrating a powerful victory. Hairy arms.	VMU

LV	Rapide	Serif typography and floral ornament on the R.	Metallic color and black background. The animal looks aggressive.	VMU
MV	Eternantena	Glossy, flawless skin. Jewel earring. Serif typography for subtitles.	Short hair, muscled body, serious face, black and grey color palette. Graphic glitch distortion. Empty, emotionless body, not scared of death.	VMU
LV	Redemption song	Round central shape (CD). Yellow - warm color.	Emotionless colors, sans-serif typography. Shadows gradient, like on "Soldi". Neon yellow.	MU
LV	Moonlight Popolare	Shiny dot in the middle and the moon.	Dark hand with short anils and dark color palette and straight net on the moon.	B
MV	Moonlight Popolare (with Massimo Pericolo)	Ornamented earring, rhrows his arms into the air, surrounded by plants, grass and flowers. Flamboyant fashion like vinyl pants, gold mouth-mask, printed sweatshirt.	Sporty outfit, hairy arms, short haircut, serious face from shots from underneath - remains superior. Collaboration with equally hyper-masculine male. The night, Cars, suburbs, working-class buildings, sits squatting or spreading his legs, logs daring into the camera with attacking arm swings.	VMU
LV	Dorado	Childish cartoon, vegetables and serif.	Jewels simulating power, matte background.	B
MV	Dorado (with Sfera Ebbasta & Feid)	Shiny typography, floral print semi-transparent skinny-fit shirt, Lana Del Rey poster, platinum sides on the hair - implies he cares for his aesthetic. A Nintendo Switch is childish and infantile compared to PlayStation, together with the Bugs Bunny appearance.	short hair, daring attitude with the camera, plays video-games. Sits with spread legs, muscled, baggy dirty pants, his dance moves include confident arm swings, quick and strong moves that do not express gracefulness or fragility. Money, power, euphoria and over-confidence. Collaboration with straight-passing males. Kicks and punches, theatrical parody of dancing. Dances on top of a statue - control. All shots are from below or the front, but never above.	VFU
TE	Inuyasha	Barefoot, fantasy (childhood).	Fire, aggressive red, fighting pose, weapon, punch fist, fiery eyes - control, power, fearless.	B
LV	Inuyasha	Risky fashion and eyebrows and hair color and finger jewels. Theatrical expression.	Aggressive colors, contrast with the background, attacking position and face.	B
MV	Inuyasha	Flamboyant accessories and outfit, might look like a disguise. Soaring through the sky. Light semi-transparent red shirt. Expresses suffering (but channels it out through violent frustration). Fantasy and magic, childish.	Metallic, pointy, beast-like accessories. Hard fabric: leather. Weapons: arrow. No choreography but violent arm swings, daring gazes and anger. Muscle, buzzcut, offensive magic power, finger-guns and he is not cold.	MU

Table 4-D. Analysis of fictional visual material MM.

14.5 TABLES OF MM'S LYRICS.

Singles	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Dimentica	"Forget Judas Kisses In The Morning" - emotional and psychological vulnerability. "Only you're not" - love dependency.	"What was right for me" - rational focus on oneself. "Those hundred punches on the wall/ The bites on the pillow" - violence, aggressive.	MU
Pesos	"King Kong would not be enough to save me" needs savior. "Not daring to press play" - fear.	"I choose boredom/ I burn all my pounds" - will. "To scream loud, to fly away" - stubborn, numb.	B

Table 5-A. Analysis of lyrics MM.

Gioventù Bruciata	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Soldi	"Now where are you dad?" - Emotionally hurt and not recovered from his dad's abandonment. "It's hard to be in the world when you lose your pride" - ashamed about being the victim of such event. "Tell me if you miss me" - He wants his love, vulnerable.	"Suburbs/ mama don't worry/ I think faster" - in control, doesn't need help. "Or f*ck me, f*ck me" - use of strong language.	FU

Gioventù Bruciata	“(you) told me old fairy tales” - reminisces his frustration his childhood, the protection and love from his dad. “I used to play in the car with Nintendo and Pokémon” - fantasy, emotional illusion with inexistent material.	“The shit I already know” - strong language. “If goodbyes were in fashion, maybe you'd be first in trends” - satirical approach, control over the situation, laughs about it.	FU
Uramaki	“We could have loved each other in a parking lot, when you wished me the worst, give me back my poetry” - emotional vulnerability, inferiority and sensitivity through art. “I'd like to go back to that bar and drink with you, but it would take talent to love someone like me” - self-rejection while craving love.	“If we text each other porn” - explicit sexual, straightforward, emotionless strong language. “I've been smoking (...), I'm like this” - drugs and self-pride.	VFU
Il Nilo Nel Naviglio	“But your smile is the only thing that can fuck me up/ it hurts more” - emotional vulnerability. “You said: “Let's escape to China”, but where do I go if you're not around anymore” - frustration over emotionally-driven promises. “It feels like drowning, sinking, going down” - inferiority, he gives himself to the heartbreak.	“erase the alcohol from my head” - drugs. “call in after, I don't answer” - decision-making, stubborn.	VFU
Anni 90 (feat. Fabri Fibra)	“Chop me up all you want, like I was the daily weed in your grinder/ Tear me to pieces all you want” - chooses toxic relationship because he is in love.	“I'm tired of listening with this hatred in my veins” - anger channelled with stubbornness and decision-making.	VFU
Asia Occidente	“Seeing you from the balcony hurts me/ Seeing you for an hour hurts” - emotional vulnerability. “Save me from the fashion that...” - passively asking for a savior, physical or emotional inferiority.	“Now I don't look like you anymore / I'll pretend like nothing happened” - stubbornness, emotionless, control of the situation and rationality. “feel like shit” - strong language.	VFU
Remo	“It felt like love, I swear, but it's not love if you don't recognize my scent, I don't want to look back anymore, in your glass maze” - his emotional needs have driven him to misinterpret reality and lose control over his emotions. “I pray, I pray, I pray” - needs help	“I beat you senseless” - physical superiority. “I fall, I do not drown” - psychological resistance. “It's too late now, to sew up the shit you've done/ I've stopped rowing anyway” - stubborn, solid decision.	FU
Milano Good Vibes	Nothing remarkable.	“I keep staring at my reflection With the gaze of a samurai” - focus, self-centered, metaphor with brave warrior. “Just good vibes” - laid-back emotionless attitude. “This beach is my town” - power	MU
Sabbie Mobili	“I go slowly but I would like to run like a jaguar/ The more I think of you... the more I fall into quicksand” - inferiority.	“I may be insensitive, but I'm not changing for you/ I don't steal, I don't deal” - emotional numbness/ stubbornness. “smoked” - drugs.	B
Mai Figlio Unico	“ I admit it's a search for affection” - emotional vulnerability. “Forgive me if I don't know where to go” - asks for forgiveness. “I feel like I got the worst side of you” - asks himself about the lack of positive emotions from others towards him. “I'll never be an only child” - he is emotionally touched by being loved by others he can trust and rely on. “My mother has only me” - compassion and care.	“I won't listen to indie” - stubborn decision-making. “I've got lots of friends” - social power and ability to be liked by others, control. “I do not return because, the North Star brings me around” - own path, prioritizes his own success. “I'm fine like this, I don't think about it anyway I don't have time” - emotionless and independence. “I'll never be an only child” - confidence in how strong he socially is.	B

Table 5-B. Analysis of lyrics MM.

External collaborations	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Luna (with Fabri Fibra)	“You made me lose my thirst/ I lost sight of it” - weakness. “They will never hear me/ understand me/ like a madman” - lack of social support.	“With slow steps to defeat, with my back straight, you won't get me/ you won't catch me/ I run through the thick fog/ my head held high” - pride, bravery, independence and superiority.	MU
Presi male (with Michele Bravi)	“We are left to chase love in a truck stop” - emotions and heartbreak pain.	“On this heart you can't spit” - resistance and psychological superiority.	FU

Doppio whisky (Guè Pequeno)	"One like me, has little to claim" - self-deprecation.	"This war without a fight/ One like me runs and doesn't give a damn" - stubbornness.	MU
Calipso (with several artists)	"You look for miracles in the streets, others tell you: 'C'est la vie'" - lack of guidance.	"We are tired but young" - physical superiority. "Now remember where your heart is" - focus.	MU
Fa paura perché è vero (with Myss Keta)	"You make up another story, It's scary because it's true, You don't want to hear" - suffering due to love and conflicted emotions.	"You say shit" - strong language. "Now you tell me when I can feel" - bigger person in the discussion, in control of the conflict.	FU
Karate (with Gemitaiz e MadMan)	"I stay home just to play with Nintendo" - childish fun with infantile games. "You call to go out, I come to you" - dependency.	"if you drink and don't talk to me, I get in the cab without you, Baby you know my limit" - own decisions and control. "This drama runs on nikes/ This ain't love but karate" - rejects love.	MU
Non sono Marra - La pelle (Marracash)	"I'll apologize to the Pope" - inferiority (although probably ironic).	"don't ask me if I can take another picture with you/ Just try to look at me well" - confidence and control. "I go out drinking" - manly habit. "Ra-ta-ta" - gun sounds, violence.	VMU
8rosk1 (with Tha Supreme)	(Nothing remarkable)	"Fuck you, your cheap bars/ You sing but I hear you out of focus/ If you're Magmar, I'll give you a tidal wave" - superiority. "I got the playlist with Me and me" - ego and confidence.	VMU

Table 5-C. Analysis of lyrics MM.

Singles (also collaborations as main artist)	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Barrio	"What am I writing you a poem for if you'll burn the pages?/ Dying for you/ never disappear like... - emotional inferiority.	"If I have to climb your jealousy, I'd rather climb a pyramid" - control. "I drive fast" - manly attitude.	FU
Eternantena	Nothing remarkable.	"I kicked in the kitchen door" - violence. "It's easy for me to lose crumbs of my control" - too much aggressiveness."To be remembered in the museums (like the gods)" - ambition of power.	VMU
Rapide	"I wonder if you'll come back, with the usual pair of Nikes" care and compassion towards lover. "If I ask you to come to my birthday" longing for love.	"Tell me what the fuck you know about me" - strong language. "I'm gonna go have some fun It's a common thing, Sleeping with other people" - independency, emotionless.	FU
Moonlight popolare (with Massimo Pericolo)	"my God/ (...) the more you want to pray" - seeks for external help, vulnerability.	"From the little church to the Top 10, without a top or a daddy" - success, confidence. "I'll just have the balls to..." - power, self-sufficiency.	VMU
Dorado (with Sfera Ebbasta and feid)	"Inside the house I sing Lana, Nefertiti is the necklace/ Mom's eyes" - female references of power, intimate bond with Lana's art.	"I would be the most expensive ring, I sleep in an armored truck" - social superiority and power (Still a dream).	MU
Inuyasha	"you break my heart/ you don't give a shit who we are/ The truth burns in my face/ not to hurt you anymore if you do" - vulnerability.	"Shit/ Fuck you if you shoot me" - strong language. "You see me and you understand/ I didn't go out of my way" - self-determination.	FU

Table 5-D. Analysis of lyrics MM.

14.6 TABLE OF MM'S INTERVIEWS.

Interviews/ Promotion	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Mahmood on Ultimo's controversy: "We're young, a wrong phrase can happen."	Palm-print Shirt. "My mama was delighted and in seventh heaven because..." - emotional motherly bond, childish. Sometimes he smiles shyly and looks around.	Dark colors and aggressive red. Short haircut, beard. Not many hand-gestures. Low voice. Calmed and without temper: "I do not judge anyone that is..." control of the situation, not driven by emotions but rationality.	MU

"Never have I ever" with Mahmood.	Childish laughter. Shy to admit having done incorrect things. "I'm a psycho, I admit it" (as a response to checking someone's phone) - driven by emotions. "I fall in love every day"	Black clothes, beard, short hair, metallic ring as accessory and chain. "When you come back from a night out, you are distracted" - bold statement about taking pride in partying.	FU
Mahmood presents "Money": "Thanks to Dardust and Charlie Charles, my song is a team effort".	Colorful jacket, shaved childish face. Hand gesture (around 1:58). Innocent-looking goodbye-message to the viewers (3:00). "I'm very happy about..." talks about emotions.	Short hair, masculine facial features, "I fought for this opportunity" - determination, confidence and pride.	B
The story of Mahmood, winner Sanremo 2019.	(About Sanremo) The 24th place goes to... - inferiority. Hand moves and print on clothes. Collaboration with a female.	Confident greeting towards a female. Dark sweatshirt and denim, short hair, no accessories and beard. "I want to present a voice that stands out of the crowd" - determination. He is the one carrying the umbrella.	MU
Basement Cafe: interview with Enrico Mentana and Mahmood Part 1 Season 2.	Printed tucked shirt. "I know him thanks to my mum" - bringing up the influential role of his mother - emotional childish bond.	Short hair, trimmed beard. Spread legs while sitting. Male collaboration. Sports socks and sneakers. Confident jokes. Low pitch voice.	MU
Personal: Mahmood tells his story between Sanremo, "Money" and his identity.	Print shirt. Childish laughter and hand moves. Talks about his family bonds, mother being irreplaceable and dad having hurt him. - emotional vulnerability. "It makes me sad there is a media discussion about my sexuality/ it makes it look like there's a difference...etc". - not denying a potential homosexuality when having the chance.	Short hair, trimmed beard. Spread legs while sitting. Male collaboration. Low pitch voice. Dark pants and heavy shoes, chains, white tank-top. "I don't like musical labels" - determination and confidence: "I am neither that, nor this".	B
Basement Cafe: interview with Enrico Mentana and Mahmood Part 2 Season 2.	When facing online criticism/ insults, he doesn't claim his reputation back: "It's not really my thing". "I write to find relief when I'm sad" - vulnerable emotions. "I get emotional when...". He looks down when finishing.	Short hair, trimmed beard. Spread legs while sitting. Male collaboration. Sports socks and sneakers. Confident jokes. Low pitch voice.	B
Interview with Mahmood - Che tempo che fa.	Print T-shirt, jokes with female host. Childish excitement regarding album release.	Short hair, trimmed beard. Spread legs while sitting. Male collaboration. Low pitch voice.	B
Eurovision, reporters' absurd questions to Mahmood: "Do you still live in the ghetto?"	Insecure at some points (because of his English). Print Shirt. The way he holds his mic without strength (01:33). "I love chocolate" and other childish smiles. How he sits like a little kid putting his legs on the little step.	Confident to ask his translator for help. Short hair. Serious face when feeling disturbed by an inappropriate question and confidence to make the tables turn "there is no difference for me, life is the same" (02:17).	B
ITALY EUROVISION 2019 : Mahmood - 'Soldi' (INTERVIEW) Tel Aviv 2019	Flamboyant shirt, Hand moves (04:94). Childish smiles. "My skin was so soft/ "I miss home" - emotional. Expressive eye-rolling. Objectively discreetly flirty with the interviewer.	Short hair, masculine facial features. Spread legs while sitting.	FU

Table 6. Analysis of interviews MM.

14.7 TABLES OF CG'S FICTIONAL VISUAL MATERIAL.

VMC	Sunset Season + Singles	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
MV	IdleTown	Pastel color jacket. Dance throwing the arms in the air. Flipping the hair from side to side as in letting go of control. No beard. Pacific sky. Dancing under the confetti thrown by a female friend. Passionate performance. Heart-shaped birthday cake and only girl friends.	Regular fit, heteronormative clothes. Jumps off a fence and plays tennis. Driving. No shyness in front of the camera, bold performance.	VFU
LV	Idle Town	Childish typography, round and serif.	Serious face.	FU

MV	Grow	Childish hero disguise and room. Dancing passionately. Hugs and plays with females, has fun with them. Throws arms in the air.	Sporty masculine clothes. On a car. Chosen fantasy is a hero. Driving. Running. Open his arms as if in control.	FU
LV	Grow	Bold, sans-serif typography. "For his friends & future" - emotional engagement.	Serious face and typical male clothes.	B
MV	Generation Why	Serif typography, warm pastel colors, garden flowers and childish elements. Plays with female friend intimately. Sitting pose. Plays with his own hair and	Bike, car, male clothes. Rebellious attitude doing illegal things. Wounds, blood.	FU
MV	Crush Culture	Heart symbology and childish behavior. Sitting pose in the bathroom. Touched by the text of his crush. Lgbtq+ representation.	Sporty outfit, gym scenario. Anti-romantic attitude. Starts scene with a girl.	FU
LV	Crush Culture	Serif typography, warm pastel colors, heart shaped balloons and short trousers and innocent pose and gaze into the camera.	Sporty outfit and sporty location.	VFU
LV	Sunset Season	Glowing skin and jewels, childish crown.	Belt, sporty landscape, power pose and face.	B
MV	The Other side	Emotional, playful with females. Childish behavior towards the camera, smiles a lot.	Bike, male friend, male typical clothes. Sans-serif typography	FU
LV	The Other Side	Shaved, over-lighted filter, Long hair.	Masculine t-shirt, serious face.	B
LV	Greek God	Nothing remarkable.	Dark background, sporty locations, sans-serif.	VMU
LV	The King	Childish landscape: blue sky and white clouds. Long hair. Arms in the air.	Sporty outfit, serious face and sans-serif.	B
LV	Sunset Shows	Light color palette, colorful top and shoes, poetic name "sunset".	Masculine outfit, legs spreading, carelessness and confidence. Wings as in race and speed.	B

Table 7-A. Analysis of fictional visual material CG.

VMC	Kid Krow	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
LV	Checkmate	Over-lighted filter and long hair.	Violent pose and facial expression. Brutal typography, muscled arms and male outfit.	VMU
MV	Checkmate	Emotions-driven. Cut-throat hand-gesture. Similar attention to the male & to the female (lgbtq+ narrative) - subtle queer-coded story.	Car, fashion, interaction with female. Female moans, serious. Straight couple. Bites on spoon, blood-images, kills somebody, looks crazy.	MU
LV	Checkmate	Scribbles. Heart drawings, lips and eye-lashes, childish-drawn jewish star on necklace and school-like typography.	Aggressive colors: red, gray, black. Drawings of his face, ouija, crosses on eyes, fire, scissors, knife, robber, heart (organ).	VMU
LV	Comfort Crowd	Serious face, dark background, scary typography.	Cries, vulnerable feminine pose, colorful top, long hair, shaved.	FU
MV	Comfort Crowd	Serif typography. Cereal bowl, long hair, shaved, cleaning the window. Flowers at the end.	Aggressive red. Blood. Spreads legs when sitting, serious, no camera eye-contact. Masculine outfit. Dark scenes, chain, strength and emotionless actions. Liad-back.	VMU
LV	Maniac	Long hair and intense look into the camera. Slightly open mouth.	Aggressive typography, sans-serif, masculine outfit, spread, legs, angle from below, serious face, in control of the situation, glitchy edition.	MU
MV	Maniac	Childish tale-like beginning. Passionate dancing. Parody of socially accepted males through texts. Helps a girl to fend off her exes but only as a friend. Scared of males.	Male uniform, Conan as a savior. Straight couple in the middle. Night, cemetery, jumps on fence.	FU
LV	The Story	Elegant typography, gaze, long hair, shaved.	Black & white, crow, male clothes, glitch.	B
LV	The Story	typography.	Dark clouds, written rapidly.	MU

MV	The Story	Long hair, shaved. Gets lost between the hanging blankets, sings to the sun, sad emotional face, leans against the wall while sighing. Long-hair actor (non-hegemonic).	Outfit, car, street, bold jump into the van, chain. Bold to dive into the water, face of a girl staring into the camera (romantic interest). Straight couple.	MU
LV	Wish You Were Sober	Painted nails, smiley stickers and star-glitter, iPhone earphones (sophisticated white).	Red typography. No emotions, ugly face-angles, boots and masculine socks, cans and drinks.	MU
MV	Wish You Were Sober	Animal print shirt, grooms his hair, dances throwing his arms in the air, lets shirt fall off shoulders, cannot open doors, emotions-driven. Painted nails, regrets drinking. A guy corners him flirty. Between guy & girl in bed.	In the center of the apt, sits powerfully, laid back attitude, chains. Straight couples. Alcohol, drugs. Bold to hold the microphone and when the pair kisses in front of him, he stares at the girl (he had been bitten by her). Wasted scene.	FU
LV	Heather	Childish illustrations, drawn broken heart.	Grey and white colors. Sweatshirt has no print.	FU
MV	Heather	Long hair, fondles his neck while showering, plants, earring and intense slow-mo. Surrounded by a lot of colorful clothes and accessories. Slim body, mouth close-ups. Reads on the bed. Plays with his feet and puts socks in a feminine way and dances with a skirt like a ballerina.	Male pajama, sleeps with socks, in control of a big bed, steps all over. Abs and hairy armpits. A feminine hand touches him. Boldness of cross-dressing and posting it on social media.	VFU
LV	The Cut That Always Bleeds	Childish illustrations and typography.	Blood everywhere and no gaze into the camera.	B
LV	Fight or Flight	“Flight” typography and tears.	Black and white colors, aggressive trace and typography, crosses on eyes, bloody-red.	VMU
LV	(Online Love)	Heart on top, sky blue color for texts.	Sans-serif typography and sober design.	B
LV	Little League	Female friend, kid-smiles, plays with hair.	Informal typography, black frame.	FU
LV	Affluenza	Childish caricature, eye-lashes, tears & lips.	Money, power (face on bill), serious, eyebrows.	MU
LV	Can We Be Friends?	Childish, colorful, smileys, flowers, hearts, emotional, letters shake lightly as cartoons.	Sans-serif typography.	VFU
LV	Kid Krow	Long hair, shaved, slightly opened mouth. Feet are not spread and the arms around his knees resemble a protective pose.	Hairy & strong arms, not afraid of the krow, masculine clothes with rough fabrics like leather, denim and thick socks.	B
LV	Kid Krow Tour	Printed jersey and theatrical expression.	Aggressive colors, typography & face gesture.	VFU

Table 7-B. Analysis of fictional visual material CG.

VMC	Singles	Hegemonic femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
MV	Overdrive	Playing with female and feminine dancing, make-up and clothes. The girl drives and he throws his arms in the air. Slim body.	Heteronormative beginning and ending. Hugs and kisses the forehead of the girl. Rebellious night doing forbidden things. Hairy armpit.	VFU
LV	Overdrive	Lila/pink color for the typography at some specific points. Colorful childish video game.	Neon colors, car, speed, night, fast pace, bold typography, racing video-game-looking footage.	MU
MV	Fake (with Lauv)	Pink and jaguar-printed pants and accessories. Pink decoration, pillow fight, lead by girls, lollipops, clouds, balloons, ice-cream, fear from sparks, childish ending.	Male collaboration, serious to the camera. White tank top revealing strong arms, females dress them up. Theatrical parody. They touch each other's shoulders. Hip hop arms swings.	VFU
LV	Fake (with Lauv)	Hearts, colorful, stars, glossy aesthetic, cheesy, kitsch, flowers, ice cream and pink.	Collaboration with another male, boldness, intended parody.	VFU

Table 7-C. Analysis of fictional visual material CG.

14.8 TABLES OF CG'S LYRICS.

Songs	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
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Grow	"Pure reality, don't know where it'll lead, But everything's a dream" - childish fantasy, insecurity, admits he has not grown up yet.	"I made it out, it seems" - confidence and control, "Yeah I'll take my time evolving". Stubbornness.	MU
Lookalike	"No matter how I try to hide, and erase you from my mind, I'm dying" - emotions and psychological vulnerability.	"I know in your head, You see me instead" - control of the situation and superiority. "Can't compete 'cause I've already won" - arrogance.	MU
Greek God	"Cause I know what you really want A little more confidence" - compassion.	"There's nothin' you could do, to dampen up my mood/ You don't wanna end me (You wanna befriend me)" - psychological superiority.	VMU
Crush Culture	"I'm not falling for you, 'Cause this baby is loveproof (Culture)" - calls himself baby. "Just let me be sad and lonely" - emotional.	"Crush culture makes me wanna spill my guts out, I know what you're doing" - rejection of emotions and psychological superiority.	MU
Generation Why	"Parents think we're fast asleep" - childish. "And all the big dreams..." - fantasy.	"We get into trouble and lose our minds" - rebellious attitude, stubbornness, laid-back.	MU
Idle Town	"While everybody's off partying, We're watching stars over ice-cream/ never learned anybody's name" - child without control.	Sportive words (games, stadium).	FU
The other Side	"I hope, all of our homes have white fences/ Our smiles are wider than theirs is" -no power.	"You keep on crying, babe, I don't mind" - emotionless, stubbornness.	B
The King	"Crush always making me feel like I got nothing to offer/ Choose me" - vulnerability. "Don't you got a girl..." - queer-coding?	"You like me, well obviously, So why you trying to leave when you know that I'm the king?" - confidence.	MU
The Story	"when the people were mean" vulnerability. "I knew a boy and a boy/ always wished they were more/ they loved one another/ were too afraid of what they'd say" - queer. "it could work for you and me/ I'm afraid" - emotions. "me and my friend" - referring to a female.	"about a boy and a girl" - heteronormative. "It's not the end of the story" - confidence. "And I hope that they all get their happy end" - no hard feelings, emotional control.	VFU
Little League	"We wore our hearts proud on our sleeve" - emotions. "Could I get a rewind?, Get another chance/ I don't know what to do/ where did all my friends go?" - vulnerability, regret.	"Messin' with our neighbors who called the cops/ we snuck out of class" - rebellious attitude.	FU

Table 8-A. Analysis of lyrics CG.

Songs	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic Masculinity	GEF
(Can We Be Friends?)	"Could you be my best friend?/ I'll tell you all my secrets/ I'll tell you all the times/ That I wished that I could die" - vulnerability.	"I'll knock their teeth out" - violence and physical superiority, stubbornness and confidence.	MU
Affluenza	"He never calls back" - psychological inferiority and emotional pain. "80 grand in both your hands, but no love" - advocate for emotions and not driven by materialism. "Mama/ daddy" - childish love figures.	"get me money, 'Til I'm bloody" - power and emotionless ambition.	FU
Fight or Flight	"Well, fight or flight, I'd rather die, Than have to cry in front of you/ Than tell you I'm in love with you, my eyes are welling up" - emotional swings.	"I'm throwing all your shit outta my window" violence, stubbornness. "Fight or flight, I'd rather lie, Than tell you I'm in love with you" - pride and strong will.	FU
The Cut That Always Bleeds	"Cause you keep me on a rope, tied a noose around my throat/ 'Cause I could be your lover on a leash" - emotional dependency.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Checkmate	"When you tell me you love me then you throw me away" - emotional vulnerability. "Holding your hand, but in the other one I'm holding a loaded gun" - driven by swings.	"Now I'm gonna ruin your life/ you should really run, You're gonna wish you never harmed me" - physical superiority and strong will.	MU

(Online Love)	"I can't help but imagine what maybe could've happened, If you weren't just an online love, Sometimes I say "Hi" and he, like, doesn't answer - emotions, fantasy, queer-coding.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Comfort Crowd	"Beggin' on my knees, Screamin', 'Someone come and help me" psychological inferiority.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Wish You Were Sober	"I'ma crawl out the window now, 'Cause I don't like anyone around" - fear of being caught. "Kiss me in the seat of your Rover" - emotional cravings.	"But I'm over this roller coaster" - stubbornness.	FU
Maniac	"But I'm past that and you know that" - admits to have loved in the past, emotions.	"So why do you call me and tell me you want me back? You maniac" - psychological superiority, no compassion and under control.	MU
Heather	"Why would you ever kiss me?/ I'm not even half as pretty, You gave her your sweater, it's just polyester, But you like her better, (Wish I were Heather)" - inferiority and he wishes he was a girl, probably for a guy: queer story.	Nothing remarkable.	VFU
Fake (with Lauv)	Nothing remarkable.	"Fucking" - strong language. "If we've got a problem, say it to my face, ah" - stubbornness and bravery. Emotionlessness and laid-back act.	VMU
Overdrive	"Said I'm not catchin' feelings, I guess I lied" - losing control in the name of love. "Don't give a fuck about labels" - pro lgbtq+ narratives.	"Burnin' down the street, no left, right, left, right I don't wanna see no red light, red light" - car, speed, stubbornness. "But I'm likin' the danger.	FU

Table 8-B. Analysis of lyrics CG.

14.9 TABLE OF CG'S INTERVIEWS.

Interviews/ Promotion	Hegemonic Femininity	Hegemonic masculinity	GEF
Conan Gray "Heather" Official Lyrics & Meaning Verified	Long hair, shaved, patterned jersey without sleeves and accessories. Shrinks shoulders, hand gestures. Shy smile. Emotions. Very young voice and V-hands.	Hairy armpits, nails without paint, no make-up. Bravery to sing.	VFU
Conan Gray "Crush Culture" Official Lyrics & Meaning Verified	Childish, long hair, colorful shirt and rolled-up sleeves. Vulnerability and no social success "I have never had my first kiss". Arms dance when singing. "I melt, I'm not love-proof".	Denim fit, no make up, no nails paint, sarcasm. "I don't hide in bathrooms, I usually punch people". - physical superiority. "Damn" - strong language.	VFU
👉 i'm a girly boy and i don't care (kinda) 🤔	Plants, hand-gestures, painting his nails with glittery blue. "I am not masculine at all/ If you are fragile like me/ I'm terrified of others/ I'm affectionate" - insecure & feminine. Fashion.	Brave to say everything in front of the camera. No make up or earrings or hair-accessories.	VFU
Conan Gray Guesses the Lyrics to Taylor Swift Songs Lyric Challenge	Long hair, shaved face, painted nails, Taylor Swift-fan attitude (admiration towards a female). Childish laughter, he covers his mouth with shyness. Patterned shirt. "I want to transform into Taylor Swift".	Denim trousers and white tank top. Nothing else remarkable.	VFU
Conan Gray Sings Taylor Swift, One Direction, and "Heather" in a Game of Song Association ELLE	Floral shirt, long hair, shaved, accessories. High-pitched singing. Admitting being jealous about a girl and being emotionally devastated by not being loved back without gendering.	Bare chest. Seducing confident attitude towards the camera. Bravery to admit things confidently.	VFU
9 Things About Conan Gray You Should Know! Billboard	Colorful shirt, shy laughter, "I almost started crying on stage/ it was super sweet" - fragile, emotional vulnerability. Admiration towards a female (Lorde).	Nails without paint, no make-up.	VFU

Conan Gray Performs 'Checkmate,' 'Comfort Crowd' & 'Maniac' + Talks About His Album MTV News	Bi-color shirt. Long hair, shaved. Hand-gestures. Childish laughter, plays with his hair. Self-deprecating confessions.	Male typical clothes. Nails without paint, no make-up.	FU
Conan Gray Talks Maniac, Creative Process & Dating	Childish laughter. Hand gestures. Long hair, shaved. Accessories. Female friend "Ashley", feelings towards her and her necklace.	Ripped pants. Hairy arms, no paint on nails, no make-up. Confident sitting position. Sideburns and thick eye-brows. "I don't care" - laid-back.	FU
Conan Gray Breaks Down His Album Kid Krow	Floral print shirt, long hair, shaved, emotional confessions, hand-gestures, painted nails. Childish laughter "oh my god", "I'm so excited, so happy" - emotional vulnerability.	"I did not listen at all/ what do you think I did, Zach?" - confidence, laid-back attitude and bravery to directly appeal and call the name of the host. Sarcastic, nonchalant, no make-up.	FU
Conan Gray plays Jam or Not a Jam	Hand-gestures, shy dancing, long hair, childish laughter, shaved, fascination towards Cardi B, Justin Bieber and shyness.	Male typical jumper, no make up, no paint on his nails, bravery to talk to the camera.	VFU

Table 9. Analysis of interviews CG.