

Legitimation, Authenticity, and Communicative Entitlement in YouTube “Lifestyle” Vlogs: The Case of “Hygge”

WILL GIBSON*

University College London, UK

ELISABETH MUTH ANDERSEN

University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

This article uses ethnomethodological conversation analysis and multimodal analysis to explore the performance of “authenticity” in “lifestyle” vlogs that deal with the topic of hygge. This analysis contributes to our understanding of the emergence and development of vloggers’ “genre practices,” foregrounding the epistemic strategies through which “authenticity” is configured. The analysis points to three distinctive epistemic categories of hygge videos: (1) videos in which vloggers discursively claim legitimacy as practitioners of hygge; (2) videos in which vloggers embody hygge practice as a way of displaying legitimacy; (3) videos in which vloggers show hygge as distinctively Danish and enact their Danish identity through the videos. These three types involve the production of different notions of authenticity that are tied to particular identity claims, accounting practices, and audience positionality.

Keywords: hygge, authenticity, vlogs, legitimacy, YouTube

YouTube can be understood as an open database of content that is produced and curated by a global community underpinned by a complex business model and even more complex algorithmic systems (Bishop, 2019). YouTube’s content is culturally and linguistically “superdiverse” (Blommaert & Rampton, 2012) and involves an ever-expanding range of content genres and production practices (Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2012). There is great “bridging” (Herring, 2005) or “hybridism” (Mogoş & Trofin, 2015) among these genres, which can be thought of as ever-changing and evolving content forms. Researchers are increasingly interested in the processes behind this diversity, such as how algorithms (Balanzategui, 2021) and monetization policies impact content practices, and the relationship between culture and content production practices (e.g., Mohan, 2019). Our study aims to contribute to our understanding of YouTube’s diversity through an analysis of the different ways in which “lifestyle vloggers” present the Danish concept of hygge. We illustrate that what may, at first sight, seem to be a homogenous practice is actually very diverse and that this variation tells us something important about the relationship between identity and content production and about the communicative performance of authenticity.

Will Gibson: w.gibson@ucl.ac.uk

Elisabeth Muth Andersen: elan@sdu.dk

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Hygge has become increasingly popular around the world in the last 10 years as a “lifestyle” concept related closely to design and socialization. As a design concept, hygge’s contemporary iteration is minimalistic, associated with simplicity, an absence of clutter, and specific sensory experiences relating to lighting, smells, tastes, touch, temperature, and ambient sound—soft lighting and “homely” smells and tastes often associated with baking and “comforting” foods (wine, chocolate, and “Christmas flavors”); soft fabrics, blankets, and warmth; and “smooth” music soundscapes. Hygge invokes particular types of social practice, like cooking, playing board games, reading, and telling stories. There is also an association with small-group settings, shared leisure time, informal chatting, eating and drinking, and group relaxation and informality (Johansen, 2017; Wiking, 2016). While it is increasingly associated with consumerism and purchasing of hygge-inspired products, definitions of hygge also tend to highlight hygge as a mental state of well-being characterized by relaxation and attentiveness to the present moment (Levisen, 2012).

Our concern here is not with an objectivized characterization of hygge’s meaning but with how vloggers position themselves in their presentation of it. Before we turn to the methods of our study, we examine the issue of authenticity, which is the central analytic concern of this article.

Audience, Identity, and Authenticity: The Construction of an Epistemic Space

Generating user interaction with video content is critical to the “successes” of the content itself because it is through likes, shares, upvoting, and commenting that a post or contribution can be constructed as “popular” and potentially financially lucrative. One way in which social media contributors can control the popularity of their posts is by constructing content that is authentic. “Authenticity” is often described as one of the underlying “cultural logics” of YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2018). Authenticity relates to the ways that a vlogger presents themselves and constructs an identity as competent, trustworthy, and “real” (Jorge, Marôpo, & Nunes, 2018).

Scholars in linguistics, discourse analysis, and cognate areas have begun to examine the communicative practices constitutive of authenticity, showing that greetings (Isosävi & Vecsernyés, 2022), “humour” (El Naggar, 2018), sharing personal experience (Parini & Fetzer, 2019), and informal speech (Zappavigna, 2012) are common resources used to achieve it. The use of pronouns has been found to be key to the formation of epistemic alignment between the vlogger and the audience. For example, the pronoun “you” has been shown to have use in constructing specific types of audience members that share the perspectives and knowledge of the vlogger (Bhatia, 2018).

Our approach to the analysis of authenticity departs from that found in “discourse” studies of YouTube, which focus on the “cultures” of production and the discourses that “inform” them, such as care and family bonds (Becker, 2023), “neoliberalism” (Zappavigna, 2019), or “gender” (Lupton, 2020). As Montgomery (2001) has noted, “authenticity” is not an analytic term but a term of judgment relating to how people see or treat talk. Thus, instead of “authenticity,” we follow Tolson’s (2010) notion of “communicative entitlement” to characterize the *interactional practices* through which talk may come to be *seen as* authentic.

Using ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA), we analyze the videos as epistemic actions—that is, as instances of the construction of knowledge for an audience. Knowledge construction

involves taking an epistemic stance in relation to a topic at hand and making claims about the legitimacy of the stance being adopted. In their talk, people routinely display their and others' epistemic stance in relation to knowledge (Drew, 2018), making claims about things that they know and the interlocutor does not (e.g., "You should see that house Emma, you have no idea?"), those that the interlocutor has shared knowledge of (e.g., "It's a beautiful day out, isn't it?"), and those that the interlocutor alone has knowledge of (e.g., "Are you married?"; examples taken from Heritage [2012, p. 4]).

Participants often undertake work to display the criteria rights by which they lay claim to hold knowledge. Heritage (2012) points to "recent" over "less-recent" experience or being a "professional" rather than an "amateur," and "seeing something first hand" over having "heard" about something as observable criteria that people often use to legitimize one set of claims over another. In some circumstances, people may need to display how they know through "evidence," showing how it is that they know something. In doing so, they often do more than just make a claim to their knowledge but produce a generalized statement about something being the case (Pomerantz, 1984).

An important set of concepts for our analysis comes from Goffman's (1981) work on conversational footing. Goffman (1981) proposes alternative and more subtle ways of thinking about the concepts "speaker" and "hearer." For example, people may speak words that they have no knowledge of or personal investment in (such as when reciting a piece of text), or they might be the author of the words being spoken. Furthermore, a speaker may be what Goffman (1981) calls a "principal," which is someone committed to the words and whose own position is established by them but who is not their author. As we shall show, these epistemic relationships are useful for understanding how YouTubers construct orientations to subjects and audiences and for how they negotiate their own authenticity.

In this article, we draw on these ideas to analyze the resources that vloggers use to establish epistemic entitlement. We combine detailed sequential analyses of selected extracts as well as multimodal analysis that takes into account editing and production techniques, all of which are treated as aspects of "members' methods" for managing legitimation.

Data and Methods

We searched YouTube using the keyword "hygge" to identify videos in English that deal with hygge. There were several hundred videos that fell into a number of distinct genres (see Table 1), but our central interest was in lifestyle videos that explained how to *do* hygge, which is what we analyze here. Discounting instances where vloggers produced multiple videos on the topic and concentrating only on videos that involved talking (as opposed to "silent" videos), we found 15 instances (see Table 2). There may, of course, be more videos that were not found through our keyword search. We reviewed each of these videos and produced three categories of video presentation practice: (1) videos that teach viewers how to perform hygge, (2) videos that perform hygge as an embedded/embody identity, and (3) videos by Danes that show hygge as a distinctive Danish practice with the vloggers performing their "Danishness" through the videos. Serendipitously, these three categories overlap substantially with three categories of authentic

broadcast talk proposed by Montgomery (2001, p. 398)¹: (1) talk that is true to the person and capturing something at their core, (2) talk that is true to the participant's experience, and (3) talk that is "fresh" and spontaneous. We will return to the discussion of these categories and their relationship to our analysis in the conclusion of this article.

Table 1. Examples of Hygge Videos by Typology.

Video	Room	How to do Hygge	Explaining Hygge as a Concept	Product Reviews	Tourism Videos	Hygge Activities
Diaries	Pronunciation	Makeovers	Hygge	Plume	theobarthez	HandyWoman
Getting Hygge With It (2019)	Smith (2016)	Mr. Kate (2019)	Carilion Clinic (2020)	Bernardi (2017)	Books (2017)	(2019)

Table 2. Data Corpus of How to Hygge Videos.

Category 1—Discursively Claiming Legitimacy	Category 2—Embodying Hygge Practice	Category 3—Danish Identity Performance
Eaton (2020)	Living the Life You Love (2017)	sissel (2020)
Dinen (2017)	Life of Kotts (2020)	Vestergaard (2018)
Rainbow Plant Life (2019)	Seasonal Living with Leo (2022)	Jeppesen (2016)
Woods (2020)	Lowell (2021)	Kubicka (2021)
Weldon (2020)	Darling Desi (2021)	Use Less (2018)

Our analysis draws on concepts from conversation analysis as it has been applied to online contexts (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2014) as well as multimodal analysis of online interaction (Lustig, Brookes, & Hunt, 2021). The methods in these fields are well described elsewhere, and we refer the reader to relevant literature for a description of the methodological procedures (Mondada, 2008; Sidnell, 2010; Ten Have, 1998). Our analysis explores the conversational, gestural, and other semiotic orderings through which the vloggers construct the distinctive epistemic positions of themselves and their audience and how they orientate to (and produce) iterations of hygge itself. We draw particularly on the works of Gibson (2022), McNeill (1992), and Streeck (2008), which explore the use of gestures as communicative practices. Of particular relevance are McNeill's (1992) distinctions between gestures as "iconics" (representing things), "metaphorics" (representing abstract concepts), "deictics" (ordering the world, such as through pointing), and "beats" (rhythmic movements used to order attention).

Due to space limitations, our analysis here only includes extracts from two videos from each of the three categories (six videos in total), but the claims made are indicative of practices in the broader data set.

¹ We did not discover Montgomery's (2001) work until after we had conducted our own initial analysis, making this an interesting example of analysis in distinctive fields producing substantially overlapping qualitative descriptions.

Table 3. Data for Analysis: Six Vlogs.

Video Number	Vlog
V1	Use Less (2019)
V2	Dinen (2017)
V3	Living the Life You Love (2017)
V4	Life of Kotts (2020)
V5	Vestergaard (2018)
V6	sissel (2020)

Analysis

Besides sharing a number of features associated with the genre of vlogging, the six videos have common characteristics related to how the topic of hygge is presented: (1) it is linked to Denmark, (2) it is described as a "feeling", and (3) it is semiotically indexed using objects such as cups with hot drinks, candles, blankets, lighting, and "relaxing" music (see Extracts 1–3 and Figures 1–9).

Extract 1: Hygge is Linked to Denmark

- A. V1: "To those of you who don't know, hygge is a Danish word" (Use Less, 2019, 00:01:16–00:01:18).
- B. V2: "So if you can't tell by the name of the book hygge, it's really the cornerstone of the way of life in Denmark" (Dinen, 2017, 00:01:22–00:01:29).
- C. V3: "Hygge is a Danish word that describes the feeling of coziness and comfort you get when you spend time relaxing in your home with your loved ones or drinking a hot cup of tea and watch the steam evaporate into the air" (Living the Life You Love, 2017, 00:00:31–00:00:44).
- D. V4: "Today's video is going to be all about the Danish secret to happy living, that is hygge" (Life of Kotts, 2020, 00:00:03–00:00:09).
- E. V5: "Hygge is a word from Denmark" (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:00:55–00:00:57).
- F. V6: "If there is one thing that I definitely should film here to capture the essence of Denmark it's a video about hygge" (sissel, 2020, 00:01:05–00:01:13).

Extract 2: Hygge is Described as a Feeling

- A. V1: "The point is that when you taste it, when you smell it, when you see it, when you hear it, ah, when you touch it, you will feel it" (Use Less, 2019, 00:01:22–00:01:28).
- B. V2: "At the end of the day, hygge is a feeling" (Dinen, 2017, 00:01:58–00:02:01).
- C. V3: See Extract 1c.
- D. V4: "In this book, hygge is described as not relating to one particular thing, but instead it relates to an overall experience, a feeling" (Life of Kotts, 2020, 00:01:04–00:01:12).
- E. V5: "It's basically just like an expression of an extreme coziness, happiness and a secure warm feeling" (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:00:59–00:01:06).
- F. V6: "It's also describing a mood and a feeling inside" (sissel, 2020, 00:01:37–00:01:40).

Extract 3: Semiotically Representing Hygge

A. V1



Figure 1. Screenshot from the video (*Use Less*, 2019, 00:03:00).



Figure 2. Screenshot from the video (*Use Less*, 2019, 00:00:27).

B. V2



Figure 3. Screenshot from the video (*Dinen*, 2017, 00:00:34).

C. V3



Figure 4. Screenshot from the video (*Living the Life You Love*, 2017, 00:03:44).

D. V4



Figure 5. Screenshot from the video (*Life of Kotts*, 2020, 00:00:13).

E. V5



Figure 6. Screenshot from the video (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:02:11).

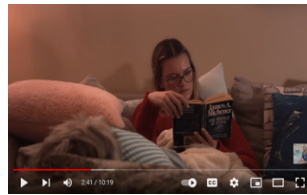


Figure 7. Screenshot from the video (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:02:41).

F. V6



Figure 8. Screenshot from the video (sissel, 2020, 00:00:46).



Figure 9. Screenshot from the video (sissel, 2020, 00:05:53).

Furthermore, in four of the six videos, *The Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Live Well* (Wiking, 2016) is introduced and shown as a prop to define hygge (Extract 4; Dinen, 2017; Life of Kotts, 2020; Use Less, 2019; Vestergaard, 2018):

Extract 4: The Little Book of Hygge

A. V1: "A lot of you guys might remember this book, *The Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Live Well* (Use Less, 2019, 00:00:14–00:00:18).



Figure 10. Screenshot from the video (Use Less, 2019, 00:00:15).

- B. V2: "You may have seen the word before, or perhaps you've seen the book, *The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living* by Meik Wiking" (Dinen, 2017, 00:01:01–00:01:12).



Figure 11. Screenshot from the video (Dinen, 2017, 00:01:06).

- C. V3: —
D. V4: "The reason I wanted to do this video for you guys is because I recently finished this book called *The Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Live Well* by Meik Wiking (Life of Kotts, 2020, 00:00:53–00:01:01).



Figure 12. Screenshot from the video (Life of Kotts, 2020, 00:00:55).

- E. V5: "There is this book called *The Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Live Well* (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:01:18–00:01:21).



Figure 13. Screenshot from the video (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:01:22).

- F. V6: —

These extracts show that most of the vloggers rely on the same source for constructing their explanations of hygge. Another common feature has to do with the genres of the vlogs. Four of the six vlogs are framed as a type of how-to video in the video title: V1 (Use Less, 2019), V2 (Dinen, 2017), V4 (Life of Kotts, 2020), and V5 (Vestergaard, 2018), and most of the videos entail lists of actions the viewer can do or encouragement for taking a specific type of approach (e.g., V3: "So as the nights draw in allow yourselves more hygge moments and enjoy the darkness and reflection that winter brings" [Living the Life You Love, 2017, 00:03:25–00:03:33]). However, looking more closely at the videos, it becomes clear that the vloggers present their personal relationship with hygge in three quite distinctive ways. The remainder of our analysis discusses each of these three strategies of communicative entitlement. Each set is divided into subsections that point to thematically distinct practices within the set.

Vlogger Set 1: Hygge Practitioners

The first two vlog examples that we examine involve the vlogger (a) establishing that she has extensive experience with *doing* hygge and (b) drawing on expert sources to explain the concept.

Establishing Attachments Between the Vlogger, the Audience, and the Topic

As discussed, the vlogger genre is typically found to be informal in its communicative structures (Bhatia, 2018), and this was present in the videos analyzed here too (V1; Use Less, 2019) and V2 (Dinen, 2017; set 1) and, as we shall see, this was the case for set 3 as well (i.e., V5; Vestergaard, 2018) and V6 (sissel, 2020). An example of this can be seen in Extract 5 (Dinen, 2017).

Extract 5: V2



Figure 14a. (7 sec)

Figure 14b. (8 sec)

Figure 14c. (12 sec)

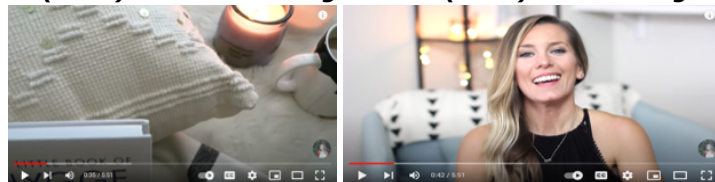


Figure 14d. (15 sec)

Figure 14e. (300 sec)

Figure 14 (a–e): Screenshots from the video by Dinen (2017). (a) Dinen (2017, 00:00:00); (b) Dinen (2017, 00:00:07); (c) Dinen (2017, 00:00:11); (d) Dinen (2017, 00:00:35); (e) Dinen (2017, 00:00:42).

1. {cut14e}²Hell:o" everyone and w:>elcome< back to my channel: I'm Chelsea Dinen
2. I'm really: s:o excited for: todays video (.) this is a topic I've: truly wanted to
3. talk about for quite some time now (.h) and today is finally: the day.
4. So today I wanted to talk about hooger.

Figure 15. Transcription (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:42–00:01:00).

The elongated "hello" and addressing the audience as "everyone" (Figure 15, line 1) while gazing toward the camera create a sense of familiarity and informality in the recipient design, with the audience being known to the presenter. The "welcome back to my channel" (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:43–00:00:45) continues this positionality, constructing the viewers as repeated consumers of her content and the "channel" (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:45) and as members of *her* community. The introduction through her full name, "I'm Chelsea Dinen," (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:45) is reminiscent of introductions in content such as talk shows (Ilie, 2001) that show similar patterns. Following this, Chelsea moves to present "the topic" (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:51) at hand, constructing a strong emotional attachment to the subject and a long-standing interest in it: "I'm really: s:o excited for todays video (.) this is a topic I've: truly wanted to talk about for quite some time now" (Dinen, 2017, 00:00:47–00:00:54; Figure 15, lines 2–3). This builds her legitimacy as someone with an authentic and vested interest in the topic and therefore as a legitimate presenter on it.

Hygge as Practice

All six vlogs take up the notion of what hygge is and describe it as a feeling (see above). However, they do it in quite different ways. The videos in set 1 such as Use Less (2019; V1) and Chelsea Dinen (2017; V2) explain hygge as a concept while facing the camera. Their explanations are characterized by references to sources (the Wiking (2016) text) and by being highly structured and scripted. In Goffman's (1981) terms, we can characterize the vloggers' uses of the book as an example of "principal" status, where they adopt the same position as the book, using it to represent the sentiments being expressed. Use Less (2019) introduces and praises *The Little Book of Hygge* (Wiking, 2016) extensively (not included in Extract 6 below) and then uses the book as a source in her explanation of the term hygge to the audience; see Extract 6 (Use Less, 2019):

² Numbers placed in curly brackets in the transcripts refer to picture numbers. The picture referred to shows a still image from the video at a specific moment during the talk. "Cut" indicates that the image represents the beginning of a new shot.

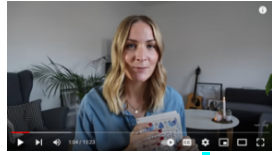
Extract 6: V1**Figure 16a.****Figure 16b.****Figure 16c.****Figure 16d.****Figure 16e.****Figure 16f.**

Figure 16 (a–f): Screenshots from the video by Use Less (2019). (a) Use Less (2019, 00:01:04); (b) Use Less (2019, 00:01:05); (c) Use Less (2019, 00:01:08); (d) Use Less (2019, 00:01:10); (e) Use Less (2019, 00:01:12); (f) Use Less (2019, 00:01:15).

1. So according to this {16a}book (.) there a:re {16b}five
2. different dimensions to: hygge s{16c}o kindoflike the
3. five senses really.
4. {16d}so when they are a:ll combi:ned that is when
5. {16e}you truely feel the real power of ↑hygge
6. basical{16f}ly.

Figure 17. Transcription (Use Less, 2019, 00:01:04–00:01:14).

Use Less (2019) starts her explanation with an explicit reference to the source that she has in her hands and holds up for the audience to see. She then renders a definition of hygge from the book, which is organized in a list of five elements that “combine” to produce hygge and link them with the five senses. While introducing this idea (Figure 17, lines 1–2), she gazes toward the camera and speaks distinctly at a slow pace and with clear enunciation, creating a sense of the statement as “noteworthy.” She adds to this an elaboration comparing the dimensions of hygge to the five senses (Figure 17, line 2). Through this, Use Less (2019) gazes down to her left, giving a sense that she is searching for words. Other aspects of the elaboration also suggest this, such as using the term “kindoflike” (Figure 17, line 2), indicating the absence of (or departure from) a formal script. These ways of speaking differ from scripted talk such as “reading aloud” or reading “memorized” words, forms of talk that are used in television news (Feng, 2016) and documentaries (Chovanec, 2016), for example. Use Less (2019) goes on to present the main and “basic” (Figure 17, line 6) conclusion in regard to defining hygge, initiating her action with “so” and using a “when . . . that is when” structure again gazing toward the camera (see Figure 17, lines 4–5).

Use Less’s (2019) explanation suggests that everyone who uses their five senses reflexively can accomplish the feeling of hygge. Use Less (2019) addresses the viewer with the pronoun “you” (Figure 17, line 5) and points to herself with her left hand, which seems to indicate that she belongs to the group of people she is talking about and perhaps implies that she has these types of subjective sensorial experiences herself. In this way, Use Less (2019) creates a link between an authoritative,

knowledge-based account of hygge and a practice-based approach that makes indexical references to both the vlogger herself and the audience.

Expertise and Experience

In presenting themselves as expert guides to hygge, Chelsea Dinen (2017) and Use Less (2019) include references to their previous experiences, which they present as being extensive. Use Less (2019) does this by introducing the audience to a nickname she has been given by her husband; see Extract 7.

Extract 7: V1



Figure 18a.



Figure 18b.



Figure 18c.



Figure 18d.

Figure 18 (a–d): Screenshots from the video by Use Less (2019). (a) Use Less (2019, 00:01:39); (b) Use Less (2019, 00:01:40); (c) Use Less (2019, 00:01:44); (d) Use Less (2017, 00:01:48).

1. {18a}My husband often calls me: like the que{18b}en of
2. hygge because I'm a:ll about that very cozy feeling=
3. ={18c}I love snuggling up and when/ever I feel hygge
4. I make sure to {18d}say it out loud=
5. =like §this is really hyggelig§ a:nd /this is this
6. is really cozy

Figure 19. Transcription (Use Less, 2019, 00:01:39–00:01:51).

Use Less (2019) claims that she is often given the nickname “hygge queen” by her husband and that the reason is her liking of “that very cozy feeling” (00:01:43–00:01:44; Figure 19, line 2), which she assumes is known or recognizable to the audience. She elaborates the basis of this nickname by describing how she engaged in hygge in specific situations (“snuggling up”; “say it out loud”; Use Less, 2019, 00:01:48–00:01:49; Figure 19, lines 3–4), helping to prove that not only does she feel hygge subjectively, but she also acts on it and makes it recognizable to others. These actions are described in general terms as practices that are repeated regularly: “I love . . .”; “whenever I . . .” (Use Less, 2019; Figure 19, line 3). Chelsea Dinen (2017) does something similar, using a “revelation story” that establishes a year-long relationship between her and hygge practice. The story includes claims of her conscious and persistent efforts to create a specific “space” around herself (not shown).

In summary, the videos in set 1 make claims about an authoritative epistemic status with regard to practicing hygge, and they legitimize this position by two shifting communicative practices: (1) by invoking expert sources of knowledge and using a quite scripted form of talk and (2) by claiming to have a vested interest in the topic and demonstrating extensive personal experiences with practicing hygge while using an improvised communication style. These practices work to display extensive "authentic experience" to the audience and may be seen as examples of "authentic talk," particularly talk that is "true to the self/person" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 404).

Vlogger Set 2: Performing Hygge

Another strategy used in vlogs about hygge is a combination of shifting shots and a voiceover. Sequences of shots may be organized as a temporal sequence (Van Leeuwen, 1991; see Extract 5 [Dinen, 2017] and Extract 6 [Use Less, 2019]) or as a sequence of thematically related shots, that is, a montage (see Extract 4a; Use Less, 2019). Lustig and colleagues (2021) describe how a voiceover in another type of vlog is used to "describe their contents, to put the depicted events in context, and create salience," and this is also the case here (p. 4). The vloggers in set 2 are not filmed, and the viewer only sees the selected images of moving bodies, objects, actions, and locations. The depicted scenes are given meaning through the voiceover narration and textual additions to the screen.

Showing Hygge

Life of Kotts (2020) combines a series of shots and a voiceover in her video *7 Ways to Create a Hygge Home*. Her video starts with a montage of six shots using visual framings that make particular objects and actions salient; see Extract 8:

Extract 8a: V4



Figure 20a. (1.8 sec)



Figure 20b. (2 sec)



Figure 20c. (2 sec)



Figure 20d. (1.5 sec)

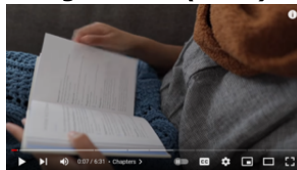


Figure 20e. (2 sec)



Figure 20f. (6 sec)

Figure 20 (a–f): Screenshots from the video by Life of Kotts (2020). (a) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:00); (b) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:02); (c) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:04); (d) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:05); (e) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:07); (f) Life of Kotts (2020, 00:00:09).

The montage format is used by *Life of Kotts* (2020) to construct a particular conception of *hygge* through small snapshots of everyday activities, such as making tea (Figure 20b), putting clothes away (Figure 20d), and reading a book (Figure 20e)—frames with specific types of items and qualities of them (soft pillows and sweaters, tea, a lit fireplace, etc.) and from a specific type of location (at home). This format makes salient particular items, actions, and locations and minimizes the vlogger, who is only shown through close-up shots of particular parts of the body and point-of-view (POV) shots where the camera assumes the position of a subject and “sees” what the subject sees (Lustig et al., 2021). The POV shots provide a seeing position for the viewer that comes close to that of the vlogger or a copresent participant physically close to the vlogger. *Life of Kotts* (2020) accompanies the shots with a voiceover, and she uses a greeting format very similar to that of Chelsea Dinen (2017; Figure 15, line 1; V2) and *Use Less* (2019; V1), except that she is not shown “in shot” speaking and uses more of a “read-aloud-voice,” which is characteristic of voiceover narrations, see Figure 21.

Extract 8b: V4

1. (1.8) {cut20b}(0.5)
2. hey gu:ys and welcome back
3. {cut20c}
4. today’s video is going to be all {cut20d} about the
5. Danish secret to hap{cut20e}py living, that is *hygge*
6. {cut20f}

Figure 21. Transcription (*Life of Kotts*, 2020, 00:00:02–00:00:09).

In her greeting and welcoming actions, the vlogger (*Life of Kotts*, 2020) addresses the viewers directly and welcomes them back. Aside from showing what might be her hand (Extract 8a; Figure 20b), the vlogger is not in the shot during this introduction. The voiceover introduces the topic of the video as “all about the Danish secret to happy living, that is *hygge*” (lines 4–5). This framing presents *hygge* as a way of life with a certain quality (“happy living”), that is, a quality that involves an experiential perspective. It also links the phenomenon to Denmark and presents it as a “secret” and therefore hidden from other societies, cultures, or members of other nationalities. This implicitly alludes to the relevance of producing a video on *hygge* for a potentially global audience of a vlog.

“Telling” *Hygge*

Living the Life You Love’s (2017) explanation of *hygge* is also presented through a voiceover, shown in Extract 9. Voiceovers used in television news and documentaries are said to create an authoritative voice (Chovanec, 2016; Feng, 2016). In this case, however, while a scripted form of talk is used, the female voice quality and other contextual cues (i.e., the vlog genre and the “channel” that the video belongs to) invite the viewer to infer that the voice belongs to the female subject depicted in the video, see Extract 9:

Extract 9: V3**Figure 22a.****Figure 22b.****Figure 22c. (dynamic)****Figure 22d. (dynamic)****Figure 22e.****Figure 22f.**

Figure 22 (a–f): Screenshots from the video by Living the Life You Love (2017). (a) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:31); (b) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:34); (c) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:40); (d) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:50); (e) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:51); (f) Living the Life You Love (2017, 00:00:54).

1. {22a}hygge is a Danish word that describes the {cut22b}
2. feeling of coziness and comfort you get when you
3. spend time relazin in your home with your {22c}loved
4. ones or drinking a hot cup of tea and watching the
5. steam evaporate into the air {22d-22f}

Figure 23. Transcription (Living the Life You Love, 2017, 00:00:31–00:00:44).

The voiceover associates hygge with Denmark and then goes on to define it as “the feeling of coziness and comfort” (Living the Life You Love, 2017, 00:00:33–00:00:35; Figure 23, line 2). Using the pronoun “you,” the subjective experience of “feeling hygge” is generalized and described as being associated with a specific location, items, people, and embodied experiences.

Using the pronoun “you” and a “when-then” construction, Living the Life You Love (2017) constructs hygge as a subjective experience that every person could have under the right circumstances (this is similar to Use Less’s (2019) explanation in Extract 6). This verbal construction is accompanied by shots comprising a temporal sequence. After showing a woman walking away from the door and toward the center of the house, the next shots show close-ups of a kettle being picked up, filled with water, turned on, and brought to a boil (Figures 22b–22f). As in Extract 8a, only body parts are shown, and the visual frame again resembles a POV shot. This salience on an embodied action of preparing tea while the voiceover presents hygge as a subjective experience and a *feeling* indicates to the viewer that what is being depicted should be understood as a demonstration of one instance of hygge performed for the viewer by the vlogger. The linguistic and multimodal resources employed dwell on the embodied accomplishment of everyday actions by the vlogger and, in this way, they construct hygge as an ordinary activity that can be produced by the viewer in their everyday lives.

Hygge, "For Me Personally"

Living the Life You Love (2017) and Life of Kotts (2020) explicitly address the vloggers' personal relationship with hygge; see Extract 10:

Extract 10: V3



Figure 24a.

Figure 24b.

Figure 24c.

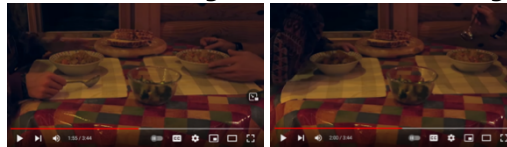


Figure 24d.

Figure 24e.

Figure 24 (a–e): Screenshots from the video *Living the Life You Love* (2017). (a) *Living the Life You Love* (2017, 00:01:40); (b) *Living the Life You Love* (2017, 00:01:45); (c) *Living the Life You Love* (2017, 00:01:49); (d) *Living the Life You Love* (2017, 00:01:55); (e) *Living the Life You Love* (2017, 00:02:00).

1. {24a}to me hygge is about slowing down{24b} taking joy
2. in the {24c}simplests of sounds and a slo:w
3. {24d}movement of your body as you take time to
4. your{24e}self

Figure 25. Transcription (*Living the Life You Love*, 2017, 00:01:40–00:01:54).

In Extract 10, *Living the Life You Love* (2017) presents a list of qualities of embodied action as being what "hygge is about" (Figure 25, line 1) to the vlogger. The list includes the pace through which actions are undertaken, the mindset associated with registering sounds, and the choice of prioritizing spending time alone (Figure 25, lines 1–4). The list of qualities of actions attributed to hygge allows the viewer to make sense of the objects and actions depicted in the shot, including a shot of a table being set and the hands of two people sitting at the table starting to eat very slowly. Slow pacing is enacted in a matched form across the modalities of speech, music, and movement, which gives emphasis and salience to the actions of hygge as an embodied practice rather than, say, to the relationship between the vlogger and the viewer.

To summarize, it is characteristic of the videos in set 2 that they use a voiceover and create a subjective viewing position for the viewer to represent embodied experiences, often, implicitly, in the setting of the vlogger's home. By inviting the viewer to observe the slow-paced embodied actions that constitute hygge practices, and by letting the viewer assume the vlogger's subjective viewing perspective, the vlogger can be seen to be producing "authentic talk" that is "true to the event/experience" (Montgomery, 2001, p.

404). This does not only involve language but also may be accomplished by coordinating all the resources available to the participants, which in this case includes voiceover, filming, and editing techniques.

Vlogger Set 3: Hygge and Danish Nationality

The final set of vlogs are made by vloggers who explicitly identify themselves as "Danes" in the videos. This identity category is made relevant in several ways and is used to display legitimacy as well as authenticity. Most prominently, the vloggers self-categorize as Danes and speak in a non-scripted, improvised manner when explaining hygge to the audience.

Self-Categorizing as a Dane

Very early on in her video, sissel (2020) establishes her legitimacy as someone doing a vlog on hygge with reference to her nationality as a Dane; see Extract 11:

Extract 11: V6

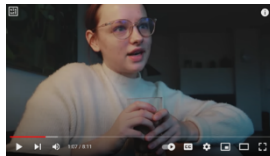


Figure 26. Screenshot from the video by sissel (2020, 00:01:07).

((sequences showing sissel's morning routine omitted))

1. Good morning guys and welcome to Denmark once again.
2. if there is one thing that I definitely should film 3 here (.) ahm to capture the essence of Denmark it's 4 a video about hygge,

Figure 27. Transcription (sissel, 2020, 00:01:02–00:01:13).

Built into the action of greeting and welcoming the audience visibly present for the viewers to see, sissel's (2020) vlog anchors her identity and her relationship with the audience in her physical placement in Denmark ("welcome to Denmark once again"; sissel, 2020, 00:01:04–00:01:05; Figure 27, line 1). In this way, she implies that she is a Dane (or at least physically residing in Denmark), and she indicates an expectation that the viewers are *not* in Denmark, do not (necessarily) speak Danish, and that she can make Denmark and Danish culture available to them. In this way, sissel (2020) sets herself up as a kind of cultural ambassador and anchors her identity and her relationship with the audience in her physical placement in Denmark.

The presenter constructs her choice for the topic of hygge as relating to her aim of capturing "the essence of Denmark" (sissel, 2020, 00:01:10–00:01:11). When sissel starts the introduction to this topic, she gazes into space, saying, "If there is one thing that I definitely should film here (.) ahm" (sissel, 2020, 00:01:05–00:01:09; Figure 27, lines 2–3) and then turns her gaze toward the camera when saying "to capture the essence of Denmark, it's a video about hygge," (00:01:09–00:01:12, Figure 27, lines 3–4). As

with the explanation of *hygge* shown in V5 below, the talk comes across as *improvised* rather than as scripted. In addition to her nationality, Sissel's (2020) performance enacts her identity as a *vlogger*, with the informality of improvised practice reproducing the types of legitimacy found in other vlog genres (Gibson, 2020). Tied with her status as a Dane, these actions serve to produce her "legitimate epistemic status" as a speaker on the topic of *hygge*.

A Non-Scripted Explanation

In Extract 12, Katja (V5) also self-categorizes as a "Dane" when she introduces the topic of the video (saying, "Denmark is where I'm from", directing her right hand to her chest while saying "Denmark"; Vestergaard, 2018, 00:00:56–00:00:58). As with the previous example, the video is produced using spontaneous and non-scripted "fresh talk" (Goffman, 1981). Sitting in front of a camera, visually accessible from the waist up, Katja offers an explanation of the word *hygge* for participants in the audience who do not know what it means (not shown in extract); see Extract 12:

Extract 12: V5



Figure 28a.



Figure 28b.



Figure 28c.



Figure 28d.



Figure 28e.



Figure 28f.



Figure 28g.



Figure 28h.

Figure 28 (a–h): Screenshots from video by Vestergaard (2018). (a) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:00); (b) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:00); (c) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:01); (d) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:01); (e) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:03); (f) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:04); (g) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:05); (h) Vestergaard (2018, 00:01:06).

1. and it's basically just li{28a}ke{28b} an
2. {28c}expression of{28d} an extreme cozi{28e}ness,
3. happine{28f}ss and like se{28g}cure warm f{28h}eeling
4. that you can feel basically no matter what situation
5. you're in ahm and you don't have to be in Denmark to
6. feel *hygge*, you can feel *hygge* anywhere in the
7. world, it's a concept and so yeah

Figure 29. *Transcription (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:00:59–00:01:18).*

Katja presents *hygge* as similar to other kinds of sensations and feelings: "extreme coziness," "happiness," and "a secure warm feeling" (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:01:04–00:01:06). Modifying the explanation with "basically," this is presented as the core of what *hygge* denotes, which is similar to the

strategies found in Use Less's (2019; Extract 6) video. In the opening line of the extract (Figure 29, line 1) Katja includes the words "just" and "like," which may function to stress the explanation as a simplification ("just") and an approximation ("like").

While she talks, Katja (Vestergaard, 2018) shifts her gaze continuously and uses a range of gestures to produce an embodied sense of the meaning of *hygge*. While saying "just like," Katja looks upward and to the side, which invokes an act of searching for words and gives the activity an improvised character (see also Gibson, 2020). Following this, Katja takes both hands in front of her chest and intertwines her fingers, palms turning downward (Figure 28a). Vocalizing the phrase "an expression," she separates her hands and moves them outward and downward, which might be seen as a kind of metaphorical act of expression (literally, something moving outward; see McNeill, 1992).

Katja continues with "of an extreme" (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:01:01–00:01:03; Figure 29, line 2) and looks down, her fists clenched in front of her neck (Figure 28d). Her hands are then unlocked as she spreads her fingers and produces the word "coziness" (Figure 28e), and then she looks up and moves both hands back and forth interchangeably as she says "happiness" (Figure 28f). As has been seen in other contexts (Gibson, 2020), these gestures have a *searching* quality reminiscent of "sense making/finding" actions (see Streeck, 2008). All of these features give the talk a sense of being "enlivened" and a very personal quality.

After this, Katja says, "like a secure warm feeling" (Vestergaard, 2018, 00:01:04–00:01:06; Figure 29, line 3) and while doing so, looks into the camera, draws her clenched fists close to her chest, pulls her upper body in (Figure 28g), and then moves her hands back and forth in front of her (Figure 28h). This action can be conceptualized not only as an iconic but also as a metaphoric representation of security and of curling up in a ball. This tight hand gesture is then released, and Katja moves her hands back and forth when she refers to the concept as a "warm feeling," which, as before, can be interpreted as metaphorically expressing the sensation of the feeling as involving the release of energy in the body.

Katja (Vestergaard, 2017) does not state specific personal experiences with *hygge* verbally but, we argue, her gestures may be seen as demonstrating or even performing the definition through embodied experience of the feelings and sensations that are, for her, constitutive of *hygge*. That is, having self-categorized as a Dane and having associated *hygge* with Denmark, Katja (Vestergaard, 2018) can now be seen as someone with "authentic experiences" of *hygge* and who can talk authentically and spontaneously about what it feels like. This way of speaking resembles the type of "authentic talk" that Montgomery (2001) characterizes as "talk that is deemed authentic because it does not sound contrived, simulated or performed, but rather sounds natural, 'fresh', spontaneous" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 403.) In the case of Katja (Vestergaard, 2018), this authenticity is accomplished using not only "talk" but also gestures that perform *hygge* experiences as deeply personal and lived features that have become embodied properties.

Discussion

Our article has analyzed how the Danish concept of *hygge* is articulated in the context of self-help videos in the super-diverse cultural milieu of YouTube. We started the analysis by showing the substantial

similarities across the video corpus but went on to highlight three different sets of practices through which vloggers establish their expertise and legitimize themselves as presenters on the topic. As we shall show in this final section, this analysis has implications for how we understand and conceptualize YouTube as a super-diverse community.

To begin with, we saw earlier that claiming expertise is an integral part of the performance of "authenticity," and that it has been described as a key "discursive" practice within YouTube culture. For example, claiming to be "the queen of" the practice at hand (Extract 3) is certainly not unique to *hygge* or lifestyle vlogs but can be seen as a quite general communicative strategy of credibility building. However, an important question for scholars is how such identity strategies inform (or intersect with) particular kinds of genre work, and how this relates to the proliferation of localized cultural practices within distinctive "genres." In other words, how do genres take shape through the negotiation of authenticity practices?

In the case of *hygge*, we can see different types of activities being undertaken that could be broadly glossed as "displaying the vloggers' personal history with *hygge*," "displaying the vlogger enactment of *hygge*," and "displaying the link between the vlogger's (national) identity and *hygge*." These are quite different "scripts" of performance and implicate different relationships with the topic and with the audience. "Doing expertise," then, is much more subtle than following a model of "expertise claiming" and involves the working through of a particular person's biography in a specific context. It is in this sense that we see it as problematic to refer to expertise as a *discourse*, and why we suggest that the notion of communicative entitlement is more productive. Examining empirically the diversity of authenticity work within a given genre helps us to understand the processes that lead to content diversity.

Our analysis has shown that editing and the multimodal organization of videos are both practices that are central to this identity work. While editing as a situated practice has been investigated using EMCA (Broth et al., 2014), and while other studies have highlighted the importance of these skills for vloggers (Johansson, 2017), we illustrate the specific ways that the coordination of images, talk, text, and body movements cohere to produce nuanced meanings that have strong implications for identity and authenticity. For instance, we see how a disembodied hand and an unnamed place can become implicitly related to the identity of the vlogger themselves, and how through the careful organization of sound and music, vloggers can produce an emotive performance of, in this case, "*hygge*." This shows how critical it is to see YouTube talk as situated within a much broader set of editorial practices that remain a largely unexplored area of praxis.

Conclusion

This article contributes to our understanding of YouTube as a super-diverse cultural sphere by looking at how a (once) localized set of cultural practices are (re)configured in the context of vlogging. The three sets of identity practices that we highlighted in the videos all involved mobilized video-editing methods along with speech and gesture to produce iterations of entitlement to make claims, and they all positioned the viewer as an "outsider" and a "learner" and the vlogger as "expert." The three categories of practice that we identified here mirror closely Montgomery's (2001) three types of "authentic talk," which are talk that is "true to the person," "true to experience," and "talk that is spontaneous." In set 2, the videos used

the subjective view of bodily action, while in sets 1 and 3, gaze and gesture were used to establish the vloggers' embodied expertise. In all cases, the vlogger was the only speaker in the videos, with no other invited experts (which contrasts with journalistic videos on hygge distributed on YouTube and elsewhere); instead, it is the production of expertise as an authoritative voice (sets 1 and 2) or by virtue of invoking a specific identity category (set 3) that manufactured the vlogger as someone who is "trustworthy" (Montgomery, 2001). In our data, this type of authority is accomplished using specific types of talk, that is, scripted talk (set 1), a voiceover (set 2), and spontaneous talk (set 3). It is the deployment of these resources and their coordination with talk in very specific ways that invite the viewers to see the vlogger as a "first hand authority" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 398).

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