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Chris Hughes's performance of masculinity in *Love Island* (2017)

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the performance of masculinity of the participant Chris Hughes in the reality television show *Love Island* (2017). With media as a pivotal status apparatus in the encoding of discourses such hegemonic masculinity, it could be argued that it is pivotal to the construction of gender in society. In a time and age in which the identification with the masculine is decreasing amongst younger generations of males in the United Kingdom, the contestants of TV shows like *Love Island* can bring light to this issue. Gender has not been previously been studied in none of the seasons of *Love Island*; accordingly, through in depth analysis of Chris and his behaviour in all the episodes in which he appears, this paper aims at determining whether his performance of masculinity conforms to the hegemonic discourse.

Key words

Masculinity, Gender Performance, Hegemonic Masculinity, Reality TV

Introduction

Reality shows have rapidly become an essential cultural product of television all around the globe. They exist in numerous different formats, from the game-shows and dating-focused formulas to the scripted versions, its versatility has made reality TV a powerful tool of media, and “[t]he international trade in reality formats has allowed the genre to flourish, making it a transnational genre unlike any other” (Hill 2007, 118). *Big Brother* and *Jersey Shore* are examples of this, having different adaptations in various countries. *Love Island* (2015–), an ITV2 production based on *Celebrity Love Island* (2005-2006) that involves single contestants who must find a couple, set a milestone in 2017 by achieving 2.43 million viewers in their final episode (BBC 2017). For these reasons, its ability to transmit discourses is undoubtedly far-reaching. Due to the immense power reality TV programmes have over audiences due to their success, such cultural products can be analysed in terms of how they encode certain discourses, such as that of social constructs like masculinity. This concept has been the centre of attention for many, especially in recent years, as many question what it really means to be “masculine” and a recent study shows that, in the UK, only 2% of men from the ages of 18 to 24 would describe themselves as being completely masculine (YouGov 2016). There are those who argue that “[i]n an era when defined roles for men such as mining have fallen by the wayside, it may be necessary to embrace masculinity in other ways” (Dahlgreen 2016), words which, together with the survey’s results, further highlight the mutability of masculinity.

This unfixed nature can be analysed in many ways, and one of the possibilities is to examine gender performativity in TV shows, since “there is a carefully crafted relationship between reality television programming and gender role stereotyping” (Anderson and Ferris 2016, 12). As it has been previously stated, *Love Island* attracted the public’s attention, and one of the finalists in its third season was Chris Hughes, a 24-year-old from Cheltenham (“2” 2017, 47:06). This paper will aim at analysing his performance of masculinity, since he fits in the category of those who were surveyed in the YouGov research. As to the show, it has been chosen because of its relevance as a cultural product, allowing the public to see contestants such as Chris coexisting in a domestic setting with both males and females, and taking part in various activities. *Love Island* remains extremely popular show in mainstream mass media, having an immense influence on the general public.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated reality TV, such as Weber's *Reality Gendervision* (2012), a compilation of works which establishes multiple approaches when analysing some of the most popular reality television programmes, examining them taking into consideration the issue of gender or other identity matters. *A Companion to Reality Television* (Ouellette 2014) provides an extensive collection of discussions on how reality television intersects with capitalism, gender, and other concerns. Pantti's "Talking alone: Reality TV, emotions and authenticity" focuses on the role of emotions and how they are disclosed, by placing an emphasis on monologues and authenticity. A number of authors have reported analysis on specific shows such as *Jersey Shore*, like in "Abject Femininity and Compulsory Masculinity on *Jersey Shore*" (Klein 2014), where she examines how the ethnic subculture of the contestants and gender influence each other, while Anderson and Ferris's "Gender Stereotyping and the *Jersey Shore*: A Content Analysis" (2016) demonstrates how gender stereotyping roles are portrayed in this show. Other studies have considered exclusively British reality TV programmes, such as "Television Fandom in the Age of Narrowcasting: The Politics of Proximity in the Regional Scripted Reality Dramas *The Only Way Is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea*" (Sandvoss, Youngs, and Hobbs, 2015), "The politics of hyperbole on *Geordie Shore*: Class, gender, youth and excess" (Wood 2016), or "Classed Femininity, Performativity, and Camp in British Structured Reality Programming" (Woods 2012).

Nevertheless, there is no previous literature which examines gender on *Love Island*, the only academic article focusing entirely on this show being "Population exposure to smoking and tobacco branding in the UK reality show *Love Island*" (Barker et al. 2018), which illustrates the influence that the contestants who smoked in the 2017 edition could have on the audience. It is true that gender has been intensively analysed in reality TV programmes, and shows like *Love Island* have an effect on viewers; however, to what extent is hegemonic masculinity represented in the mainstream media? The purpose of this paper is to further analyse how Chris Hughes performs his masculinity as to determine if it is hegemonic or deviant, in order to evaluate if it complies with young men's perception of masculinity. This analysis will be realised through the scope of post-structuralist feminism in the framework of Media and Gender Studies, following Raewyn Connell's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', first "introduced ... in the 1980s" (Connell 2005, xviii), and the "plurality...and [a] hierarchy of masculinities" (Connell 2005, 846). Accordingly, this paper will begin by considering how Chris and his involvement in domestic tasks such as cooking and taking care of babies, and his ideas expressed on families, encode hegemonic masculinity. The second section of the

essay will examine Chris role as a victim, hero, and leader, following Anderson and Ferris' methodology in their research (2016), and how he portrays his masculinity through said roles. Finally, it will end by demonstrating how his masculinity complies with the hegemonic discourse in regards to his behavior towards women – focusing on the specific cases of Montana, Tyne-Lexy and Chloe – .

Case of study

“I’m a family guy”: Chris and domesticity

Living in a shared household, even if it is in a reality TV show, brings the issue of domestic tasks. However, housekeeping becomes a rather irrelevant — and to some extent, inexistent — concern in *Love Island*, since the participants have their food provided by a catering service, except for breakfast which they cook themselves, and they also benefit from laundry and cleaning service (Fillingham 2018). Housework is simply employed as another source of entertainment in the form of challenges in which the contestants must participate as a way to obtain a reward. However, these can be of importance to analyse masculinity, since “[g]ender relations also are constituted through nondiscursive practices, including ... domestic labor, and child care as well as through unreflective routinized action” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 842). In episode 23, Chris and Olivia are assigned the task of going to the local supermarket to buy food supplies and cook dinner for everyone. Chris is shown to be displeased when the announcement is made, as he declares that he doesn't know how to cook since his mother always cooks for him (“23” 2017, 12:43). Olivia automatically assumes a position of authority; she is in charge of the shopping while Chris aimlessly walks around the store's aisles, and she prepares dinner while giving him directions on how to do so. There is a reaffirmation of gender roles in these scenes, in which Chris adopts a passive role in domestic tasks, as opposed to Olivia's active performance. Gabby laughs when Olivia complains about Chris not being helpful and the argument they two had (21:57). This further reinforces the idea that domesticity is attached to the essence of femininity, since shopping and cooking has traditionally been attached to the “domestic sphere of action for women” (Connell 2005, 195). This evidence also reflects the YouGov study results in which females who are under 25 spend four more hours than their male counterparts doing housework (2013), and therefore Chris's attitude is regarded as acceptable.

Episodes later, the issue of cooking is introduced again when Chris receives a text message in which he is told that the boys must cook lunch for their girls (“42” 2017, 11:12). As Chris reads out the text, Olivia says “For fuck's sake, Chris can't cook” (11:35), as the

girls nearby laugh at the statement. Again, just like when Gabby laughed at Chris not being helpful in the process of doing the groceries nor cooking in episode 23, he is reinforcing the hegemonic discourse, by placing the act of cooking as an activity that is part of the domestic sphere, and therefore, as something reserved just for women. Nevertheless, he ends up participating in the task, even though through adapting a different role than his colleagues – issue that will be discussed further on –.

Another instance of a recreation of a real-life situation in a domestic sphere is the “baby challenge”, in which the couples must care for a baby doll. In contrast to his behaviour towards doing the groceries and cooking, Chris here embraces the role of a single father (“45” 2017). Olivia chooses to ignore their plastic baby even from the beginning of the episode, while Chris carries it around the whole time, changing his nappies, singing lullabies, and even shedding a tear as a consequence, according to him, of feeling emotional because of the baby (8:03). After all, “[c]aring is a gendered disposition that is encouraged and developed over time, institutionalized in motherhood” (Skeggs and Wood 2012, 230), so here Chris is, in a way, being emasculated through his own actions. Yet his overprotecting and caring attitude in this test is exploited to shame Sam Gowland, a then oil rig worker from Middlesbrough. The babies are left with their father’s as they leave the house for a day out, and as Chris’s doll does not stop crying, Sam tells him to “dunk him” in the swimming pool (“46” 2017, 15:49) or “ring mummy” (15:55). Thus, even though Chris’s discourse is deviant when it comes to parenting, he is used as a tool to vilify his working-class colleague.

The topic of parenting is addressed again in one of the games of the show called “That’s what she said”, in which the boys must guess what their partners would have answered to some questions they are asked. Olivia is posed with the question of, if she could only achieve one thing in her life, what would it be (“42”, 22:07). Chris says he thinks it would be to have a family; however, Olivia reveals that she would rather be rich (22:26). He then talks about the incident with Kem, as the friend jokes about Chris not getting the question right. Chris answers in a humorous tone, saying that had he known she were not rich, he would not have accepted to be her couple (26:06). Chris then goes on to say that he considers himself a “family guy” who comes from a “proper family” and that he would like to “settle down” (26:21). This conversation takes place in an intimate setting, with the two friends sitting side by side in a sofa, in which Chris confides in his friend, displaying his feelings. He is given space and time to do so, while Olivia is bereft of the asset of expressing her own point of view. This, of course, is the work of those in charge of the show; nevertheless, this moment and Chris’s statements entail patriarchal values, by means of the

reinforcement of what should be the only aim of a heterosexual couple – with, even if it is not explicitly said, Chris as the breadwinner, and Olivia eventually assuming the figure of the female restricted to the domestic setting, with motherhood being her main characteristic.

The same idea is further stressed in the following sequence, with Chris telling Kem that, although he does picture himself having a family, he “can’t do nappies” (“42”, 26:54), and emphasising that he would never do it. Again, they automatically assume it is their partner’s role to do so. Similarly, Kem mentions the role he would like to have as a father, claiming that 4-year-old children are “annoying”, and that whenever his child would “get lippy”, he would give the kid to the mother (27:45). Chris vigorously nods his head and answers with “yeah” to Kem’s remarks, and thus conforming to the hegemonic discourse by subscribing to the idea that the mother must spend more time with the children and must comfort them whenever they are in emotional distress. This illustrates Connell’s idea, that “[m]en are substantially excluded from relationships with very young children” (2005, 247), and Chris and Kem want to keep this traditional behaviour. Through her words, Olivia is challenging this traditional role she is expected to fulfil, while Chris and Kem, the other two male figures in the scene, embody the hegemonic discourse. They both explicitly declare their desire to form a family, as opposed to Olivia, but both of them wish to do so by assuming those roles which adhere to hegemonic masculinity.

In this way, it could be argued that “[r]eality television offers men a space to suggest what they can do as long as it fits with a producer’s design” (Ouellette 2014, 247). When Chris performs hegemonic masculinity, just as he did when being unhelpful at cooking dinner or when discussing his opinion on family issues (“42” 2017, 26:54), his actions are a source of comedy, whereas when he provides a deviant performativity, he becomes a source of mockery —both to be laughed at and also to ridicule his working class friend. Whether he decides to comply with the hegemonic universe of the show or not, the way these images are presented will make his actions conform with the producer’s expectations.

Victim or hero, leader or follower

Anderson and Ferris examine gender stereotyping in *Jersey Shore* (MTV), finding that “Victim/Hero behaviors illustrated societal norms, with ‘Victim’ roles being female dominated at 68%, and ‘hero’ behaviors male dominated at 60%” (2016, 9). Accordingly, for Chris to comply with societal norms, he should tend to perform the role of the hero. Still, there are several occasions in which he does otherwise. Mike Thalassitis, a boy who enters the villa in episode 11, tries to break the couple formed by Chris and Olivia. There is an emphasis

on his physical appearance from the beginning; he calls himself “the Greek God that girls have been waiting for” (“10” 2017, 47:07), and Iain Sterling, the narrator of the series, describes him as “stunning” and an “Adonis” (“11” 2017, 36:47). Until then, Chris had been the one to gain all the girls’ attention through his looks, stating at one point that “[e]very person in this place fancies me” (“8” 2017, 42:05). But Mike poses a threat to his advantaged position in relation to the other guys, since most girls stated in their introductory videos that they like men who are tall and tanned (“1” 2017, 5:37), a description that coincides with his physical features. Hence, he is challenging Chris’s privileged position as the best-looking man in the show, as he had been up until that moment the one who complies the most with the Western standard of beauty.

Mike’s physical appearance is not the only asset menacing Chris, his forthright and confident attitude also has a clear impact on Chris’s state, which resembles what Wood explains about conflicts related to conflicts between sexual and romantic partners in *Geordie Shore*, since “[m]any of the excessive emotional outbursts in the house occur when the men take other women to the coupled women’s rooms” (Wood 2016, 12). This mirrors Chris’s feelings of uneasiness and future arguments with his opponent. Mike describes himself in his presentation video as someone who is “ready to get in that villa and sweep those girls off their feet” (“10” 2017, 47:07). In his first episode as a participant in the TV programme, he is set on a date with Tyne-Lexy Clarson. This might not be an arbitrary choice since just days before, Tyne-Lexy had tried to get close to Chris. When asked about his opinion on the boys, she had mentioned to the other girls that she was attracted to him (“7” 2017, 40:25). Even though Chris does not verbally express his concern at first, Kem reassures his friend by telling him that he doesn’t need to worry about the new guy (“11” 2017, 42:45), placing Chris in a position of inferiority by morally supporting him, since he is publicly displaying his emotions, thus showing vulnerability and providing a deviant discourse.

Yet Mike’s depiction as an antihero culminates in his pursuit of Chris’s couple, Olivia. Episode 12 starts off with a dramatic montage and music that anticipates the tense scenes that are about to happen as a consequence of Mike’s official entrance in the villa, and the camera zooms in on the girls’ smiling faces, highlighting Olivia’s cheerful expression (2017, 0:44). Through the effect he has on the girls, he is not only legitimising his power over them, but also over the other guys. Eventually Chris, feeling unsure and realising that Olivia might decide to replace him, decides to have a private conversation with Mike. They both sit in a table facing each other, evoking a feeling of confrontation through their demeanour. This exchange of words centres around Olivia, and there is a contrast between the two men’s

arguments: Mike defends his actions by stating that he wants to be with her because she is the best-looking girl, while Chris resorts to his feelings for her (12:16). Chris's procedure of turning to the subject of love further makes Mike seem like an unkind character. What is more, in this same exchange, Chris tries to dissuade him by saying that they are even sharing a bed now, but still, Mike replies that "[he]'ll do what [he] wants" (13:24). By being sincere about his feelings for Olivia, Chris has placed himself in a position of vulnerability, and Mike disregarding them only serves as a tool to polarising their positions even more – Mike as the wicked, and Chris as his victim. The idea of the homewrecker could also be associated to this instance; Chris is enacting the role of the husband, sleeping in the same bed as his wife – Olivia –, and Mike represents the man who irrupts the domestic sphere and the married couple. However, despite their opposing demeanours in this conversation, they have both excluded Olivia from the conversation, thus upholding an oppressive strategy of the patriarchy, placing her in that of the position of a passive agent, stripping her from her right to have her say on the matter which, after all, concerns her person. Together, these factors – Chris being replaced as the most attractive man by Mike, as he goes on a date with his once-pretender Tyne-Lexy, and then stating his intentions of pursuing Olivia – lead to Mike being reduced to someone evil, whereas Chris, in return, is reduced to a victim.

Likewise, Chris is continuously portrayed as a sufferer in most of the conflicts in his relationship with Olivia. In one of the show's competitions, the contestants are shown Twitter posts commenting on *Love Island*. In one of them, English rapper Stormzy tweets "Chris you're too good for [Olivia] mate" ("43" 2017, 15:55). Chris laughs, but seems uneasy as soon he learns from someone else's tweet that Olivia would have slept with Mike if no one would find out (19:47). All the contestants look shocked and stare pitifully at Chris, while Olivia laughs and smiles (20:02). Olivia is presented as the villain of their relationship, whereas Chris is once again the victim, the man who has been cheated on; nevertheless, he has flirted with girls before – as when he is affective with Tyla, hugging and kissing her ("38" 2017, 2:43) –, but this is obliterated as Olivia is loud and direct, while Chris is generally calmer. Similarly, in the lie detector test, the girls are posed with questions which have been prepared by the boys. Olivia states that he does not trust Chris ("44" 2017, 21:40), and the camera zooms into him, who now has a bitter look on his face. Soon after this, Olivia insults him, saying that he is "prick" for not asking her to be his girlfriend, to which Chris answers "why am I getting abuse [...]?" (22:58). Chris's behaviour with respect to Olivia and Mike's relationship is supporting the idea that "the women must perform a sexually liberated consumer-driven sexuality as well as hold on to a longing for a monogamous relationship"

(Wood 2016, 13), whereas him doing the same with other girls – being affectionate and flirting – is assumed to be accepted, which lead to the conclusion that these scenes merely serve to accentuate his victimisation.

His role as a victim culminates in a big argument Chris and Olivia have in episode 38, and from the beginning the audience is already conditioned to position themselves in favour of Chris, although viewers still do not know what will happen in the disagreement. A close shot of Chris crying, with his voice echoing in the background saying “we’re not right for each other” (2017, 0:57), intensifies the dramatism of the situation, grasping the public’s attention from the start, as to announce that the whole episode will be based on the conflict. After all, these images are mimicking “melodramatic scenes known from soap-operas” (Aslama and Pantti 2006, 173). Two contestants have been eliminated from the competition, and the participants have been told who are the most and least popular according to the public’s opinion. Fellow contestant Tyla, who is tearful due to his partner’s ejection from the contest, is consoled by Chris with kisses on the cheek, as he places an arm around her shoulder and tells her that he loves her twice (“38” 2017, 4:10), while Olivia is shown to be on her own, still resentful as she has been told to be amongst the four less liked by the viewers. She soon asks Chris if they can have a conversation, and she confesses that she would like to end their relationship, to which Chris reacts with surprise, responding “You’re sacking us off, because you’re in the bottom four?” (5:08). There is a reversal of roles here, as Olivia is the one in control, deciding to end the relationship, while Chris has no other option but to accept being left.

Afterwards, he appears to start crying, and Olivia claims that he is in this situation – her leaving him – because of “this” (5:37), meaning his reaction of crying to her words. She is chastising him for expressing what he feels through tears and therefore Olivia is upholding the oppressive discourse of “men do not cry”. However, it should be noted that Olivia’s behaviour might be influenced by the pressure of the audience, since, as Aslama and Pantti argue, “[h]ighly conscious emotional management may be of vital importance not only for the television medium but also for participants, especially those involved in sub-genres ... in which there is a ... voting audience to convince” (2006, 171). Olivia has just been told that she is one of the most unpopular contestants, has decided by the public, and her not being able to control her anger with Chris is affecting his chance of reaching the final. The following day, Chris reveals to contestant Jamie Jewitt that “it’s the most spiteful thing no one’s ever done” and that Olivia wants attention “badly” (17:19). With these words, Chris is vilifying his partner, and by doing so he is placing himself in the condition of a victim. He is then shown

crying again victimised by two agents: one being Olivia, causing him to cry through their arguments in connection to their relationship, and the other being the producers of the TV show, placing the focal point on his tears all throughout the show. Such confrontations are only included for melodramatising purposes, to present feelings in such a way (Aslama and Pantti 2006, 174) and to support the “competitive aspects of the show” (173). Whenever a female contestant cries, it is also shown on camera, but the emphasis on Chris’s tears is a way to excessively dramatise the incident by weaponising his feelings, using them as a tool to catch the viewer’s attention.

Referring back to the test that involved the men having to prepare lunch, in which the issue of cooking was discussed, this occasion also serves to illustrate Chris in the role of “leader”. Anderson and Ferris noted in their analysis of *Jersey Shore* that the role of ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ was predominant in male contestants. Chris exhibited the so-called ‘leader’ behaviour, but there were not any instances in which he explicitly performed that of ‘follower’. Chris addresses the camera in the confessional to claim that in every kitchen there’s a person who tells the cooks what to do, and he declares that he “won’t get [his] hands dirty” (“42” 2017, 11:45). Shortly after insisting on the idea that he is not willing to cook, the images show the boys following Chris in a line. This dynamic reflects the authority in our neo-liberal society in the business world, in which men are predominant in corporate management (Connell 2005, xx), as this socioeconomic system places “strategic power in the hands of particular groups of men” (xxiii). In this example, Chris is the one that exerts violence on the other males. Firstly, he does so through intimidation, since his role is said to be that of “chatting shit to everybody” (12:51) and “annoying everyone” (13:10). Secondly, Chris mistreats his friends by means of exploitation by directing them without providing any help, justifying his attitude through his role as kitchen manager. His privileged position is further reinforced through his companions’ nakedness, they are being placed in a subordinate position by means of the exploitation of their bodies. There are continuous shots of their shirtless torsos and support this idea, which is also manifested when they are all lined up with Chris in front of them in a military-like way (12:07), widening the gap between the shirtless working men and the clothed person in charge.

Chris performance as a leader is not only restricted to the aforementioned case, further evidence supporting his dominance over the other boys can be observed in his first episode in the show, entering in the villa with Jonny and presenting himself to the girls who are standing by the swimming pool, while the other boys watch from afar in one of the house’s balconies. Dom states that he does not feel threatened by the new boys (“4” 2017, 03:05), but his

anxious state can be perceived by the camera. Chris takes control of the situation by asking the girls if they are already coupled with someone (07:05), less than a minute from first meeting them, showing his bluntness. Hence Chris's domination over the other male contestants is portrayed through his control of the situation, he has the privilege to be on his own with all of the female contestants while the boys, not being able to interfere, watch from the distance. His role as leader is both maintained by his actions in the two examples – controlling the boys' conduct in the kitchen, and his privileged position in the instance in which he receives the opportunity to be on his own with the girls –, but also through his words in the confessional, since “a monologue equals importance: the participant given a voice alone with the camera is empowered” (Aslama and Pantti 2006, 178), thus his monologues with the camera function as a tool to strengthen his dominance.

As Connell argues, “[t]he figure of the hero is central to the Western cultural imagery of the masculine” (2005, 213). “Hero” in his conduct with respect to the love triangle that existed between him, Olivia and Mike. As it has been previously mentioned, Mike is established as the intrusive person in the main relationship which would be that of Chris and Olivia. For him to be a hero, the storyline needs to highlight Mike's evilness, and this is accomplished through Olivia's own words who, even though is acceding to getting to know Mike, describes him as a “prick” (“14” 2017, 25:47) and states that he is only attracted to her looks (33:10). This all leads to the final scene of the episode, in which the men have to choose their couples once again, to either stay with their old ones or to select a new partner, and Mike is given the opportunity to do so before Chris and so he couples up with Olivia (39:47). Hero stories such as the *Ramayana* or the *Iliad* are “produced around hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005, 233), and a parallel could be established between the character of Odysseus and Chris.

The character from the classic work of the *Odyssey* cannot do anything to impend the suitors from getting close to her wife Penelope, just like Chris is dispossessed – both by Mike, but also from the TV show –, of the opportunity of choosing the girl she likes. Still, he confronts him, calling Mike “muggy” (“14” 2017, 43:52) – nickname that would, since this moment, be used by the media to refer to Mike –, as a way to call him out on his behaviour, regarded as offensive to Chris. Following the selection process, the camera focuses on Chris and Mike, with dramatic music in the background, simulating a battle between the two for the girl. This conflict is similar to when Odysseus confronts Penelope's suitors (Homer 2002, 895-958), thus supporting that the image of the hero, which is strongly linked to the construction of hegemonic masculinity, is present in Chris's actions with respect to his rivalry

with Mike, who is eventually ejected from the show, as voted by his co-contestants in *Love Island*. It could then be argued that when Chris performs the role of a leader, he does so in order to exert power over both male and female contestants for his own benefit. His enactment of a hero is a way to couple again with Olivia, and by performing these two roles, he is complying with hegemonic masculinity, while also reflecting Anderson and Ferris's results in their *Jersey Shore* "hero" behaviour analysis, which was predominant in males, "reflect[ing] societal gendered norms" (2016, 9). The way in which Chris's performance shifts and can be adhered to the different roles of victim, hero, and leader, is comparable to Foucault's definition of power, in which it "... is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others (x, 98). It can also be connected in complexity to hegemonic masculinity, in that "[it] is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same" (Connell 76), but rather it is subject to change and is conditioned by different factors – in Chris's case, his relationship with the other boys and Olivia.

"This is *Love Island*, not *friend island*"

As it has been said, the objective in *Love Island* is for the contestants to form heterosexual couples and to look for a romantic partner. Chris eventually **gets** to the final with his partner Olivia, but living in a communal space with other contestants forces him to establish relationships with others – whether it is simply a friendship, or a potential romance –. However, there is an immense pressure on all contenders to win the final prize, a demand which is manifested when Iain Stirling jokingly announces that "[t]his is *Love Island*, not 'friend island'" ("48" 2017, 12:16), a well-known quote amongst the show's public. Most of the contestants tend to establish potentially romantic or sexual relationships with more than one person throughout the season, as to finally meet the one they will stay with. Consequently, before partnering with Olivia – which would eventually lead to, according to them, an official relationship as they ask each other to be boyfriend and girlfriend ("42" 2017, 41:40) – Chris couples up and goes on dates with other girls.

He first gets to know Montana Brown, as the show gives them the opportunity to talk and drink together in a private space, away from the other contestants. When going out to the little terrace, he insists on Montana getting through first since she is a woman ("4" 2017, 14:10), flaunting his gentlemanlike manners. He noticeably stares at Montana's body during their conversation (15:21), and later asks her for a "smooch", to which she refuses. Chris's attitude might be regarded as playful and straightforward, but it clearly represents the

objectification of women. He mainly talks about himself, saying that he's "funny" (15:25) and "better-looking than Beckham" (15:39), and by doing so he is disregarding Montana, not letting her talk about herself. The objectification inherent in Chris's actions towards her in the date culminates in him telling Montana that "[you] got a nice bum" (16:28), to which she does not reply, and he even goes as far as to ask her to touch her, to which she refuses (16:46). Her uneasiness with respect to his attitude are reflected in her verbal negations and her movements, such as when she later refuses to go before him when exiting the door (17:06). Davis et al. notice that in *Tim Gunn's Guide to Style* and *What not to Wear* the hosts put an emphasis on "their female contestants as having 'beautiful' bodies or 'great figures'" (Davis et al. 2014, 264), and this objectification and consequent depersonalisation of Montana convey a conformity to the hegemonic discourse from Chris's stance.

Tyne-Lexy, another contestant who showed interested in Chris, was determined to spend some time alone with him as to get to know him better. She goes to the table where Chris was sitting on his own, and asks him questions about himself, commenting on every answer he gives as to try to establish what they have in common ("7" 2017, 38:01). She tells him that he's beautiful, trying to flirt with him, and she barely stops between questions and speaks quickly which, together with the editing of the scenes, gives a fast-paced and comical situation, as Chris comments in the confessional that "[s]he's really putting it on me" (39:10) while laughing. Chris keeps a straight face all throughout their exchange of words, seeming uninterested, and the absurd scene ends when Tyne-Lexy tells the camera that she thinks the date went well. Still reflecting on the date, Chris states that "boys and girls go at it in a different way" (39:52), meaning that men and women should act differently when flirting – with women adopting a quieter, passive attitude, and men being in control of the conversation. This reversal of roles makes Chris uncomfortable, as through her forthright attitude she is portraying a reversal of the traditional gender roles.

Chris's comments on Chloe Crowhurst, the executive assistant from Essex and her couple at the time, also exhibit ideas inherent in the hegemonic discourse. Chris brings out Chloe's looks in his conversation with Tyne-Lexy, alluding to the girl's facial plastic surgery, and then admits that he likes "natural girls" ("7" 2017, 39:30). Woods observed that the femininity portrayed in *The Only Way Is Essex* is characterised by a "lack of naturalness" (2012, 208) when compared to the standard beauty canon, and Chloe's physical appearance is similar to that of Amy Child's in the scripted reality show. Chloe, who is also from Essex, is a female figure which, "although financially solidly middle class, employ[s] and celebrate[s] a form of glamor and femininity that highlights excess and artifice" (204). They both "[wear]

full make up and blown-out hair” no matter the context or place they are in, and there is a “... juxtaposition of women’s heightened, fake, glamor with everyday British locales” (208) – the everyday British locales corresponding in *Love Island* to the other contestants. Chris’s attitude towards Tyne-Lexy and Chloe mirrors his behaviour in the date with Montana in that his masculinity is in all cases hegemonic. Just like in *Jersey Shore*, he reflects the reality television’s portrayal of women as “clichéd and conforming to societal gender stereotypes” (Anderson and Ferris 2016, 11), objectifying and placing the girls in a subordinate position, while also ascribing to *TOWIE*’s discourse which “can encourage a mocking audience position that pokes fun at its cast’s inarticulate excess” (Wood 2012, 206), similar to his attitude towards Tyne-Lexy and Chloe and the depictions he gives of them.

Conclusion

The present paper was determined to analyse Chris’s performance of masculinity in *Love Island* (2017), in relation to the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to say that the performance of Chris largely illustrates characteristics which correspond to the hegemonic discourse, although demonstrating in particular occasions that it is deviant. Therefore, it reflects the results of the study on masculinity in young males in the UK (YouGov 2016), which suggested that only a small percentage felt completely masculine.

The findings suggest that in relation to the issue domesticity, Chris adheres to the hegemonic discourse in terms of his attitude towards cooking and his views on family. Nevertheless, he shows a deviant performance in terms of fathering. Similarly, his performance is also deviant in terms of performing the role of a victim, argument that is clearly supported by the scenes in which he is shown to be crying. Yet his masculinity is hegemonic in his behaviour as a hero and leader, exhibited through his confrontation with Mike, and his controlling job when directing the boys in a cooking challenge. The final findings suggest that his masculinity is hegemonic as to how he behaves towards the girls – objectifying Montana, while mocking Tyne-Lexy for her directness in flirting and Chloe by cause of her physical appearance.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study: firstly, that even though he performs a deviant masculinity in certain points of his time in the reality TV show, it remains mainly hegemonic; and secondly, and related to this first point, it indicates a subtle deviation from the traditional gender roles, and thus it might reflect that he could be considered as not completely masculine. The scope of this study was limited in terms of the

analysis being based on a single participant in the show; however, the findings suggest that it reflects the general public's opinion. Further research regarding the encoding and decoding of masculinity in famous reality television programmes such as *Love Island* (2015-) is strongly recommended.

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