Review of Master’s thesis

**Bronies: A discourse analysis of the paradoxical nature of gender-stigmatized identity**
by Kristýna Kozlovská

The author chose an interesting topic for gender analysis – male fans of a girls’ TV show “My Little Pony.” These men call themselves Bronies and (many of them) unabashedly watch this age- and gender-inappropriate program. While it is laudable to search for the atypical and unexpected to shed light on the possibilities and pitfalls for gender change, this thesis fails to persuade that there is more depth than just that: unlikely spectators of a TV show.

Kristýna Kozlovská sets up the concepts of self, stigma, and hegemonic masculinity she wants to use for discourse analysis of over-the-skype interviews with self-identified Bronies. She explains the complicated nature of discourse analysis – in fact, she traces the differences among several kinds of discourse analysis – and then simply retells what the presented excerpts just said, often in the same words. One example for all (chosen at random):

This participant answers the question whether there is something like typical non-Brony:
A: Typical non-Brony… well the creed of that community is love and tolerance so I think it doesn’t exist.
Q: So there is a wide specter of both Bronies and nonBronies.
A: Well, it is more like that non-Brony, the community present itself like it will accept everyone.
The participant says that the community creed is love and tolerance. The community image here is built upon acceptance, so there really is not a person that would not be allowed to join.

The author keeps repeating herself. She mentions several times that “ponies are stereotypically seen as both feminine and childish” or that “hegemonic masculinity is more likely an ideal type than something that real-life men can actually embody.” We are not learning much new, moreover, we do not eventually learn how to understand the relationship of the key concepts of self-stigma-masculinity beyond something to the effect of “Being a Brony has a dualistic nature” (p. 61). Or, more confusingly: “When practiced by men, standing up against gender prejudices is thus one of the positions of subversion and confirmation at the same time” (p. 42). As sociologists, we know from the start that things are complicated and that “concepts” do not parade themselves in real life. Taking speech acts always at face value is not analysis, let alone discourse analysis.

I would expect the author to have elaborated more on what it means to her interlocutors to inhabit a gender-atypical space of being a Brony. Do they (all) perceive it as non-masculine? Is masculinity the central category they associate with them being a Brony? What is the spectrum of their experience: from (I am guessing) stigma to empowerment? Do they perceive it as gender-bending? The author writes about their rebelliousness – I remain unconvinced: do her interlocutors see themselves as revolting? Against what exactly? Instead of analyzing these and similar issues, Kristýna Kozlovská – in a thesis with a subtitle including the words “gender-stigmatized – states: “I will not
work with extracts that deal with direct questions about masculinity, because I do not want to thematize Bronies as a potentially problematic group in the question of gender” (p. 41). How to analyze gender without actually talking gender into account?

Choosing to write a thesis in English is challenging and I am glad to see more students making that choice. Yet, it would help to have it proofread by a native speaker. Authors would then avoid using wrong words (implicate instead of imply, thread instead of threat, etc.) and overall awkward formulations. The author starts each and every section with a variation on “Stigma. The first subchapter of the analysis will be dedicated to stigma” (p. 29). It might be that there would be some heavy-handedness even had she written in Czech.

I suggest the thesis is graded C-D, depending on the performance during the defence.

In Brno, June 8 2015

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