

# GENDER ON THE SCREEN: A PUBLIC VIEW OF PRIVATE WRITING

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the public and private nature of personal weblogs written by British and Spanish teenagers. In particular, it reports on the first stage of a long-term research project about the effects of the anti-sexist language policies and the process of feminisation of the language in the media. Given that the linguistic expression of online female gender identity includes a wide range of variables, I shall concentrate on a selection of pragmatic meanings of informative and directive utterances in British and Spanish female teenagers' narrations of their love-life. In doing so, I shall highlight the fight between the persistence of traditional patriarchal feminine behaviours and the growing appearance of culturally-based androgynous behaviour patterns in both British and Spanish societies.

KEY WORDS: Gender identity and language, Politeness strategies, androgyny and femininity, self and other presentation strategies.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio investiga la naturaleza pública y privada de los *weblogs* personales escritos por adolescentes británicas y españolas. En concreto, aquí se recogen las primeras conclusiones extraídas de la primera fase del proyecto «Efectos de las Políticas Lingüísticas Anti-sexistas y Feminización del Lenguaje de los Medios». Dado el número de variables que incluye la expresión de identidad de género en este modo de comunicación, aquí se presenta el análisis de una selección de las fuerzas elocutivas de enunciados directivos e informativos que aparecen en las narraciones de la vida amorosa de estas adolescentes británicas y españolas. Dicho análisis pondrá de manifiesto la lucha existente entre la supervivencia de comportamientos patriarcales y la aparición de comportamiento andrógenos que parecen responder a dos patrones diferenciados para cada cultura.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Identidad de género y lenguaje, estrategias de cortesía verbal, masculinización y feminidad, estrategias de auto-presentación.

## INTRODUCTION

There has been considerable interest among scholars in analysing weblogs as a new genre of Computer-Mediated Communication<sup>1</sup>. Much of the research in



characterising weblogs has focused on whether or not it is possible to argue that blogs constitute a unified genre<sup>2</sup>. In this way, researchers have attached great importance to characterising the properties of the emergent blog genre and, more precisely, the common structural features all weblogs show<sup>3</sup>. Different empirical studies have identified three sub-genres according to the purpose the blog fulfils: a) Personal weblogs are blogs where individuals reflect on their daily life matters, such as family, friends, or personal thoughts<sup>4</sup>; b) Filter weblogs mainly gather information about other weblogs and websites and explain the nature of the content you can find<sup>5</sup>; and c) Knowledge-logs aim to share information of an institutional nature from a particular organisation.

The present study moves away from this isolated genre stance and focuses on issues which combine personal weblog writing and gender identity<sup>6</sup>. In line with Herring and Paolillo's (2006) claim that half of all bloggers discuss love relationships in order to establish a mature sexual identity, the point of departure of this study is that personal weblogs can be understood as a vehicle for self-expression and self-empowerment. In particular, this paper analyses those entries where British and Spanish teen females write about their loving heterosexual relationships and broken ones. After these brief introductory lines, section 1 presents the point of departure of the present study. Section 2 deals with participants and data collection. Section 3 defines the scope of the paper. Section 4 and section 5 present a detailed analysis of British and Spanish teenage female gender identity in personal weblog writing. Finally, section 6 summarises the key characteristics of this particular discourse.

## 1. LANGUAGE, GENDER AND AUDIENCE IN PERSONAL WEBLOG WRITING

The starting point of the analysis is the fact that the *self* is not a fixed, complete entity, but an ongoing project<sup>7</sup>. As online weblog writing becomes a medium of self-expression and self-construction, personal weblogs represent interest-

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<sup>1</sup> S. HERRING and J.C. PAOLILLO, «Gender and genre variation in weblogs». *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, vol. 10, n. 4 (2006), pp. 439-459.

<sup>2</sup> L. KARLSSON, «Acts of reading diary weblogs». *Human IT*, vol. 8, n. 2 (2006), pp. 1-59.

<sup>3</sup> W. RICHARDSON, *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*. California, Corwin Press, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> L.A. SCHEIDT, «Adolescent diary weblogs and the unseen audience», in D. BUCKINGHAM and R. WILLETT (eds.), *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006, pp. 109-114.

<sup>5</sup> S. NOWSON, *The Language of Weblogs: A Study of Genre and Individual Differences*. Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> The present study was financially supported by a grant (ID No: 37/06-01) from the Instituto de la Mujer. This study is part of a long-term research project: *Efectos de las Políticas Lingüísticas Anti-sexistas y Feminización del Lenguaje de los Medios*. Universidad de Alcalá de Henares (Madrid).

<sup>7</sup> A. GIDDENS, *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991.

ing variants of the maintenance of relationships through intrapersonal communication<sup>8</sup>. In particular, the claim that the *self* is a social product entails that, on the one hand, the sense of self arises from publicly validated performances, and, on the other, that although individuals play an active role in moulding these self-indexing performances, they are generally constrained by the need to project self-images that are socially supported within the context of a given status hierarchy<sup>9</sup>.

Indebted to Holmes and Meyerhoff's (2005) work<sup>10</sup>, the analysis of the different self-presentation strategies found in these bloggers' entries about their loving relationships and broken ones allow the researcher to argue that gender is a dynamic and ever changing construct<sup>11</sup>. More precisely, weblog writing is here understood as a «community practice» which enables us to see how both femininities and masculinities change in this context. In particular, the analysis reveals that the self-presentation strategies employed cluster around two key relational issues: interdependence and separation. First is the use of interdependence or the extent to which teenage females self-present as powerless individuals and move toward males when they are in love. The second issue is separation, or the extent to which the teenage females attempt to appropriate their own identity as individuals and push away from the males socially and psychologically when they have broken off the relationship<sup>12</sup>.

When analysing the presence of particular linguistics strategies, this study does not gloss over the point that all texts are designed for a particular audience. We understand that an important part of the analysis of any text composed for public consumption (as weblogs by definition are) must be to consider the effect on a writer's self-presentation of who the text is written to be read by, what that reader can be assumed to find intelligible or appealing, and what kind of persona the writer may have an investment in projecting to her imagined reader. This has been solved in the analysis in the following way. On the one hand, we are aware that these British and Spanish female teenagers blog about their boyfriends in the cause of constructing a self for an audience which they imagine primarily as consisting of other teenage girls. Whether they adopt the stance of passive adoration or active hostility towards their male subjects, the face needs<sup>13</sup> they are really addressing are primarily their own, and probably have most to do with their desire to be judged positively or sympathetically by their peers. On the other hand, the study defines

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<sup>8</sup> J. PENNEBAKER, *Opening Up*. New York, Guilford Press, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> E. GOFFMAN, *Frame Analysis*. New York, Harper Colophon, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> J. HOLMES and M. MEYERHOFF, *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Malden (MA), Blackwell, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> J. COATES, *Women, Men and Language*. London, Longman, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> L. KARLSSON, «Acts of reading diary weblogs». *Human IT*, vol. 8, n. 2, (2006), pp. 1-59.

<sup>13</sup> Face needs are thought of as the desire to be appreciated and protected. Face is further broken down into two different categories: positive face and negative face needs. Positive face is the desire or need to be liked and appreciated. Negative face is the desire or need to be autonomous and not to infringe on the other person (Brown and Levinson, 1987).



the blogger's boyfriend or ex boyfriend as the addressee (*H*) in the sense that the way female teenagers exploit different positive and negative politeness strategies throws further light on the construction of a textual self. Even though, bloggers' boyfriend may and in fact are part of the intended audience, our analysis does not claim that bloggers present themselves to and for their boyfriends.

## 2. BLOG CORPUS AND PARTICIPANTS

Since this study examines identity as it applies to female teenage girls exploring their personal and group identities in a digital environment, I have compiled a blog corpus of 599 entries drawn from thirty-four British personal weblogs (155 entries about bloggers' loving relationships and 139 entries about bloggers' broken relationships and thirty-one Spanish personal weblogs (158 entries about bloggers' loving relationships and 147 bloggers' entries about broken relationships) created by teenage females. The final sample contains 19,385 annotated utterances collected from February to May of 2007 collected from: <http://www.blogger.com> and [http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/sites/pages\\_s.php](http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/sites/pages_s.php). Every utterance has been coded for its pragmatic meaning. Table 1 shows the principles of classification of speech acts found in the corpus and frequency of each pragmatic meaning of utterances.

TABLE 1. PRINCIPLES OF CLASSIFICATION OF SPEECH ACTS  
IN THE CORPUS. ADAPTED FROM TSUI (1994)

	BRITISH CORPUS		SPANISH CORPUS	
	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Directive: imposition of a course of action	934	9.8016 %	738	7.4878 %
Directive: suggestion of a course of action for the addressee's benefit	532	5.5829 %	489	4.9614 %
Directive: threat directed to the addressee	1,120	11.7535 %	1,205	12.2260 %
Directive: warning directed to the addressee	648	6.8002 %	873	8.8575 %
Informative: direct positive self-evaluation	327	3.4316 %	470	4.7686 %
Informative: indirect positive self-evaluation	589	6.1811 %	482	4.8904 %
Informative: direct negative self-evaluation	1,293	13.5691 %	1,190	12.0738 %
Informative: indirect negative self-evaluation	324	3.4001 %	562	5.7021 %
Informative: direct positive evaluation of the addressee	1,836	19.2674 %	1,603	16.2642 %
Informative: indirect positive evaluation of the addressee	736	7.7237 %	702	7.1225 %
Informative: direct negative evaluation of the addressee	972	10.2004 %	1,121	11.3737 %
Informative: indirect negative evaluation of the opponent	218	2.2877 %	421	4.2715 %
Total	9,529		9,856	

A general assumption in language and gender studies, that even in one society, *e.g.* Britain or Spain, women cannot be discussed as if they formed a single homogeneous category. In order to provide a homogenous sample, the data selected come from a specific subsection of the female population: teenage heterosexual bloggers. More precisely, four main dimensions of identity which affect the way that the gendered selves are presented were considered: gender, age, race and social class.

All teen females range from thirteen to sixteen years of age and are therefore secondary-school students. Author gender was determined by examining all the blogs qualitatively for indications of gender such as first names, nicknames, explicit gender statements (*e.g.* «I am a woman, not a girl!», «Since I was a little girl», etc.), and gender-indexical language (*e.g.* «I know my boyfriend better than», «My boyfriend is so cute»). Finally, when bloggers want to create their own blogs they have to provide basic details about themselves which include race and social class. We cannot deny that factors like race, social class, and ethnicity do shape the experiences of individuals in society and as a result, can have profound effects on how they depict themselves. Although there is no way to check on the reliability of bloggers' description of the user, all of them chose both the categories «white» and «middle class».

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

I am aware that due to the ongoing nature of the study, it is a natural venue for generating fresh questions that will lead to further research. This study adopts a social constructionist stance in seeking to develop new understanding of the concept of personal writing and its importance by honing in on the idea of personal weblogs as sites for female adolescent identity construction<sup>14</sup>. For current purposes, this paper examines some particular aspects of the linguistic expression in British and Spanish female teenagers' narrations of their love-life and presents a framework for understanding how the female is refashioned through digital media. The present study proposes the following hypothesis: that the study of traditional patriarchal feminine narrative and culturally-based androgynous behaviour patterns present in both British and Spanish female teenagers' weblog writing can be interpreted as an adaptive response that emphasises patriarchy as a universal ideology of male superiority.

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<sup>14</sup> J. POTTER and M. WETHERELL, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London, Sage, 1987.

#### 4. PERSONAL WEBLOG WRITING: SUSTAINING TRADITIONAL STEREOTYPES OF WOMEN'S SPEECH

In literature, there has been much empirical evidence suggesting that there are gender differences in face-to-face communication, but it is still an open question whether these differences can also be observed in weblog writing. Some scholars claim that there gender as such is likely to disappear since gender identity is not stable in Computer-Mediated Communication. They add that differences, if any, are not so remarkable because bloggers, no matter their gender, cannot see each other while they interact. Furthermore, some cyberfeminist scholars argue the Internet will cause the dissolution of gender identity as an individual is given the opportunity of constructing actively his or her own persona.

Although it has been long since Tannen (1995) claimed the male preferred public «report talk» in order to maintain status and the female preferred private «rapport talk» in order to maintain social relationships<sup>15</sup>, nobody can deny that she provided analysts with a useful framework to understand men's and women's different styles in interaction. The problem lies in the fact that most of the research on men's and women's speech styles was carried out in the 70's. In spite of the fact that people certainly believe that men and women speak differently, it is difficult to claim that norms for speech styles have not changed accordingly over time. It might be expected that women have adapted to the new media. In this context, the study of weblog writing offers the opportunity of exploring women's communication style in a different environment in the twenty-first century society.

At the risk of making a sweeping generalisation, empirical research of these British and Spanish teenage females use of language has shown that, as it was characteristic of early work on gender stereotypes<sup>16</sup>, the typical female style of communication; that is to say, their speech style is still passive, accommodating, and cooperative in weblog writing. Although the present study is comparable to earlier research on gender, it also has a noteworthy difference: the claim of this typical female style of communication does not fall back on the traditional binary model<sup>17</sup>. The analysis suggests that gender stereotypes are moving towards a culturally-based androgyny and female agency. In the below examples, this British and Spanish teenagers' weblog writing shows that this female bloggers' identity revolves around interconnectedness and relationship when describing their loving relationships. More specifically, the analysis of teenage females' endorsement of traditional feminine behaviour patterns makes it possible to argue that they construct their social identity in the light of a careful exploitation of linguistic strategies.

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<sup>15</sup> D. TANNEN, *Gender and Discourse*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> R. LAKOFF, *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> J. HOLMES, *Gendered Talk in the Workplace*. London, Longman, 2006.

More precisely, corpus evidence suggests that these British and Spanish teenage females are careful about what type of impression the audience (*i.e.* other female friends and many times direct reference to their boyfriend) may form of them. One main strategy of self-presentation can be distinguished which realise these discursive goals in the corpus: Ingratiation. This self-presentation strategy is linguistically realised by means of informative utterances that incorporate both positive and negative politeness strategies<sup>18</sup>. On the one hand, these British and Spanish female teenagers move toward the male in the sense that they claim common ground with their boyfriends by presenting themselves as one with the males (*i.e.* expressions of similarity between them and their boyfriends' wants) and by subordinating their individual rights and their individual freedoms to the loving relationship (*i.e.* appreciation of their boyfriends' wants). In doing so, these female teens do not define their identity as an individual but as an in-group member of the category «women in love», unable to think or act on their own, and showing dependence on men.

The claim that the linguistic strategies identified in the corpus are designed to accommodate the face-wants of the blogger's boyfriend, does not misrepresent the nature of the speech act being analysed in so far as we are aware that the boyfriend is not the addressee, he or more exactly the bloggers' feelings about him is the topic. In linguistic terms, this is indicated by the use of third rather than second person references to boyfriends: second person reference does appear in some examples from the Spanish corpus, but third person appears to be much commoner. In sociological terms one might speculate, even if one cannot fully ascertain, that the main audience for this kind of writing is other females, *i.e.* the girls are designing their self-presentation for their teenage female peers, not the boyfriends who are the topic of their discourse. Although the self-image resulting from these linguistic strategies is presented as a positive state and as a natural response to what being in love means, it causes bloggers a personality suppression and, therefore, a separation from their essential self<sup>19</sup>. This is due to the fact that teenage females' self-presentation is based on a patriarchal ideology whereby female teenager's identity is traced through a paternal lineage<sup>20</sup>. The main linguistic realisations of this self-presentation are summarised in table 2.

Throughout history, men have been culturally legitimated as powerful and the development of this powerful masculine position is connected to the subordination of women. Corpus inspection shows that these female teenagers in love in weblog writing are deemed to be naturally deficient in making decisions, seeing right from wrong, or knowing what they want in life. In this way, their lack of will power and inability to act place female teenagers under the perpetual custody and

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<sup>18</sup> P. BROWN and S. LEVINSON, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> M. AUGOUSTINOS and I. WALKER, *Social Cognition. An Integrated Introduction*. London, Sage, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> S. MILLS, *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

TABLE 2. EXPRESSIONS OF INGRATIATION

	BRITISH CORPUS		SPANISH CORPUS	
	FREQUENCY	RATIO	FREQUENCY	RATIO
Informatives:				
(in-) direct negative self evaluation				
Subordination of personal needs	632	39.08	598	34.13
Lack of determination and personal initiative	655	40.50	682	38.92
Negative appraisal of themselves	330	20.40	472	26.94
Total	1,617		1,752	
Informatives:				
(in-) direct positive evaluation of the addressee				
Positive appraisal of their boyfriends	1,873	72.82	1,157	50.19
Justification of verbal aggressions	421	16.36	616	26.72
Justification of physical aggressive acts	278	10.80	532	23.08
Total	2,572		2,305	

protection of men. As illustrated below, these British and Spanish female teenagers attempt to self-promote by expressing their dependence on their boyfriends in every sense. The following extracts illustrate instances of this self-promotion strategy:

*Example 1: Blogger 13B. 15 years old*

If only I could say how much I love him. I love him more than words can say. He's my everything. He's the reason I wake up every day [...] God. I am so tired. I can't even handle any of this anymore. He's so HOT. Don't know how he ended up dating a «not hot» girl like me. He has lots of style and personality. He knows everything. He already knows what he wants to do with his life. I can't decide which clothes I should wear this evening. I need him.

*Example 2: Blogger 7B. 16 years old*

School is CRAP, school is CRAP!!! What's the point? If I could have my own way, I'd be with him all day long. I'm thankful that I have you. Can't imagine my life without you [...] My world is a betta place 'cos of you. Since I'm with him I'm betta, I've learnt what to wear, what to say. He's taught me so many things. When I am wrong, he always shows me the way [...]

In the above examples, the face strategies employed are clear examples of Face Threatening Act redress and serve a two-fold discursive purpose: complimenting their boyfriends and (indirectly) criticising themselves. In doing so, these British female teenagers not only fit the gender stereotype by showing their lack of will power and their inability to act, but they also subordinate their needs to satisfy their



boyfriends, validate their masculine power and make them feel important<sup>21</sup>. The primary illocutionary intent of these informative utterances is to assert bloggers 13B and 7B's positive evaluation of the relationship in general (e.g. «I'm thankful that I have you», «He's the reason I wake up every day») and of the boyfriends in particular (e.g. «I love him more than words can say», «He's my everything»). Therefore, these positive strategy utterances involve bloggers 13B and 7B claiming common ground by: a) attending to their boyfriends' needs and exaggerating interest and sympathy with them (e.g. «I love him more than words can say», «My world is a better place because of you»); and b) satisfying their boyfriends's needs («He's so HOT. Don't know how he ended up dating a «not hot» girl like me», «If I could have my own way, I'd be with him all day long»).

None the less, these teenagers' exaggerated statements and ill-founded argument damage bloggers' own positive face as they depict themselves as mentally inferior to their boyfriends. (*i.e.* both bloggers are unable to make decisions on which university she should apply or on which clothes she should wear). In doing so, teenage female adopt chauvinist goals and do little to transform the existing power relation and fight against their subordination (Tannen, 1995). In addition, the evidence from the corpus suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between women's well-being and relationship satisfaction and their lack of determination and will power. The more they want to show their affection to their boyfriend, the more passive and submissive they are (see table 1). In doing so, teenage females maintain the existing power relation, for which they accept men's superiority<sup>22</sup>. Let us shed further light on the matter by analysing some entries found in the Spanish corpus:

*Example 3: Blogger 2S. 15 years old*

Joder! Cuando les enseño las fotos a mis amigas, todas me dicen que está mazo bueno. Que está tó cachas. Me encantan sus músculos. A veces no sé cómo puede estar conmigo, pero con él soy una mujer y hago lo que él quiere que haga. Sabe que haría cualquier cosa por él. Soy suya [...] si no fuera por él, sería la chica aburrida de antes.

*Fuck! Anytime I show my friends his photos, they all say he's a hunk. He's so strong. I love his muscles. I sometimes wonder why he's with me, but when I am with him I am a woman and I do whatever he wants me to do. He knows I'd anything for him. I'm his. [...] If it weren't for him, I'd be that boring girl I used to be.*

*Example 4: Blogger 11S. 15 years old*

Estoy MAZO contenta. Hoy me ha dicho que me quiere. Yo sabía que me quería pero cuando me lo ha dicho me ha gustado mazo. Ha estado con tantas chicas que

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<sup>21</sup> L.A. SCHEIDT, «Adolescent diary weblogs and the unseen audience», in D. BUCKINGHAM and R. WILLET (eds.), *Digital Generations: Children, Young People and New Media*. London, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006, pp. 109-114.

<sup>22</sup> J. SUNDERLAND, *Gendered Discourses*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

no sé que me quería a mí me flipa. Aunque no le guste bailar y nunca me salgamos con mis amigas, me da igual, si le tengo a él ya tengo bastante, a mis amigas las puedo ver cuando quiera total me lo paso mejor con él. Me gusta más como soy cuando estoy con él.

*I'm SO happy! Today he's told me he loves me. I knew he did but when he actually said so. He's had so many girls that, don't know, that he loves me is just amazing. I don't care if he doesn't like dancing or going out with my friends. If he's with me, that's good enough for me. Besides, I can always see my friends any other time. I have more fun with him, anyway. I like the way I am when I'm with him.*

The abundance of informative utterances in examples 3 and 4 shows that these Spanish female bloggers think about the other person more often and more intensively than is warranted; that is, this self-promotion strategy is closely connected to a feeling of over-closeness and neediness. On the basis of their information content, utterances are oriented toward the positive face of bloggers' boyfriends by exaggerating and intensifying empathy (e.g. «I sometimes wonder why he's with me», «He's had so many girls that, don't know, that he loves me is just amazing»).

In addition, the resulting co-dependency can be claimed to damage bloggers' own positive face as informative utterances reflect how Spanish bloggers give away their individual identity voluntarily as they feel naturally, in mind and body, connected to the other person (e.g. «He knows I'd anything for him. I'm his», «when I am with him I am a woman and I do whatever he wants me to do»). This positive face loss goes hand in hand with the loss of 2S and 11S' individual identity as they give something of their essence to their boyfriend; that is to say, they see their loving relationship as a cathartic point in their lives and overtly state that they cannot understand how they could have lived before meeting their boyfriend (e.g. «[...] If it weren't for him, I'd be that boring girl I used to be», «I like the way I am when I'm with him»).

Looking over the examples (1-4) above given, one may argue that this self-promotion presentation strategy highlights that unequal power relations that exist between women and men stem from condoning cultural beliefs and practices which are discriminatory in nature (Sunderland, 2004). The evidence from the corpus suggests that the social baggage of traditional culture and practices which regard women as inferior gives rise to this gender-biased understanding of what loving another means<sup>23</sup>. The teenagers are unable to see the stereotypes and this fact makes it difficult for them to challenge this gender insensitivity, bias and discrimination<sup>24</sup>. Teenage females' suppression and subordination can take many forms in personal weblog writing.

<sup>23</sup> C. CASTAÑO COLLADO, *Las mujeres y las tecnologías de la información. Internet y la trama de nuestra vida*. Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> A. CANN, «Evaluative expectations and the gender schema: Is failed inconsistency better?». *Sex Roles*, vol. 28 (1993), pp. 667-678.

## 5. PERSONAL WEBLOG WRITING: MOVING TOWARDS CULTURALLY-BASED ANDROGYNOUS BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

In contrast to previous narrations, those entries where both British and Spanish female teenage bloggers narrate their sad broken heart relationships make it possible to argue that personal weblogs are the perfect place where these female teenagers can reflect on who they are and what they are doing with their lives<sup>25</sup>. A detailed analysis of the corpus shows that the narrations of broken relationships support the claim that female bloggers' identity revolves around interconnectedness and relationship. In particular, corpus evidence suggests that the narration of British and Spanish teenagers' broken relationships fosters fragmentation in the sense that this painful situation presents a multiplicity of options from which the female teenager Self needs to select. In addition, the different choices these British and Spanish female teenagers seem to have are clearly connected with specific socially-acceptable behaviour patterns.

The narration of broken relationships goes hand in hand with the exploitation of one main strategy of self-presentation: Intimidation. Linguistically speaking, this particular self-expression is realised by means of informative and directive utterances. These are cases of Face Threatening Act-oriented bald-on-record usage which aim to threaten their boyfriends' positive and negative face. On the one hand, positive face threatening acts show that bloggers do not care about their boyfriends' feelings and wants (*e.g.* expressions of violent emotions) and that they have a negative opinion of some aspect of their boyfriends' positive face (*e.g.* expressions of disapproval, accusations, insults, threats, etc). On the other hand, negative face threatening acts show how bloggers give orders and warnings and indicate deliberately intent to harm their boyfriends. Such a bald on record usage can be understood as an attempt to redefine gender role parameters by establishing a social comparison between in-group (female teenagers) and out-group (male teenagers) that intensifies women's independence (and differences) from the other sex. As another cathartic process, this self-presentation strategy allows teenage females to style themselves as morally, physically and intellectually superior<sup>26</sup>.

As illustrated in table 3, these are the main realisations that characterise the self-presentation of intimidation.

Upon reflecting on their relationship, these British and Spanish bloggers take a journey to identify who they were before they made the mistake of going out with the boyfriend. In doing so, they become aware of their dependency on the other and their identity loss as individuals; that is why they attempt to retrieve their

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<sup>25</sup> P. GILBERT, «On space, sex and stalkers». *Women and Performance*, vol. 17 (1995), pp. 1-18.

<sup>26</sup> A. GARCÍA GÓMEZ, *Habla conflictiva como acción social. Discurso y cognición*. Oviedo, Septem Ediciones, 2006.

TABLE 3. EXPRESSIONS OF INTIMIDATION

	BRITISH CORPUS		SPANISH CORPUS	
	FREQUENCY	RATIO	FREQUENCY	RATIO
Directives: Imposition and/ or suggestion of a Course of action				
Impositions of actions for the speaker's benefit	1,125	76.73	738	60.14
Suggestions of actions for the speaker's benefit	341	23.26	489	39.85
Total	1,466		1,227	
Directives: Threats and/or warning				
Direct threats	439	24.83	734	35.32
Indirect threats	315	17.81	129	6.20
Direct warnings	834	47.17	1,027	49.42
Indirect warnings	180	10.18	188	9.04
Total	1,768		2,078	
Informatives: (in-) direct negative evaluation of the addressee				
Use of swear words and insults	847	49.59	1,021	77.88
Negative appraisal of the opposite gender	861	50.40	521	33.78
Total	1,708		1,542	

own identity in defining this new reality. The discursive strategy is two-fold. On the one hand, these bloggers hold a positive appraisal of themselves and anything women do in general terms (*e.g.* most entries portray an unrealistically positive view where they exaggerate their own talents, abilities and social skills) and, on the other hand, they criticise systematically their partners and anything that has to do with them in particular or men in general terms. Let us concentrate on how female bloggers boost their self-confidence and strive to be independent.

The strategy is based on the depiction of the other sex in a negative light. The negative social comparisons in both British and Spanish female depictions of the other sex creates a framework<sup>27</sup> for personal experience that holds implications both for their own gender identity and that of the other sex. Female teenagers directly criticise the lack of integrity and sincerity of men in relationships. They avoid

<sup>27</sup> E. GOFFMAN, 1974. See footnote 8.

being ambiguous and make a direct contribution to discourse aimed at producing a dissociation between women and men.

These expressions of disaffiliation reveal that gender identity is best characterised as multifaceted and strategic insofar as British and Spanish female bloggers construct their gender identity to make themselves as appealing as possible to others. Therefore, female bloggers' negative appraisal of the other sex tries to control how the other sex must be perceived by others (*e.g.* the characteristics selected are as opposed as possible to the demands of the social order). Furthermore, this presentation strategy appears to be a gender-based distancing strategy or a tactic of female inter-group distinctiveness employed in search of positive identity<sup>28</sup>.

The recurrent presence of devaluations of the boyfriends' social image, assertions of autonomy and impositions of different courses of action for the bloggers' benefit makes it possible to argue that these female teenagers use stereotypically male discursive strategies, which assimilate these female teenagers into the stereotypically male way of behaving and dealing with things in the non-domestic sphere. To illustrate this point, consider the following examples:

*Example 5: Blogger 3B. 16 years old*

Leave me alone! Who the fuck do you think you are? Seems like it's all the same. Don't spare me your rubbish, you always spare me your shame. The previous sentence doesn't sound right. You fucking coward. You call yourself a man? [...] Yes, you heard me asshole, I said FUCK YOU (VERY MUCH) twice over. I hope you have diarrhea EVERY SINGLE DAY of your life, you goddamn wanker. Get the fuck out of my life. You never thought I was attractive or sexy. You made me hate sex. Why didn't you show up yesterday? You're a coward, come and give a blow job. I will grab your hair and smack your ass while pulling on it as you cumcome, I'll drive you wild. I will ram my pole deep into your pussy and yank your hair back, plunge my thumb into your asshole and make you scream and moan.

*Example 6: Blogger 12B. 14 years old*

You're a piece of dogshit, and I suggest you eat some as well. Todd was nice to invite me to the party. I was toying around with the thinking about going and slapping your face in front of your friends. That's what a fucking bastard like you deserve. You fucked up my life. ASSHOLE! [...] You dickhead, stop calling me!! I hate you. NO wonder then why none of your girlfriends talk to you, you dickhead.

The exploitation of these intrinsic Face Threatening Acts allows bloggers to establish their power status as the information content of informative utterances is the cumulative expression of bloggers' attitude and negative evaluations against their ex boyfriend. In examples 5 and 6, British teenage females' assertion of self-confidence is linguistically realised by informative utterances which aim not only to

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<sup>28</sup> M. HOGG and G. VAUGHAN, *Social Psychology*. London, Prentice Hall, 1998.

provide information<sup>29</sup>, but also to report a state of affairs, recount personal experience, and express evaluative judgements, feelings and thoughts on their broken relationship. Therefore these utterances threaten their boyfriends' positive face want by indicating that bloggers 3B and 12B do not like any longer their boyfriends' wants, personal characteristics and values. In addition, the attitudinal colouring of these informative utterances include a severe damage of the ex boyfriend's face want as almost list down a set of criticisms that encapsulate expressions of disapproval (e.g. «You're a piece of dogshit»), complaints (e.g. «Don't spare me your rubbish, you always spare me your shame», «Yes, you heard me asshole, I said FUCK YOU VERY MUCH»), accusations (e.g. «You fucked up my life») and insults (e.g. «ASSHOLE», «You dickhead»).

By means of mandates, British female teenagers attempt to get their ex boyfriends to perform, or to refrain from performing, an action (Tsui, 127). The characteristic features of these utterances are two-fold. Some mandates are issued because of the blogger's want, or one can say are issued for the benefit of the blogger herself (e.g. «Stop calling me!») and deliberately aim to ridicule their ex boyfriends (e.g. «I was toying around with the idea of going and slapping your face in front of your friends»). The other mandates have the additional feature of explicitly stating that the blogger herself will bring about the undesirable consequence should the ex boyfriend refuses to comply (e.g. «Get the fuck out of my life [...] I will grab your hair and smack your ass while pulling...»). As reflected in table 3, those utterances that primarily threaten bloggers 3B and 12B' boyfriends negative-face wants include traditionally male expressions (e.g. «I will ram my pole deep into your couchy and yank your hair back, plunge my thumb into your anal»). Female teenagers seem to understand these masculine expressions as a mechanism of social control and they use and validate them in order to assert their power. In delivering this kind of threats, bloggers 3B and 12B take on the responsibility for bringing about the disadvantageous action.

The validation of masculine expressions can be interpreted in two different ways. One may think that the assimilation into the male-dominated discourse not only shows the confusion about women's role in the public arena but it also reflects women's fight to transform the existing power relation<sup>30</sup>. However, this assimilation defines a negative expression of masculinity. This female self-expression masculinises the identity of bloggers to the extent of showing bias against sexual relationships other than traditional man-woman relationship. In depicting their ex boyfriends as having sex with other men or being done what men are supposed to do, the use of masculine expressions can be regarded as bloggers' attempt to manipulate their ex boyfriend. Both interpretations of this adoption of a male-dominated discourse

<sup>29</sup> A.B.M. TSUI, *English Conversation*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> S. TAKANO, «Re-examining linguistic power: Strategic uses of directives by professional Japanese women in positions of authority and leadership». *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 37, n. 5 (2004), pp. 633-666.

raise a difficult question about whether masculinisation must be interpreted as a fight for gender equity or as an attempt to exert female superiority. Such a question poses a moral and ethical controversy about the selfish nature of human beings, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented an analysis of the construction of female gender identity in British and Spanish personal weblog writing. More specifically, these British and Spanish bloggers' depictions of their loving heterosexual relationships and break-ups offers insight into the way adolescents conceptualise gender roles in twenty-first century society, especially in terms of self-expression. This research from a cultural studies perspective particularly focuses on how different femininities are constructed in relation to the other sex, and on how certain masculinities become hegemonic in the public sphere. There is evidence to argue that the tribulations of teenage females show an underlying sociological process in both British and Spanish society that reflects the fight between, on the one hand, the persistence of patriarchal feminine behaviours as shown in those entries that narrate bloggers' loving heterosexual relationships and, on the other hand, the appearance of androgynous behaviour patterns as seen in those entries that narrate bloggers' broken heterosexual relationships.

With regard to the depictions of these teenage female bloggers' loving heterosexual relationships, one may claim that the traditional gender roles employed in these depictions suggest that this social interpersonal activity is integrated into women's domestic domains. As social changes take place more slowly in the private sphere, this may be the reason why these teenage females still conceptualise their gender roles in such a traditional fashion (*e.g.* conceptualisation of women as mothers and submissive caretakers are harder to eradicate). Nevertheless, those depictions of their broken heterosexual relationships seem to be oriented toward finding their identity as individuals in the non-domestic sphere. Women's more predominant presence in the public sphere has already started changing teenagers' conceptualisation of their role in that sphere as individuals.

The emotional outbursts of Spanish female teenagers show how the reflexive project of the self operates within a constant struggle of commodified influences. Female teenagers try to put themselves together after the break-up and gather all the fragmented pieces of their self. In trying to do so, this emotional outburst - understood as an attempt to relieve the pain - opens multiple choices. In the same way that the twentieth century view of a tough man who is not allowed to express his feelings is giving way to a twenty-first man who cares about his physical appearance and shares households and work responsibilities, one may suggest that this particular twenty-first century discourse of feminisms refers to a woman who can be publicly tough, independent and aggressive.

