

# LADDISH BEHAVIOUR

## BRITISH AND SPANISH PERSONAL WEBLOGS

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The relationship between the speaking patterns of women and their social identities have previously been analysed in both oral interaction and written texts. The present paper examines contrastively British and Spanish female gender identity in personal weblogs, one of the latest modes of virtual communication. More specifically, this study is concerned with the tribulations of the British and Spanish teenage female self in narrating their love-lives in personal weblogs. It will be acknowledged that the construction of the teenage female self is still unstable in the twenty-first century. The results suggest these tribulations shed further light on the underlying ideological process which reveals the fight between the persistence of traditional patriarchal feminine behaviours and the appearance of culturally-based androgynous behaviour patterns in both British and Spanish societies.

*Key words:* Gender performativity, Online gender identity, feminism, discursive psychology, self and other presentation strategies, and social constructivism.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity becomes especially relevant at adolescence when teenagers leave behind childhood and attempt to define who they are (Calvert 2002; Calvert, Mahler *et al.* 2003). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the virtual world expands teenagers' forums for self-discovery and offers teenagers different possibilities in searching for their identity and reflecting on

their own inner world (Erikson 1993). Among the latest modes of Computer-Mediated Communication, weblogs or personal web sites have attained widespread popularity in the last ten years (Blood 2004; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright 2004a). Weblogs can be defined as modified web pages where almost any literate person can self-publish content and communicate on a regular basis by introducing dated entries in reverse chronological sequence (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright 2004b).

In particular, this study is concerned with the tribulations of the British and Spanish teenage female self in narrating their love-lives in personal weblogs. Indebted to Herring, Scheidt *et al.* (2004a), I believe that the study of this emerging type of discourse provides a venue to explore the construction of twenty-first century gender identities (Huffaker 2004a and 2004b; Huffaker and Calvert 2005), and this, in turn, may shed further light on how the Internet has changed the way young people maintain social relationships. It is worth pointing out that personal weblog writing, in the literature, has been discussed as a “private” space without any sense of the paradox that it is available for the author’s “public” consumption (García Gómez in press). When analysing the presence of particular linguistics strategies, the discursive psychological perspective adopted in 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 British and Spanish adolescent girls blog about their boyfriends is 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 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 the blogger’s boyfriend or ex boyfriend as the addressee (“H”) in the sense that the way these adolescent girls 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.

After these brief introductory lines, section 1 defines the scope of the paper. Section 2 deals with participants and data collection. Section 3 focuses on the identity of bloggers in personal weblog writing. Section 4 presents a

detailed analysis of British and Spanish teenage female gender identity in personal weblog writing. Finally, section 5 summarises the main conclusions.

## DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE PAPER

For adolescents, gender identity marks a developmental milestone (Erikson 1993; Calvert 2002). This study explores a new context for identity construction where the self-presentation strategies selected by the British and Spanish cultures play an important role in the analysis of female online identity. More precisely, this paper is concerned with the process of self-discovery in personal weblog writing and the tribulations of the self that these British and Spanish adolescent girls undergo in their loving relationships and broken ones.

Although some sectors of society claim that British and Spanish societies are moving slowly but surely toward gender equity, the overall research question is whether British and Spanish adolescent girls' depictions of their own gender in personal weblog writing reflect any behavioural patterns substantially different from those traditionally ascribed to women (West and Zimmerman 1977 and 1983; Tannen 1995; Cameron 1998; Coates 2003). As prerequisites for addressing this question, I posit two hypotheses:

H1. The tribulations of the teenage female self evidence the fight between the persistence of traditional patriarchal feminine behaviours and the appearance of androgynous behaviour patterns in both British and Spanish societies.

H2. Bloggers' self-presentation strategies reflect two different socio-cultural forms of conceptualising teenage female identity in the twenty-first century.

## 2. PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The blog corpus consists 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 adolescent girls. The final sample contains 19,385 annotated utterances collected from February to May of 2007. Every utterance has been coded for its pragmatic meaning. Table 1 shows the

taxonomy of speech acts found in the corpus and frequency of each pragmatic meaning of utterances.

|   | <b>British</b> | <b>Corpus</b> | <b>Spanish</b> | <b>Corpus</b> |
|---|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
|   | 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          |               |

Table 1. Taxonomy of speech acts in the corpus. Adapted from Tsui (1994)

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. Interestingly, the *ladette* behaviour found in these adolescent girls' entries can be connected with Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity. These female bloggers' reiterated acting in their blogs produces the effect of a normal gender while obscuring the instability of any single person's gender act. In addition, the socially constructed aspect of gender performativity in these adolescent girls' personal weblogs offers the potential for a revision of gender categories (Butler 2000).

### 3. IDENTITY OF BLOGGERS IN PERSONAL WEBLOG WRITING

Diaries have traditionally been written by females (Burt 1994; Nowson & Oberlander 2006). In the growing literature, weblogs, regarded as the twenty-first century counterpart to diaries, have already been proved to be mainly written by female teenagers (Orlowski 2003; Herring *et al.* 2004a). Herring and Paolillo's (2006) research, for instance, shows that personal weblogs are clearly dominated by female bloggers, in general terms, and preferred by female teenagers in particular. In addition, as Nowson (2005) and Nowson and Oberlander (2006) conclude in their analysis of teenage weblog writing, there is considerable variation between the number of younger females and males who create personal weblogs, and in the time devoted to blogging. Their quantitative research reveals that females not only have become more numerous as bloggers but that they also tend to create entries more regularly.

A claim that everybody agrees with is that technological changes are transforming our society into a complex reality and that (virtual) social relationships are gaining a new dimension (Karlsson 2006). This is the case with teen Internet usage, the internet clearly providing an open and potentially anonymous venue to explore twenty-first century relationships (Janssen and Murachver 2004). As will be discussed, this study explores the notion of gender performativity (Butler 1990) in general and this adolescent girls' *laddish* behaviour in particular in order to analyse the number of options readily available to the Self into the blogosphere (Giddens 1991; Gergen 1999, 2001a, 2000b; Lorenzo Dus 2003 and 2005; García Gómez 2007).

In line with Gergen (1991 and 1994), Keupp, Ahbe *et al.* (1999), and Kraus (2000a and 2000b), I believe that the analysis of online British and Spanish female teenage identity must be understood as a patchwork of independent and partially contradictory sub-identities. The starting point of the analysis is the fact that the Self is not a fixed, complete entity but an ongoing project (Giddens 1991; Lorenzo-Dus 2000 and 2002). As online weblog writing becomes a medium of self-expression and self-construction, personal weblogs represent interesting variants of the maintenance of relationships through intrapersonal communication (Pennebaker 1997). In what follows, these preliminary considerations will be given careful thought. By analysing the self-presentation strategies employed by British and Spanish adolescent girls in personal weblog writing, I will attempt to throw further light on the traditional feminist account (West and Zimmerman 1977 and 1983; Tannen 1995; Cameron 1998; Coates 2003) and I will make the argument that the construction of the female self is still unstable in the twenty-first century.

#### 4. TRIBULATIONS OF THE FEMALE TEENAGE SELF

Broadly speaking, inspection of online teenage female identity in personal weblog writing reveals that the bloggers' notion of the self is clearly intertwined with that of social accountability; that is to say, British and Spanish teenage female bloggers present themselves as responsible members of society. In doing so, their identity, understood as a social product, is not crafted in a social vacuum but within specific social settings that take the identities of others into consideration (Lorenzo-Dus 2000 and 2005). Furthermore, the claim that a person has a Self implies that he or she is capable of engaging in self-reflection (Giddens 1991; Lorenzo Dus 2001 and 2002). A detailed analysis of the differences existing in the entries in their depictions of loving relationships and broken ones shows that these British and Spanish adolescent girls clearly conduct a self-interrogation in terms of what is happening. This fact not only defines self-reflexivity as an ongoing process but the self-interrogation also brings out feelings of anxiety within the female. In this light, I will borrow Giddens' concept of "tribulations of the self"; however, I extrapolate from his mainly social constructivist approach to analyse how the individual deals with those anxieties brought about by different aspects of Modernity. This is in order to discuss twenty-first century construction of teenage female identity.

In the present study, the concept of "tribulations of the self" makes it possible to understand the different self-presentation strategies found in bloggers' entries about their loving relationships and broken ones. In general

terms, the study of the tribulations of the female self in personal weblog writing allows the researcher to argue that British and Spanish female teens are not reduced to automata, programmed by their early socialisation to repeat forever the appropriate gendered behaviour (Coates 2003), but that they are conscious agents who may engage in acts of transgression (Cameron 2004). These claims, in turn, extend the traditional feminist account whereby gender is socially constructed rather than natural (Tannen 1995; Cameron 1998 and 2004; Coates 2003). In particular, the analysis reveals that the tribulations of the self cluster around two key relational issues: unification and fragmentation. First is the use of unification or the extent to which adolescent girls self-present as powerless individuals and move toward males when they are in love. The second issue is fragmentation, or the extent to which the adolescent girls attempt to appropriate their own identity as individual and push away from the males socially and psychologically when they have broken off the relationship.

In essence, the view that compared to its male counterpart, the typical female style of communication is cooperative, relational and strongly oriented to protecting others' face may wrongly lead some to conclude that our present commitment to contemporary social constructionist accounts of gender may seem rather superficial in so far as the study seems to fall back on a simple binary model.<sup>1</sup> What is at stake here is that female bloggers' identity revolves around interconnectedness and relationship when describing their loving relationships. More specifically, the analysis of adolescent girls' 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 positive and negative politeness strategies.

Let us discuss these aspects in detail. Loving relationships, on the one hand, can be characterised by high interdependence. Both British and Spanish adolescent girls move toward the males in the sense that they present themselves as one with the males and they subordinate their individual rights and their individual freedoms to the loving relationship. Interdependence centres on the two issues of adopting a powerless identity and adhering to traditional patriarchal relationship roles. In this way, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> We are aware that this once-widespread view has been questioned by many researchers since the mid-1990s, with some important recent empirical work (notably Holmes 2006 and Goodwin 2006) as well as more theoretical arguments (e.g. Cameron 1998) casting doubt on the validity of any possible generalisation.

Conversely, broken relationships can be characterised by expressions of disaffiliation that cause fragmentation and help these adolescent girls push away from the males socially and psychologically. In these entries, these British and Spanish adolescent girls try to redefine gender role parameters by establishing a social comparison between in-group (these adolescent girls) and out-group (male teenagers) that intensifies women's independence (and differences) from the other sex. In addition, the strategies employed to redefine gender role parameters backfire due to the presence of androgynous personal schemas that, far from differentiating both genders, pull women and men together. The following matrix represents the tribulations of the self found in teenage weblog writing when analysing extracts on loving relationships and broken ones.

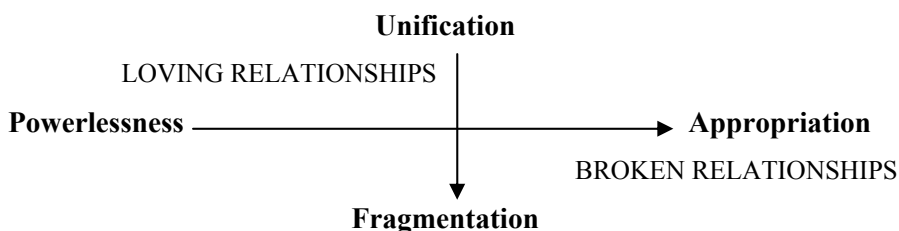


Table 2: Defining gender identities through the study of self-presentation strategies in loving relationships and broken ones

#### 4.1. PERSONALITY EXPRESSION AND SUBORDINATION IN LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Personal weblog writing can be said to focus on a quest for self-concept discovery (Hervern 2000) as all the chronological entries allow female bloggers to reflect on key aspects in their loving relationship, and, this, in turn, helps them understand better who they are. Consistent with previous studies, British and Spanish adolescent girls use language that is more passive, accommodating, or cooperative (Savicki 1996; Herring 2000; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). Close inspection of the data shows how female bloggers' identity revolves around interconnectedness and relationship when describing their loving relationships. More specifically, in describing their own identity, they show a high degree of dependence on and affiliation with the other sex.

Generally speaking, the self-presentation employed by bloggers in love aims to provide a deep sense of "belonging" to each other (e.g. depictions of the



relationship tend to draw the couple closer to each other). As individuals, they honour traditional gender role obligations while forgoing their individual rights (e.g. pleasing their boyfriends by doing, saying and thinking as they want them to). British and Spanish teenagers seem to be content to subordinate their individual rights to their gender role obligations. One main strategy of self-presentation can be distinguished which realise these discursive goals in both corpora: *Ingratiation*. This strategy attempts to provide an equilibrium between affinities and hostilities or a sense of bonding created by two minds in tune. By depicting such a romantic cliché, female bloggers only consider the positive elements in the relationship and conceptualise love as a fusion of two personalities. Expressions of ingratiation include subordination of personal needs, expressions of admiration, lack of will power, and inability to act, to tolerance of verbal abuse and physical violence. The main linguistic realisations of this self-presentation are summarised in table 3.

|  | <b>British</b> | <b>Corpus</b> | <b>Spanish</b> | <b>Corpus</b> |
|--|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Informatives:</b>                                   | Frequency      | Ratio         | Frequency      | Ratio         |
| <b>(in-) direct negative self evaluation</b>           |                |               |                |               |
| 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          |               | 1752           |               |
| <b>Informatives</b>                                    |                |               |                |               |
| <b>(in-) direct positive evaluation of the address</b> |                |               |                |               |
| Positive appraisal of their boyfriends                 | 1873           | 72.82         | 1157           | 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          |               |

Table 3. Expressions of ingratiation

In general terms, this strategy of self-presentation is woven by association and habit into a powerful bond of subordination which aims to sustain the relationship. More specifically, this self-presentation shows that teenage bloggers negotiate their way in a patriarchal society by presenting self-images that endorse traditional female roles and are as consonant as possible with the demands of the social order. In doing so, adolescent girls create environments

around them that, far from nurturing their self, can be said to produce a lack of personal boundaries. This is due to the fact that the self-presentation selected in loving relationships is connected to adolescent girls' subordination to the other sex.

In what follows, I will discuss ingratiation strategy in detail. In many examples, British and Spanish teenagers worship their boyfriends in every sense and view the relationship as a spiritual path. Therefore, loving relationships are conceptualised as the practice of interpersonal love: admiration, appreciation, gratitude, and care that can rise to the level of reverence; that is, of spiritually potent forms of love that will last forever and will have a positive impact on everything adolescent girls do. This idea is highlighted by the common contrast between the negative appraisal of their previous experiences and all the positive things that love has brought into their lives. The following examples illustrate the strategy of ingratiation and show how British bloggers construct their identity as a woman in love who admires, subordinates her needs, and sees the world through her lover's eyes.

Example 1: Blogger 12B. 16 years old.

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He's MY EVERYTHING!! He's SOOOOOOOO HOT. I love him to bits. My feelings are growing STRONGER every day. He's the best guy a girl could dream of [...]. When I am with him, he makes me look like a better person. I feel I can do anything. I was blind before he entered my life [...]. Now that I know what love means, I realise how stupid I was. I wasted my "feelings" on someone who had made it clear that I was nothing more than an easy lay. I am so glad Bruce helped me out. Thanks to him I could wash my hands of it and walk away with a shred of my dignity intact! [...] He is JUST perfect! His eyes, his smile and he is the best lover I have ever had.

Example 2: Blogger 19B. 15 years old

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He has always been there for me through everything, he took care of me when no one else would, not even my parents! Every time I do something that makes him seem disappointed I become disappointed in myself. I only wanna make him proud, I only stand here everyday working hard and doing my best at everything just to make him smile and point proudly saying "That's my girl" [...] I know he loves me, he loves me so much, and this is not a new concept for me, I just wish to never put a single upset look upon his face, I hope to never make him feel like he's done anything wrong in life, I only hope to allow him to pat himself on the back because he is with someone he's unashamed of. There is a lot of pressure on me to make him happy, but disappointing him would be the worst feeling ever!

A constant feature throughout the corpus is the fact that British adolescent girls' behaviour and personal characteristics are influenced and shaped by social forces (Miller and Shepherd 2004). One has to build a joint construct of

individual agents (e.g. females agree to subordinate their basic needs to those of their couples) and their social cultural context (e.g. what is appropriate or not in a relationship) in order to understand gender related issues. Agreed social behaviour subdues teenagers' personality expression and causes subordination to the other sex (Cameron 2004).

As reflected in the examples above, these British adolescent girls' loving relationships are connected to a patriarchal social behaviour. Independent from their personality traits, their sense of self arises from sexist, but publicly validated performances that provide meaning to their everyday existence and have a strong influence on their general experience of well-being. In other words, teenagers' worship not only guides, enriches and ennobles their lives, but also affects their sense of finding self-fulfilment. As can be seen above, female bloggers' desire to find self-fulfilment comes down to simply living to satisfy their boyfriends' needs. The claim that the politeness strategies identified in the corpus are designed to accommodate the face-wants of H—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. Finally, this idea of subordinating their needs and expressing their admiration is linguistically realised by an abundance of superlative structures to maximise their boyfriends' qualities and by use of positive appraisal of everything their boyfriends do or say.

Examples found in the Spanish corpus shed further light on this line of argument:

Example 3: Blogger 2S. 15 years old

Este el día más feliz de mi vida. Me encantaría pasarme el día acariciando su pelo, besándolo, haría cualquier cosas que me pidiera por hacerle feliz [...] El me lo ha enseñado todo. Nos sobran las palabras, puedo ver en sus ojos lo que quiere. No hay un instante que no piense en él. Mi madre me dice que no esto no es normal ¿Qué sabrá ella? Quiero gritarle al mundo que le QUIEROOOOOOOOOOOOOOO [...] Está tan bueno, no me canso de mirarle. Es el espejo en el quiero mirarme todos los días.

[This is the happiest day of my life. I'd like to spend all day long clutching his hair, kissing him. I'd do anything he asked me if it makes him happy [...] He has taught me everything I know. We don't need to talk, I look into his eyes and I know what he wants. I can't stop thinking about him all day long.

My mom says this is not normal, she can't understand. I want to tell the world that I LOOOOOVE him [...] He's so cute I never get tired of looking at him. He's the mirror I want to look upon every day.]

Example 4: Blogger 8S. 14 years old

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Cuando estoy a su lado, el tiempo se para. Ya no soy esa chica tonta, con él sé lo que quiero [...] Mi corazón y el suyo son uno, mi alma y la suya son una. Le quiero más que a mi vida, por sería capaz de cualquier cosa, de CUALQUIER cosa [...] Con él aprendo más que en el insti. Me pasaría el día escuchándoles hablar y cuando me coge me siento volar, me flipa lo cachas que estás.

[When I am by his side, time stops. I am no longer that silly girl I used to be, thanks to him I know what I want [...] My heart and his heart beat as one, my soul and his soul are one. I love him more than anything else, I'd dare to do anything, ANYTHING if he wants me to [...]. I learn much more when I am with him than when going to highschool. I'd spend the whole day listening to him, he's so funny! And when he holds me in his arms I feel like a feather. He's so strong.]

Following the same line of argument, inspection of the Spanish corpus shows that these adolescent girls also exaggerate and intensify their interest in the other sex. Expressions of admiration are a source of happiness and encapsulate all types of appreciation and gratitude for having such a wonderful person in their lives (e.g. These adolescent girls admire them because of their great physical, intellectual capacities, etc). In addition to the expressions of admiration, these British and Spanish adolescent girls also attempt to ingratiate by expressing their dependence on their boyfriends in every sense. These entries found in both corpora range from general remarks that point out these adolescent girls' lack of intelligence in comparison to their boyfriends (e.g. recollections of their experiences where they give examples of their daily life and show their intellectual dependence on the other sex) to explicit declarations of subordination to their boyfriends' decisions (e.g. expressions that encapsulate adolescent girls' lack of determination to act in life unless their boyfriends want them to). The following extracts illustrate instances of this ingratiating strategy:

Example 5: Blogger 13B. 14 years old

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Today I phoned Andy and asked him whether to wear my blue skirt or my new jeans. I spent an hour trying to make a decision but I couldn't. I wanted to be perfect for him [...] I can't understand why Mum seems to be fucked off every time I phone him and ask him when I don't know what to do [...] He couldn't remember and I took a picture of me wearing the skirt and the jeans and emailed him, it took him a while to decide but in the end he chose the skirt.

#### Example 6: Blogger 1S. 16 years old

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HOLA MUNDOOOOOOO! ¿Os he dicho cuanto le kiero? Hoy hemos estado todo el día juntos. Yo quería ir al cine pero al final fuimos a ver a sus amigos jugar al fútbol. No me atreví a decirle nada para que no se enfadara. Yo si estoy con él soy feliz, además el manda.

[HELLO WORLD! Have I ever told you how much I love him? We've been together the whole day. I wanted to go to the cinema but in the end we went to see his friends playing football. I didn't dare to say no because I didn't want him to get mad or anything. If I am with him I am happy, besides he is in charge.]

The discourse style typical of, and considered appropriate for, personal weblog writing on loving relationships has the discourse patterns of female speakers (Scheidt 2006). These British adolescent girls 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. 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. In doing so, these adolescent girls maintain the existing power relation, for which they accept men's superiority

Given the fact that British and Spanish societies have witnessed far-reaching developments brought by the influx of women into the public sphere in the last decades (e.g. increase in women's educational level, participation in the labour market, and contribution to household income) and a resulting modification in relationships within the family (e.g. emergence of different family types different from the traditional nuclear family), one may expect that this modification of cultural patterns and a noteworthy increase in women's autonomy would have produced changes in society —particularly on social and gender equity (Kennedy, Robinson, and Trammel 2005).

However, and in spite of the numerous significant advances in the legislative, institutional and cultural spheres, the high frequency of expressions of admiration and of subordination of personal needs to support the ingratiation strategy (see table 3 above) makes it possible to argue that when it comes to love, British and Spanish teenagers do not seem to make a substantial change from the patriarchal roles traditionally ascribed to women (West and Zimmerman 1983; Tannen 1995; Coates 1996; Cameron 1998). More specifically, inspection of the corpus shows that far from understanding that their individual needs for independence provide them with a greater control of environment, and enable them to contribute more meaningfully to their societal

and personal needs, adolescent girls still seem to find self-fulfilment by subordinating their own needs to satisfy those of their couples. In other words, these British and Spanish adolescent girls' conceptualisation of loving relationships shows that progress is still being limited by the symptoms of subordination and dependence seen in the examples. This is especially significant as these teenagers are supposed to have been brought up in a different socio-cultural context. In the light of this, one may conclude that twenty-first century adolescent girls' gain of self-esteem is still at an early stage as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned.

As a result, this perception of bloggers manifests itself in unsavoury behavioural norms such as the persistence of gender inequality. This unequal relationship is clearly demonstrated by the bloggers' inability to act and their excessive expressions of lack of will power (see table 2). Education has not managed to sensitise this twenty-first century generation of teenagers in order to redress the stereotypes so as to give women equal participation based on their capabilities and to avoid the disparities that are mainly due to stereotyped socialisation (Danet 1998 and 2001). Examples have been found in both the British and Spanish corpora where the teenagers' passive and submissive attitude while in love leads both these British and Spanish adolescent girls to justify and tolerate physical violence at the hands of their partner (see table 2). The recurrent idea that love means submission, satisfying the other at any cost, can go hand in hand with accepting verbal abuse and physical violence as part of the relationship. Let us consider the following examples:

Example 7: Blogger 5B. 15 years old

We went to my room and got in bed. I didn't want to have sex with him. I didn't want to lead him on. I turned on my side with my back to him. He snuggled up close and started spooning. He was caressing my arms and back and I enjoyed it until I felt his hand poking me. I wasn't in the mood for sex, I just wanted to be hugged. I tried to fall asleep. I dozed a bit and he was still caressing me. A while later I woke up to him playing with my breasts. I didn't tell him, but it reminded me of sexual abuse I had when I was younger. I laid there like I did back then and pretended I was asleep, hoping he would stop. He didn't. I told him to stop but he didn't. I still felt I had to have sex with him, so I gave in.

Example 8: Blogger 29B. 16 years old

Sorry for not writing but I didn't feel like blogging these days. It has happened again. He insulted me very badly by swearing at me in public and I just couldn't take it anymore so I slapped him. He promised he wouldn't do it again. My friend tells me I should dump him and call the police but I know he can't control it. He loves me and I make him feel jealous. I promised myself that I will never make him jealous again. I love him and I know he

loves me more than words can say. That's what matters to me [...] It was great at first, but now we have started to argue all the time and he has started to feel distant and cold. I have a bad temper and tend to get in his face and scream a lot. Well, we had a reeeeeally bad fight about 4 hours ago. I said some terrible things, and he slapped me. He slapped me so hard that I thought I heard my teeth break.

British female teenage bloggers assess themselves, their opinions and skills in comparison with the other sex. These evaluations have a clear influence on the behaviour of these adolescent girls as the negative appraisals of themselves and their behaviour are always put forward as the reason why the other batters them. Examples illustrate the feeling of being dominated by encroaching forces from the outside (i.e. their boyfriends' needs) which they are unable to resist or control. As females perform 'stereotypical transgressions' (e.g. wearing the wrong clothes, saying the wrong things, behaving in a way they knew beforehand their boyfriends do not approve of), males' violence is validated. Similar instances have been found in the Spanish corpus:

Example 9: Blogger 7S. 15 years old

Me siento hecha una mierda. No puedo creer que llegara tarde otra vez. Sé lo mucho que le jode tener que esperarme. Me merezco todo lo que me dijo [...] Cuando le fui a dar un beso y me empujó, sé que lo hizo sin querer, que no se dio cuenta. NUNCA MÁS LLEGARÉ TARDE, lo juro. No voy a volver a defraudarle.

[I am distraught. I can't believe I was late again. I know waiting for me pisses him off. I deserve everything he said [...] When I wanted to kiss him, he pushed me, I know he didn't mean to hurt me, he didn't realise. I WILL NEVER EVER BE LATE again, I swear. I will not fail him again.]

Example 10: Blogger 24S. 14 years old

Me lo tengo merecido. Cuando llegó Pablo y se puso a hablar conmigo sabía que se iba a chinar, que lo ralla mazo que hable con él [...] No quiero que se chine y cuando nos quedamos solos intenté hablar con él, pero no quiso ni que me acercara...me dio una patada en el estomago pero yo me lo busqué, me lo tenía merecido. Voy a llamarle para decirle que lo siento y que necesito estar con él.

[I deserve it. When Pablo arrived and started talking to me, I knew he'd get mad. He can't put up with me talking to him [...] I don't want him to get mad at me and when we were alone I tried to talk to him, but he didn't even want me to get close [...] he kicked me in the stomach but it was my fault, I did deserve it. I am going to phone him and tell him how sorry I am and how much I need him.]

Female bloggers mainly exploit positive politeness strategies to establish power relations. In doing so, they show a tendency to adhere to their partner's

position (e.g. way of thinking, doing things) and, in turn, they devalue themselves. The central point here is that these adolescent girls present themselves as responsible for the socially reprehensible action. The attitudinal colouring employed to depict the situation defines the other sex as victims who simply acted the way they had to.

Although this is not the concern of this paper, and at the risk of overgeneralising from the examples found in both corpora, these adolescent girls' acceptance of any kind of violence reveals a serious problem in this new generation. In spite of all the efforts made to raise awareness of violence against women as a serious human rights violation and a development issue (García Gómez 2006a and 2006b), there is still a long way to go. As an educator, I am convinced that the best solution is to design a national educational plan in order to raise awareness among children and teenagers of this illness that is undermining the foundations of any civilised society where violence against women, or any human being, must be eliminated.

#### 4.2. IDENTITY RETRIEVAL IN BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS: HEADING TOWARDS ANDROGYNY?

This personal diary facilitates a sense of dialogue with oneself as these online reflections allow female teenagers to define who they are by negotiating differences and similarities with other social members (Chandler and Roberts-Young 1998). Broadly speaking, depictions of broken relationships are in line with the argument that female bloggers' identity revolves around interconnectedness and relationship. As previously stated, 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 (see table 1 above).

One main strategy of self-presentation can be distinguished when narrating broken relationships in both corpora: identity-retrieval. This strategy aims to address power loss by reconnecting the person with their original self. Through weblog writing, British and Spanish female bloggers try to find and recover those lost parts of their essence; that is to say, their own identity as individuals. Expressions of identity-retrieval range from the use of insults, and/or threats, to the validation of masculine expressions and feminisation of masculine expressions. As illustrated in table 4, these are the main realisations that characterise the self-presentation of identity-retrieval:



|  | <b>British</b> | <b>Corpus</b> | <b>Spanish</b> | <b>Corpus</b> |
|--|----------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| <b>Directives:</b>   | Frequency      | Ratio         | Frequency      | Ratio         |
| <b>Imposition and/ or suggestion of a course of action</b> |                |               |                |               |
| 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          |               | 1227           |               |
| <b>Directives:</b>   |                |               |                |               |
| <b>Threats and/or warning</b>                              |                |               |                |               |
| 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          |               |
| <b>Informatives:</b>                                       |                |               |                |               |
| <b>(in-) direct positive self-evaluation</b>               |                |               |                |               |
| Use and validation of masculine expressions assert power   | 567            | 61.89         | 428            | 44.95         |
| Feminisation of masculine expressions that assert power    | 349            | 38.10         | 524            | 55.04         |
| Total  | 916            |               | 952            |               |
| <b>Informatives:</b>                                       |                |               |                |               |
| <b>(in-) direct negative evaluation of the addressee</b>   |                |               |                |               |
| 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          |               |

Table 4. Expressions of identity-retrieval

Interestingly, this strategy of self-presentation not only confirms the tribulations adolescent girls undergo to retrieve their own identity, but it also reveals a culturally-based variation in the activation of androgynous personal schemas. Corpus evidence suggests that British bloggers style themselves by using expressions traditionally ascribed to men (e.g. common masculine expressions associated with masculine attributes and sexuality such as “I’ve got the balls to leave him”, “I’m at the mercy of my nether regions”, “my pants department”), whereas Spanish bloggers feminise these traditionally masculine

expressions<sup>2</sup> (e.g. “When I’ve got the ovaries” instead of “When I’ve got the balls”, “You’re touching my tits” instead of “You’re touching my balls”). In what follows, I will analyse further this culturally-based distinctive self-presentation strategy. Contrary to those entries where bloggers narrate their loving relationships, these British and Spanish adolescent girls are motivated to stay in control and tend to express emotions that reflect their power. The emotional outbursts of female bloggers show how the reflexive project of the self operates within a constant struggle of “commodified influences” (Giddens 1991:123). These adolescent girls 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.

These British and Spanish adolescent girls adopt the discourse patterns traditionally associated with male speakers (Coates 2003). This can be seen in the recurrent employment of threats and/or insults (see table 3 above) which shows that twenty-first century adolescent girls socialise into a more competitive style (e.g. with a verbally aggressive and challenging attitude). In this light, bloggers’ acceptance of male-dominated discourse involves a catharsis in women’s speech and this in turn seems to reflect an underlying complex sociological phenomenon with respect to women’s fight for gender equality. In view of the clear differences between the depictions of females’ loving relationships and broken ones, one may argue that these depictions are the reflection of a still latent inherent conflict between genders and the entrenched attitudes about what is deemed to be appropriate gender behaviour in both the non-domestic sphere and the domestic realm (e.g. men have been traditionally bread winners, whereas women have been housewives).

If we consider females’ self-presentation strategies, it is possible to argue that the traditional gender roles employed in the depictions of the loving relationship suggest that this social interpersonal activity is integrated into women’s domestic domain (Arnot, Araújo, *et al.* 2000, Herring 2007). As social changes take place more slowly in the private sphere, this may be the reason why adolescent girls still conceptualise their gender roles in so traditional a fashion (e.g. conceptualisation of women as mothers and submissive caretakers

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth pointing out how difficult it is to translate these expressions. For instance, the translation of common slang in Spanish such as “Me estás tocando los huevos” meaning “You’re bothering me” or “You piss me off” does not reflect the real nature of the Spanish expression (“You’re touching my balls”). In this sense and even though we are aware that most of the expressions are not idiomatic in English language, we have decided to reflect the real meaning in Spanish language in an attempt to show the androgynous language use. However, an explanation of the Spanish expressions will be given whenever needed to help the reader.

are harder to eradicate). However, those depictions of their broken 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 the public sphere as individuals in the twenty-first century (García Gómez 2006a and 2006b). Depictions of the broken relationship suggest that these adolescent girls no longer accept their inferior position and use distinct discursive strategies (e.g. devaluation of the boyfriends' social image, assertion of autonomy, imposition of different courses of action for the bloggers' benefit) which assimilate them into the stereotypically male way of behaving and dealing with things in the non-domestic sphere.

The discursive strategy is based on the appropriation of the right features for bloggers to define their new self as morally, physically and intellectually superior to their ex-boyfriend. Inspection of the corpus reveals two significant aspects. The first significant aspect is that those gender differences found in the appraisal of their own gender reflects a paradoxical situation. The paradoxical state lies in the fact that the features selected to define the new female self obscure the prototypical sex-roles and stereotypical notions of men's and women's talk (Zimmerman and West 1975; West and Zimmerman 1977; Maltz and Borker 1998) and pull both genders closer. This can be seen in those cases where the same blogger narrates her loving relationship and some entries later her break-up. Analysis of these entries shows that British teenagers reject the traditional female self-images they employed when they were in love and redefine themselves and their female gender role identity in an androgynous style.

The second relevant aspect is that these British and Spanish adolescent girls' identity retrieval is clearly connected to a different conceptualisation of gender identity (Takano 2004). Interestingly, both cultures seem to head towards a particular schema of androgyny which makes it possible to argue a culturally-based redefinition of gender role parameters. In addition, this culturally-based redefinition and the construction of the female self in an androgynous style reveal two different social phenomena resulting from the fight for gender equality in both societies (White 1998). In this light, these British adolescent girls define a masculine self that endows women with all the abilities they lacked when they were in love (e.g. ability to make decisions, strong will power, tendency to impose on others, etc.). This assimilation to the group in power, in a way, blurs the gendered spaces of men and women; however, the deconstruction of the public/domestic binary has several implications. It has made women adopt the masculinised manner in their public persona which, in turn, is causing the loss of the individuality and uniqueness of the female self. Contrarily, these Spanish adolescent girls seem to begin to find

a way to achieve a gendered equality while still preserving integrity and individuality by feminising traditionally masculine expressions. This can be seen in the following examples:

Example 11: Blogger 6B. 16 years old

You're pretty smart alright...for a grinning, drooling twat with a gaping hole in his head, you example of why pregnant women shouldn't work with plutonium. I'd tell you to go fuck yourself and the horse you rode in on, but looking at that stupid grin on your face, I'd say you already have [...] So FUCKING proud of myself. I don't know how I could touch that. He's not even big on having sex. Thank God I stood up for myself and yesterday I got the balls to tell you to do me a favour and have a fatal overdose of your medication. NEVER EVER phone me again or I'll have your back to the wall and teach you what fuck means.

Example 12: Blogger 21E. 14 years old

Stop fucking my life or I'll kick your butt. You think I was a bean flicker but you are wrong. Eat my dick. You fag hole! [...] You babbling, snow-blind, fecal dustbin. You fraudulent, slow-witted fucker. You smiling, disgusting, beef-witted flip-flop. You doltish, overstrung snotface. You flagging, archeozoic, piss stained buffoon. You pilfering, doleful, syncopated budgie. You disjointed self-defeating impacted fracture. You fucking wanker, I hope you get fucked in the ass, at least you'll know how you made me feel.

This adolescent girl gender blindness in such a complex sociological phenomenon may be due to the characteristic blindness of power and the theoretical incoherence of sex role theory for fully explaining resistance and agency (Carrigan *et al.* 1987). This, in turn, supports Connell's (1993:601) claim that "one of the cultural supports of men's power is the failure to ask questions about masculinity". With regard to this Spanish adolescent girls' claim to independence, corpus evidence suggests that a different femininity is constructed in relation to the other sex. In line with research from a cultural studies perspective (Bengoechea 2006), one may argue that this particular femininity can also be regarded as a particular form of masculinity, or at least, it sustains, reproduces and privileges sexist behaviour in a certain way. Let us consider the following examples in the Spanish corpus:

Example 13: Blogger 31S. 15 years old

Eres un mierda eso es lo que eres. No tuviste huevos para dejarme y te liaste con esa guarra. Espero por tu bien que no te cruces en mi camino o prepararé para despedirte de tus preciados huevos. Aunque te advierto que no les ibas a

echar mucho de menos, por que no te sirven para nada [...] Este tío me está tocando las tetas,<sup>3</sup> estoy hasta los pezones<sup>4</sup> de que me deje tirada cada vez que quiera. Me china mazo cuando me mira con esa cara de idiota. Será gilipollas! Un día me voy a bajar las bragas y se voy a poner en toda la cara para que sepa quien manda aquí.

[You're a shit, that's what you are. You didn't have the balls to leave me and you hooked up with that bitch. You'd better get out of my way or else. If I ever see you again, I will kick you in your beloved balls. Although I warn you that you won't miss them much, since they are useless after all [...] This guy is touching my tits, I'm up to my nipples with him standing me up. It fucks me off when he looks at me, with that stupid face. What a jerk! One day I will pull down my panties and stick them onto his face so that he knows who's boss here.]

Example 14: Blogger 4S. 14 years old

Si sabes lo que te conviene no vuelvas por Alonso o te patearé esa cara de culo que tienes. No sé cómo pude fijarme en ti. Si te tuviera aquí te pillaba la polla con el cajón. So MIERDA!! Después de pasarlo fatal, he pasado página. Ese capullo ha pasado a la historia. ¡Que le den! Me lo has hecho pasar fatal que con sólo pensar en ti me entran ganas de potar, pero yo con 2 ovarios<sup>5</sup> que es lo que hay que tener a ver si se cree que me va a torear.

[If you know what's best for you, never ever come back to Alonso<sup>6</sup> or I will kick your disgusting face. I don't know how the heck I set my eyes on you. If you were here, I would slam your dick in a drawer. You shit head!! I really had an awful time, but I have already turned over a new leaf. This jerk is history. Fuck off! You made me have such a bad time that just thinking of you makes me puke. Fortunately I've got two ovaries, that's what a women should have, we'll see if he thinks he can mess around with me.]

By activating this particular femininity, these Spanish adolescent girls allow the researcher to point out an emerging new form of masculinity. Sociologically speaking, this new form can be understood as a shift away from the patriarchal masculinity observed in those entries narrating loving relationships to a strategic competitive masculinity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In line with Connell (1993:191), this phenomenon is a

<sup>3</sup> "He pisses me off." This expression comes from the male counterpart "you're touching my balls."

<sup>4</sup> "I'm fed up with him." This expression comes from the male counterpart "I'm up to my balls" meaning "I'm fed up with, sick of something."

<sup>5</sup> "I am brave enough to do anything." This expression comes from the male counterpart "I've got two balls" meaning "I've got the courage to do anything."

<sup>6</sup> Fashionable place where young people meet at weekends in Madrid.

clear case of strategic masculinity where hegemonic masculinities “reconstitute themselves in new forms which both build upon and transform early forms of masculinity, to maintain dominance”. In the same way that the discourses of masculinism refer to a twenty-first century man who can be publicly sensitive, caring and family minded without being labelled as “feminine” (Kerfoot and Knights 1993), the discourses of feminism refer to a woman who can be publicly tough, independent and aggressive. As illustrated by Kerfoot and Knights (1993), it is true that so competitive a femininity can lead to adolescent girls being self driven for no discernable reason other than maintaining an image of success.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The contrastive study of the tribulations of the teenage female self in personal weblog writing and, more specifically, British and Spanish bloggers’ depictions of their loving relationships and broken ones offers insight into the way adolescents conceptualise gender roles in twenty-first century society, especially in terms of self-expression and peer group relationships. In particular, this research from a cultural studies perspective focuses on how different femininities are constructed in relation to the other sex, and on how particular masculinities become hegemonic in the public sphere. There is evidence to argue that the tribulations of teenage female selves 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 relationships and, on the other hand, the appearance of androgynous behaviour patterns as seen in those entries that narrate bloggers’ broken relationships.

The results make it possible to argue that the instability of teenage female behaviours not only moves away from the stereotypical “rapport talk” traditionally ascribed to women, but it also deals with a culturally-based redefinition of gender roles. Cybergender helps one see how women endorse both patriarchal values and cases of androgyny. For instance, these British adolescent girls’ use of masculine expressions defines interpersonal interaction as a way to claim their place in the public sphere. However, these Spanish adolescent girls’ feminisation of masculine expressions sheds further light on the current sociological process. Finally, this new form of femininity not only shows a wider range of feminine behaviours but it also proves that masculinity is changing. Further thought on the matter leads to the claim that masculinity and femininity may be changing; however, inspection of the tribulations of the

teenage female self highlights the fact that asymmetrical power relations between genders still persist.

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