



Gender Stereotypes 2.0: Self-representations of Adolescents on Facebook

Estereotipos de género 2.0: Auto-representaciones de adolescentes en Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Adolescent girls and boys use online networking sites differently, and girls have a higher risk of being harmed by non-adaptive use. The aim of the study was to assess the extent to which adolescents portray themselves according to gender stereotypes on their Facebook profiles. Participants were 623 Facebook users of both sexes who responded to the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Personal Well-being Index (PWI). In the first step, the adolescents responded to the BSRI with respect to how they view a typical adult in terms of gender stereotypes. In the second step, half of them responded to the BSRI with respect to how they view themselves and the other half responded with respect to their self-presentation on Facebook. The results show that adolescents consider themselves to be less sexually differentiated than a typical adult of their own sex, both in their self-perception and their self-portrayal on Facebook. The study confirms that the psychological well-being of girls decreases considerably with age and that it is associated with a greater degree of masculinity. We conclude that adolescents produce accurate self-representations on their Facebook profiles, and both boys and girls tend to offer a less sexually differentiated self-concept and self-portrayal than that of the typical adult, with a slight preference for masculine traits; moreover, masculinity is associated with a greater degree of psychological well-being.

RESUMEN

Chicas y chicos adolescentes hacen un uso diferente de las redes sociales online, y las chicas presentan un mayor riesgo de verse perjudicadas por un uso no adaptativo. El objetivo de este estudio era investigar en qué medida los adolescentes se presentan en términos de estereotipos de género en sus perfiles de Facebook. Los participantes, 623 usuarios de Facebook de ambos sexos, contestaron el Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) y el Personal Well-being Index (PWI). En la primera fase, respondieron sobre cómo ven a un adulto típico en términos de estereotipos de género. En la segunda fase, la mitad de ellos contestó el BSRI en relación a cómo se ven a sí mismos, y la otra mitad cómo se presentan en Facebook. Los resultados muestran que los adolescentes se consideran más sexualmente indiferenciados que un adulto típico de su mismo sexo, tanto en su auto-percepción como en su presentación en Facebook. Se confirma que el bienestar psicológico de las chicas baja considerablemente con la edad, y que está asociado a un mayor grado de masculinidad. Se concluye que los adolescentes producen representaciones verdaderas en sus perfiles de Facebook, y que existe una tendencia hacia una auto-concepción y auto-presentación más sexualmente indiferenciada con una leve preferencia por rasgos masculinos, tanto en chicos como en chicas; además, la masculinidad está asociada a un mayor grado de bienestar psicológico.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Social networking sites, Facebook, adolescents, gender roles, gender stereotypes, masculinity, femininity, psychological well-being. Redes sociales online, Facebook, adolescentes, roles de género, estereotipos de género, masculinidad, feminidad, bienestar psicológico.



1. Introduction

1.1. Psychological correlates of the use of the Internet and its applications

The development of the Internet and its application has led to an exponential increase in two-way communication channels. While oral communication has remained practically unchanged, written communication has undergone a revolution, especially through social networking sites (SNS) (Carbonell & Oberst, 2015). These means of communication are increasingly present in our daily lives and although their use is expanding throughout the population, they are especially popular among teens and young adults. SNSs offer a new information format and a new communication channel. Through registering and creating a profile, users can display aspects of their identity and connect with other users, interacting in a number of ways (such as through comments, links, photos, videos, and internal chats). Despite rumors about its possible decline and disappearance (Cannarella & Spechler, 2014), Facebook, with 1,59 billion users in 2015 (Statista, 2015), is still the most popular and most used platform in the world and also in Spain (17 million users). Age of initiation to Facebook is dropping, and in general SNSs have replaced email and instant messaging as the principal focus of teens' online activity (García, López-de-Ayala, & Catalina, 2013). It is to be expected that the widespread introduction of a means of communication would impact the habits and psychological structure of users, especially among the youngest ones. This mode of communication tends to begin in adolescence, the developmental stage in which young people construct their identities through contact with their peers.

The first studies on the use of the Internet and online social networks showed a negative effect of computer-mediated communication on the psychological health of teens and young adults, a phenomenon called the Internet Paradox (Kraut & al., 1998). Further research brought nuance to this finding (Kraut & al., 2002), as results showed that these new forms of communication could also have positive effects on psychological adjustment because they allow young people to expand their social networks and satisfy their need for affiliation and self-disclosure (Spies-Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Only 5% of teens say that the use of social networks makes them feel depressed and only 4% say that it has had a negative effect on their relationship with friends. In contrast, 10% report that using them makes them feel less depressed and 52% say that they have helped them maintain or improve their relationships (Rideout, 2012). Nevertheless, since online

social networking through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or text messaging services has become one of the main activities of teens, studies have shown that overuse or maladaptive use of these technologies has negative effects on the well-being and psychological functioning of children and adolescents (Kross & al., 2013; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015) and on their academic achievement (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011).

The use of online social networking has been identified as a potential mental health problem (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Recent studies suggest that negative effects depend on how young people use the technology, on certain specific practices and on the reactions of others, for example, on whether their peers offer positive or negative feedback on their profiles (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Having many Facebook friends is associated with greater subjective well-being and with presenting a positive –and honest– image of oneself (Kim & Lee, 2011). In contrast, young people with the highest levels of falsification on their profiles have fewer social abilities, lower self-esteem, higher social anxiety and higher levels of aggression (Harman, Hansen, Cochran, & Lindsey, 2005).

An important issue of interest in research on SNS is what people disclose on these sites and how they present themselves (impression management). The degree to which social network users disclose information in their interactions depends on various factors, especially on the relationship between interlocutors (Nguyen, Bin & Campbell, 2012). Gendered presentation refers to the different patterns of males and females in their online self-presentations. Taking this as a starting point, the aim of the present study was to assess adolescents' perception of traditional gender roles and their self-perception and self-presentation on Facebook with respect to masculinity and femininity. Taking the Facebook profile as a strategic presentation of one's ideal self, we wanted to learn whether adolescents continue to present themselves in terms of traditional gender roles and to assess whether more intense Facebook use or higher gender typicality in one's Facebook self-presentation correlates with lower psychological well-being.

1.2. Gender differences in the use of ICTs and SNSs

Gender is an important factor in considering the possible negative consequences of the problematic use of ICTs. Multiple studies of computer-mediated communication reveal important sex differences related to

the use of Internet and new technologies in general. For two major Internet applications linked to abuse, pornography and online video games, most of the people with addictions are men. In other applications and technologies, the gender ratio is more balanced, although there are gender differences in how people use the technologies. For example, men use mobile phones primarily for work, logistical matters and entertainment, while women use them primarily for establishing and maintaining social relationships (Beranuy, Oberst, Carbonell, & Chamarro, 2009).

Studies of social networks and gender show that men's and women's patterns of behavior are also reproduced in this means of communication. The different motives in men and women for using online social networks are parallel to their motives for using the Internet (Bond, 2009). Young women use these pages mainly for communication and self-presentation (Barker, 2009), while men mainly use them for pragmatic reasons or entertainment (Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012). Women are also more likely than men to express emotions on these applications; to self-disclose; to post more images of themselves, friends and significant others; and to change their profile pictures more often (Strano, 2008). In contrast, men are more likely to present themselves as strong, powerful, independent and having high status. According to some authors (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008), both men and women adopt self-presentations that conform to traditional codes of masculinity and femininity. According to these norms, men have been considered more instrumental and less emotional, and women have been considered more expressive. Women's online self-portrayals may also lead to self-objectification (de-Vries & Peter, 2013). Most authors conclude that Facebook helps identity construction while also maintaining traditional gender stereotypes (Linne, 2014). More women than men also appear to suffer from the inappropriate use of Facebook. Women are more likely to indicate that they lose sleep because of their Facebook activity, that their activity causes them stress, that images on FB

cause negative self body image, and that they feel addicted (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012).

1.3. Gender stereotypes

The construction of gender identity is an ongoing process, which begins in early childhood. The influence of family members, peers and the media converge to impact young people's self-concept (Lieper & Friedman, 2007). The process culminates in adolescence, when gender role identification is more pronounced (Galambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990).

The aim of the present study was to assess adolescents' perception of traditional gender roles and their self-perception and self-presentation on Facebook with respect to masculinity and femininity. Taking the Facebook profile as a strategic presentation of one's ideal self, we wanted to learn whether adolescents continue to present themselves in terms of traditional gender roles and to assess whether more intense Facebook use or higher gender typicality in one's Facebook self-presentation correlates with lower psychological well-being.

Unlike the biological category «sex», the term «gender» is understood and explained through social role theory (Eagly, 1987) as a social construction that emerges through a process of ongoing learning related to behaviors, perceptions and expectations that define what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender stereotypes are composed of a series of characteristics associated with women or men (López-Zafra, García-Retamero, Diekman, & Eagly, 2008). In this sense, gender roles are not simply descriptive or explanatory categories (López-Sáez, Morales, & Lisbona, 2008); rather, they are also prescriptive and they refer to what an individual perceives about how others expect him or her to behave. Therefore, men and women are subject to different normative expectations, and those factors can lead to gender differences in behavior.

Studies demonstrate that men are expected to be more agentic (task-oriented, assertive, controlling,

independent and unemotional), and that women are expected to be more communicative and oriented towards interpersonal relationships (Guadagno, Muscanell, Okdie, Burk, & Ward, 2011). Nonetheless, typically masculine and typically feminine traits –that is, masculinity and femininity– have changed in recent decades, and traditional masculine and feminine roles are losing importance (Holt & Ellis, 1998; López-Zafra & al., 2008; (Martínez-Sánchez, Navarro-Olivas, & Yubero-Jiménez, 2009).

However, while women now tend to assign themselves traits considered typically masculine, adopting an androgynous self-perception, men do not do the same with feminine traits (López-Sáez & al., 2008). It seems that typically feminine characteristics are less socially desirable, while masculine traits are more socially desirable. Therefore, girls want to display more masculinity while boys do not want to display more femininity. It has also been observed that the internalization of gender stereotypes is more ingrained in adolescent boys than in adolescent girls (Colás & Villaciervos, 2007).

Gender and gender roles have important psychological correlates. While in earlier studies conduct congruent with one's own gender was considered to be psychologically adaptive (Whitley & Bernard, 1985; Williams & D'Alessandro, 1994), later studies showed that either masculinity (Woo & Oei, 2006) or androgyny (high masculinity and high femininity) correlates positively to psychological adjustment (Williams & D'Alessandro, 1994). However, the results of other studies are not consistent with this finding (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003). Moreover, neither masculinity nor femininity presents itself as uniformly positive. In a study performed with adult participants, masculinity predicted less depression but more antisocial problems and substance use (Lengua & Stormshak, 2000).

Traditional gender stereotypes are generated and maintained by social structure and an individual will conform or not to them depending on the response that he or she receives. Back & al. (2010) emphasize the fact that online social networks integrate several sources of personal information that act as a mirror of the different environments of the person, such as private thoughts, facial images, and social conduct (both their own and those of others). In this sense, the person receives and generates different displays depending on and in accordance with the peer group. Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan (2013) have argued that SNSs represent an environment of elevated public surveillance, which makes both girls and boys present

themselves more in accordance with gender norms than what they would do in face-to-face contexts.

Social context shapes identity, including gender identity. And because stereotypes are a fundamental element of gender identity, it follows that Internet social networks also influence it. From the perspective of gender, the necessity of presenting oneself in a certain way may be different for girls and for boys. It is possible that gender stereotypes play a more important role in girls' virtual self-presentation than in their self-presentation in face-to-face social contexts, and this may increase their psychological discomfort. One study found that girls on Facebook wanted to be nicer, sexier, stronger and more objective, while boys didn't desire any change (Renau, Carbonell, & Oberst, 2012). Gender roles and stereotypes have a fundamental role in gender identity and in shaping the personality of pre-teens and teens, and SNSs have great relevance today in the identity formation of young people (Linne, 2014). For these reasons we wanted to investigate the presence of gender stereotypes on these networks and their implications for psychological well-being.

We established the following hypotheses:

- H1: As outlined before, earlier studies have shown a decrease in self-attributed gender stereotypes (Martínez-Sánchez, Navarro-Olivas, & Yubero-Jiménez, 2009). Therefore we expected participants to present themselves as less masculine or feminine than their perception of a typical male or female.
- H2: It has also been shown (Ruble & Martin, 1998) that teens' awareness of gender roles increases with age. Therefore, we expected the participants to perceive the typical adult as increasingly more stereotyped, and we also expected their self-perception scores to increase in gender typicality.
- H3: Previous studies have shown that Facebook profiles accurately represent the personality of their users and do not display self-idealization (Back & al., 2010; Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011). Therefore, we expected adolescents' online self-presentations to be likewise accurate in terms of gender stereotypes, i.e. there should be no difference between the scores based on self-perception and those based on self-presentation in their Facebook profiles.
- H4: As found in earlier studies (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014), we expected girls to make more use of FB and have more FB friends, and also to show less psychological well-being than boys.
- H5: According to studies on gender roles (e.g. Woo & Oei, 2006), masculinity in online profiles

should have a positive association with psychological well-being, whereas femininity should not.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 623 secondary school students (331 females) aged between 12 and 16 (1st to 4th year of ESO, which are the first four years of Spanish compulsory secondary schooling), from different Spanish schools in the region of Catalonia. All participants had a personal Facebook profile under their real identity (table 1).

	1ºESO (1st year)	2ºESO (2nd year)	3ºESO (3rd year)	4ºESO (4th year)	total
Boys	33	55	115	89	292
Girls	29	64	118	120	331

2.2. Instruments

Number of Facebook friends and frequency of Facebook use: participants were asked to indicate the number of Facebook friends they had as well as their frequency of FB connection, using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (once a month) to 5 (several times a day).

Sex roles: the Spanish adaptation of the Bem Sex Roles Inventory (BSRI, Páez & Fernández, 2004) was used to assess sex role stereotypes. This version of the scale consists of 18 items (adjectives or short expressions, such as «sensitive to others' needs»), with nine in each of two dimensions corresponding to the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in a Likert-type scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The BSRI offers the possibility for respondents to rate masculinity and femininity of a «typical male» and a «typical female», and then to rate the respondents self-perception of his or her gender typicality. For the «typical male», Cronbach's α 's were =.812 for masculinity, and .817 for femininity; for the «typical female», Cronbach's α 's were =.733 for masculinity, and .788 for femininity.

Personal well-being: the Spanish adaptation of the Personal Well-Being Index Scale (PWI; Casas & al., 2011) was used. The scale consists of seven items on a Likert scale from 1 (no satisfaction at all) to 10 (completely satisfied),

each item asking for the respondent's satisfaction in a different area in life (e.g. health, personal relationships, etc.) and yielding an overall score of personal well-being. In this study, Cronbach's reliability index was $\alpha=.75$.

2.3. Procedure

The study was approved by the funding institution and the Institutional Research Committee of the Ramon Llull University. Informed consent from school authorities and parents was obtained. Participants answered the questionnaires in a paper-and-pencil format within a classroom context. In the first step, all participants replied to the BSRI, indicating scores for what they considered to be a typical male (TM) and a typical female (TF). In a second step, half of each class answered the questionnaires in reference to themselves (condition SELF), and the other half opened their Facebook profiles on their personal computers and assessed their own profiles (condition FB) with respect to the BSRI. Finally, in the last step, all students answered the PWI.

2.4. Data analysis

The subscales for masculinity (mas) and femininity (fem) were calculated for the respondents' perception of a typical male and a typical female (thus obtaining masTM, femTM, masTF, femTF), as well as for themselves, either in the SELF or in the FB condition (obtaining masRES, femRES). Two paired-sample t-tests were run for boys and for girls to assess the difference between the participants' perception of themselves and a typical adult (typical female in the case of girls and typical male in the case of boys). To test the effects of gender, grade, and condition on number of Facebook friends, frequency of Facebook use, psychological well-being, masTM, femTM, masTF, femTF, masRES, femRES, a 2x4x2 MANOVA was run. Correlations between the dependent variables were calculated. As indicator of effect size, the eta-

	Condition SELF		Condition FB	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Nº of Facebook friends	410(338.69)	550(428.64)	454.66(420.34)	512.53(287.97)
Connection time	3.64 (1.32)	3.88(1.24)	3.51(1.38)	4.06 (1.02)
Psychological well-being	56.78 (8.75)	54.88 (8.83)	56.61(7.52)	54.33 (8.61)
Masculinity typical same-sex adult	38.89 (8.15)	34.38 (7.69)	40.16 (8.55)	32.84 (7.16)
Femininity typical same-sex adult	33.66 (7.65)	48.47 (6.67)	32.33 (8.07)	47.06 (7.15)
Masculinity respondent	34.30 (8.96)	32.67 (8.30)	32.41 (8.38)	27.68 (8.75)
Femininity respondent	34.09 (7.13)	39.98 (6.71)	32.80 (8.76)	38.92 (8.97)

square (η^2) coefficients were calculated. All data analyses were effectuated with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS version 22.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics are set out in table 2.

3.1. Results of self-presentation with respect to typical adult

Compared to their perception of a typical male, boys scored themselves as lower with respect to masculinity ($t=10.718$, $p=.000$, $df=274$), with respect to the typical female, girls rated themselves as lower both for masculinity ($t=7.705$, $p=.000$, $df=314$) and for femininity ($t=19.318$, $p=.000$, $df=318$).

3.2. Effects of gender, grade and condition on the dependent variables

The results of the 2x4x2 MANOVA are shown in table 3. For the main effects, as expected, girls show higher scores in femininity, while boys rate higher in masculinity. Girls also have more Facebook friends and rate the typical female's masculinity and femininity as higher than boys do. As for the effects of grade, the number of Facebook friends and connection time increases. Additionally, the participants' perception of a typical female's masculinity increases with age. For the combined effect of gender and grade, it is noteworthy that the girls' femininity as well as their well-being decreases with age. There was no effect of the interaction of gender*condition or grade*condition, and for the interaction of all three sources there was only an effect for well-being. The finding of no combined effects for condition with respect to the respondents' masculinity and femininity indicates that there is no difference in self-perception and self-presentation on Facebook. Therefore, for subsequent analysis, the scores of both conditions were taken together.

3.3. Correlations

Psychological well-being correlated positively with masculinity ($r=.142$, $p<.01$). Both masculinity and femininity also correlated with number of Facebook friends ($r=.119$, and $r=.138$, respectively, both with

Table 3. Results of the 2x4x2 MANOVA

Source	Variable	F	p	η
Gender				
	Facebook friends	4.421	.036	.008
	Connection time	3.389	.066	.006
	Psychological well-being	1.947	.164	.004
	MasTM	1.804	.180	.003
	FemTM	3.650	.057	.007
	MasTF	9.516	.002	.018
	FemTF	8.356	.004	.016
	mas RES	18.073	.000	.035
	fem RES	82.588	.000	.136
Grade				
	Facebook friends	8.846	.000	.048
	Connection time	2.760	.042	.015
	Psychological well-being	1.804	.145	.010
	MasTM	2.203	.087	.012
	FemTM	.976	.404	.006
	MasTF	3.991	.008	.022
	FemTF	.718	.541	.004
	mas RES	2.135	.095	.012
	fem RES	1.242	.294	.007
Gender x grade				
	Psychological well-being	3.356	.016	.019
	fem RES	3.557	.016	.019
Gender x grade x condition				
	Psychological well-being	2.274	.008	.022

Note. As there were no significant effects for condition, the corresponding section is omitted to save space. For the same reason, in the combined effects (gender x grade; gender x grade x condition), only the significant results are given.

$p<.01$), while frequency of Facebook connection showed a correlation with femininity ($r=.133$, $p<.01$).

3.4. Additional analyses

To explore the reasons for the girls' decreasing well-being, an additional MANOVA for gender and grade with respect to the individual items of the PWI was run. For the interaction, there were significant effects, i.e. a decrease in satisfaction in girls with respect to their health ($F=3.580$, $p=.014$, $\eta^2=.017$), to their feeling of safety ($F=2.797$, $p=.039$, $\eta^2=.013$), to their group relationships ($F=4.010$, $p=.008$, $\eta^2=.019$), and to their future ($F=3.252$, $p=.021$, $\eta^2=.016$).

4. Discussion

In this study we assessed the degree to which adolescents continue to define themselves in terms of gender stereotypes and whether their online self-presentation differs from their face-to-face self-presentation. Our results show that adolescents are aware of traditional gender stereotypes, but that they view themselves in a less stereotyped and more sexually undifferentiated way than their perception of a typical adult of their sex. These findings confirm our first hypothesis and are in line with other studies that show a change

in traditional gender stereotypes among Spanish adolescents (García-Retamero, Müller, & López-Zafra, 2011; García-Vega, Robledo-Menéndez, García-Fernández, & Rico-Fernández, 2010). However, girls continue to have higher femininity scores than boys and vice versa, as found in other studies (López-Sáez & al., 2008). While García-Vega & al. (2010) found that a majority of adolescents characterized themselves as androgynous (high masculinity, high femininity), in our study there is a tendency toward a more undifferentiated profile (low masculinity, low femininity), especially for females.

The second hypothesis is partially confirmed: Participants' perception of a typical adult also varies with sex and age: as adolescents grow older, they perceive a typical female (but not a typical male) as having more masculine attributes, i.e. it is confirmed that gender role typification increases during adolescence (Galambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990). Girls have a more androgynous view of a typical female than boys (higher masculinity and higher femininity). However, the girls' own femininity decreases with age. These results suggest a tendency of girls to endorse less feminine and more masculine attributes for themselves as future adults, both in self-perception and in online self-presentation.

With respect to hypothesis 3, our results also confirm earlier findings that people present an accurate image of themselves on SNSs. The fact that there was no condition effect leads us to the conclusion that adolescents' self-presentation on their Facebook profiles does not differ from their self-perception. This finding indicates that the participants perform honest self-presentation not only with respect to personality (Back & al., 2010), but also with respect to other dimensions related to personal attributes. We conclude that adolescents not only consider themselves to be more sexually undifferentiated with respect to gender typicality, but also want to be seen as such (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011).

Finally, the well-established finding of girls' decreasing well-being has also been confirmed in our study, and this seems to be related to increasing concerns about their health, safety, relationships, and future (hypothesis 4). Well-being correlated positively with masculinity, whereas femininity showed no influence, a finding that confirms hypothesis 5. Thus, perceiving oneself as having more masculine (desirable?) traits is a source of well-being. The case of femininity is not so clear. It has been argued (Renau & al., 2012) that high femininity has a negative effect, i.e. a more feminine self-presentation on Facebook is related to less psycho-

logical well-being. In our study, as girls grow older they score lower in femininity but nevertheless their well-being scores also decrease.

5. Conclusions

Our results confirm tendencies in gender role changes described in earlier studies and extend these results to online profile self-presentations. Teens show congruency between their face-to-face self-perception and how they want to be seen by others online. Traditional gender stereotypes seem to blur; both sexes offer self-presentations on Facebook that are less masculine and less feminine than what they perceive to be typical people of their own sex. Our results reveal a sex difference in this area, as females' self-presentation is even less feminine than males' self-presentation is masculine. Also, traditional masculine attributes are more related to well-being and boys score higher for both well-being and the masculinity of their self-presentations.

Social media such as Facebook produce more opportunities for social comparison than face-to-face contexts, and thus impression management is an important aspect of online representations. SNSs foster self-promotion and narcissistic self-representation (Mehdzadeh, 2010), in addition to a need for popularity (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Girls achieve these self-portrayals by strategically selecting their profile pictures (Krämer & Winter, 2008) and by displaying attractiveness (Manago & al., 2008), familial relations and emotional expressions (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014).

The profile that people make public on an Internet social network acts like a mirror – a mirror that we ourselves manage – and with it we design our self-presentation (Gonzales & Hancock, 2010). Social comparison is another mechanism, since when we find ourselves in an ambiguous situation, we turn to the immediate environment for the information that we need; for example, the behavior of others. Social comparison is inevitable on online social networks. In fact, according to some authors, it is one of the reasons why users maintain profiles on such networks, because doing so helps to shape personality (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008). Each time we open our profile we encounter an image of what we are projecting about ourselves, which becomes a reminder and a reaffirmation of what we are (Gonzales & Hancock, 2010). Future studies of SNSs and gender should bear this in mind. Institutional efforts, such as educational programs for promoting safer use of Facebook among adolescents in school settings (Van-

derhoven, Schellens, & Valcke, 2014), should also teach adolescents about what to disclose on their profiles and how to present themselves in order to prevent possible harmful effects.

6. Limitations

This study presents some limitations. Gender stereotypes depend to a great extent on the cultural context and therefore sampling was restricted to Catalonia in order to achieve a culturally homogeneous sample. However, this might be a limitation for the generalizability of the results.

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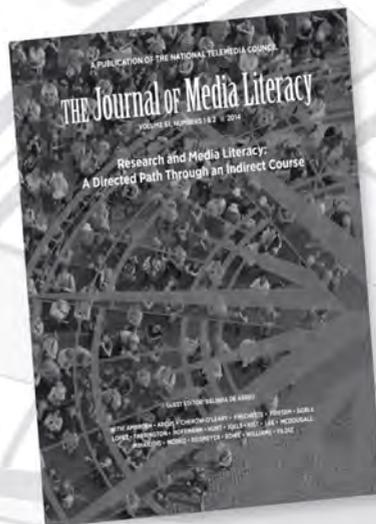
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