Writing from Experience

Doorn, Niels van; Zoonen, Liesbet van; Wyatt, Sally

Mitglied der

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Writing from Experience

Presentations of Gender Identity on Weblogs

Niels van Doorn

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Liesbet van Zoonen

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Sally Wyatt

VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE STUDIO, AMSTERDAM

ABSTRACT   This article examines how weblog authors present their online gender identity, in order to establish how these modes of presentation fit into the research landscape about gender identity and computer-mediated communication (CMC). After a preliminary descriptive analysis of a sample of Dutch and Flemish weblogs, the authors conduct a qualitative content analysis of four of these 'blogs'. They conclude that these weblog writers present their gender identity through narratives of 'everyday life' that remain closely related to the binary gender system. However, their performance of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is more diffuse and heterogeneous than some theories in the field of gender and CMC would assume. In addition, the act of diary writing on weblogs can be understood as challenging the masculine connotation of the weblog as an ICT, demonstrating that the use of a technology is pivotal in shaping the ways in which technologies themselves are conceived of as 'masculine' or 'feminine'.

KEY WORDS   CMC ◆ gender ◆ ICT ◆ identity ◆ mutual shaping ◆ weblogs

INTRODUCTION

The past few years have seen an enormous increase in the prominence of weblogs, illustrated not only by the increasing number of 'blogs' on the Internet but also by growing media attention to this phenomenon. Much of

this attention is fuelled by the realization that certain weblog authors have been gaining influence over public opinion concerning certain sociopolitical issues.[1] But it is not just this small group of prominent intellectuals who are engaging in the act of 'blogging', hundreds of thousands of others have joined them and created their own weblogs to express themselves and share their ideas with the world. In this way, weblogs are offering a new forum for the 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959), through a technology that incorporates various media into one 'arena' (Miller, 1995).

If this 'new forum' is also capable of instigating new ways in which this 'self' can be presented, weblogs could potentially offer new perspectives on the relation between the Internet and the expression of identity. In addition, the question arises whether weblogs are able to challenge certain assumptions about the relationship between gender identity and computer-mediated communication (CMC). This study examines how weblog authors present their online gender identity, through the analysis of a sample of Dutch and Flemish weblogs. We first briefly examine how the relationship between gender identity and CMC has been theorized over the past 20 years, and how recent studies of weblogs might fit into these theories. The subsequent analysis shows how these weblog authors present their gender identity through narratives of 'everyday life' that remain closely tied to the binary gender system. However, their performance of masculinity and femininity is more diffuse and heterogeneous than some theories would assume.

GENDER IDENTITY AND CMC: THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Looking at the research on the relationship between gender identity and CMC that has accumulated over the past 20 years, three general strands of research can be identified. One group of studies focuses on the online representation of the 'real life' self, which is considered to be located offline. Here, the emphasis is on the 'inextricable' relation between the 'real' person behind the keyboard and the online persona that forms its representation in cyberspace. In Goffman's terms, the person behind the keyboard can be seen as a 'performer' who acts out a 'character'; the online persona (Goffman, 1959). While the character is considered 'a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented', Goffman believes that the 'attributes of the individual *qua* performer are not merely a depicted effect of particular performances; they are psycho-biological in nature' (Goffman, 1959: 223–4).

Similarly, studies that emphasize the representational aspect of the relation between online and offline gender identity see the persona that is performed in cyberspace as rooted in a unified, embodied self that is located in the physical world. These studies have focused on diverse

applications, including Bulletin Boards, Usenet groups, IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and homepages on the World Wide Web (for an overview of some of these studies, see Döring, 2002). The emphasis has often been on the differences or similarities between men and women's Internet use. In a study about the presentation of self on web-based homepages, Miller and Mather (1998) found that:

> Men's pages were shorter, that there was more variety in length and self-reference in women's pages, and that women made more reference to the reader and seemed to be showing more awareness of those who could be viewing their pages than men did. (Miller and Mather, 1998, cited in Miller and Arnold, 2000: 335)

As stated earlier, studies like that of Miller and Mather emphasize the conception of the 'real' gendered self as located in the physical offline world. When there is a discrepancy between this 'real' offline self and the 'virtual' identity presented online, the performance of this identity is often considered a deception. This is made clear in Donath's discussion of identity deception on Usenet newsgroups, which are considered to be hazardous to the online community and its interpersonal relationships based on trust (Donath, 1999). Identity deception is a recurring theme in the work of Turkle, who has studied the way individuals 'play' with their gender identity in online locales such as MUDs (Multi User Dungeons). Paying special attention to 'gender swapping', Turkle views the online performance of 'pretending' to be of the 'other sex' as a way for individuals to experiment with different identities to eventually learn more about their 'real' self – which is, again, located offline (Turkle, 1995).

Other studies have treated the possibilities for creating different online identities with greater enthusiasm. The idea of 'being who- or whatever you want to be' in cyberspace, without being constrained by one's 'real life', physical body is welcomed by theorists who focus on the construction of alternative gender identities in an online environment. Research that emphasizes the 'online construction of gender' sees the Internet as facilitating the creation of 'disembodied' identities whose gender is 'disarticulated from biological sex', allowing for the unbridled creation of fluid identities that transgress the binary gender system (O'Brien, 1999; Rodino, 1997).

In her study on Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Reid (1993) contends that gender's common equation with sex becomes problematic when 'gender reassignment can be effected by a few touches at a keyboard' (Reid, 1993: 64). Similarly, studies by Danet (1996) and Bruckman (1993) have respectively argued how the use of 'nicknames' (on IRC) and 'characters' (on MUDs) can be used to indicate one's gender (or lack thereof) in the 'disembodied realm' of cyberspace.

In another strand of research, Wajcman (2004) addresses the 'mutual shaping' process of gender and technology, arguing that 'technology is both

a source and a consequence of gender relations' (Wajcman, 2004: 7; see also van Zoonen, 1992). This insight is grounded in feminist science and technology studies (STS), which build on the premise that culture and technology are mutually constitutive, claiming that 'just as gender produces and is produced by culture, so technologies reflect, structure and produce gender relations' (Terry and Calvert, 1997, cited in Kennedy, 2005: 472).

In a recent study, Herring et al. (2004) discuss how a relatively new communication technology such as the 'weblog' is discursively constructed by the media as adult and masculine, excluding women and teens from the discourse on weblogs and marginalizing their activities as 'bloggers'. Traditional stereotypes about masculinity and femininity are combined with the mass media's disproportionate attention for a 'masculine' form of 'blogging' (the 'filterblog'[2]), resulting in a biased discourse that co-produces the weblog as a gendered technology. This study is characterized by its emphasis on the mutual shaping process of gender and CMC. However, since the research on weblogs is still in its infancy (Herring et al., 2004), it remains to be seen how weblogs fit into the existing research landscape about the relationship between gender and CMC. Having so far focused on various aspects of the relation between gender identity and CMC (i.e. representation, construction and mutual shaping), it is now time to examine what exactly constitutes a 'weblog' and how it can be conceptualized in relation to gender identity.

GENDER IDENTITY AND WEBLOGS

Weblogs emerged in the late 1990s as a 'separately recognized category of web page mainly when specialized tools that help users create such sites were developed' (Ó Baoill, 2004: 2). They take advantage of the unique features of the Internet and are characterized by the following features: web page with small chunks of hypertext (known as 'posts'), date-stamped entries, ordered reverse-chronologically and (sometimes) hyperlinks and readers' commentary.[3]

Weblogs offer their users the possibility to combine various media into one format, increasing the 'bandwidth' of the communication. Weblog authors are able to use different technological features (images, audio and video) to express themselves, providing a rich environment for 'the presentation of self'.

Next to the weblog's technical format, another frequently discussed aspect of weblogs is the creation of community through the act of 'blogging' and the installation of a list of links known as a 'blogroll' (Ó Baoill, 2004). When people engage in the act of blogging, they add 'posts' to their weblog, allowing their audience to read these new entries and provide feedback. This fosters a reciprocal relationship in which people often add

others' weblogs to their own 'blogroll', creating a network of web-logs, often referred to as the 'blogosphere' (Lampa, 2004; Ó Baoill, 2004; Packwood, 2004; Schaap, 2004).

The 'blogosphere', like most social communities, is not homogeneous. Divisions between different kinds of weblogs can be made using various criteria, but the most common is between 'linklogs', 'lifelogs' and 'pho-tologs' (Schaap, 2004). Like the 'filterblog' mentioned by Herring et al., the 'linklog' consists primarily of hyperlinks to important events, 'note-worthy' news items and other weblogs or websites. Little to no attention is given to personal information, because of the formal character of the linklog and the fact that there are often multiple authors. In contrast, the 'lifelog' is a very personal weblog, typically created by one author who shares all kinds of personal information with his/her audience on a regu-lar basis. Unlike the authors of linklogs, lifelog authors have a closer rela-tionship with their audiences, often expecting some reciprocity. This is the kind of weblog that gives the blogosphere the sense of community and identity for which it is known. Finally, the 'photolog' is a 'photo only' weblog, usually created by individuals interested in photography who want to share their photos. Like linklogs, most photologs lack any per-sonal information about the author.

For this study, the lifelog is the most interesting, since the authors of this type of weblog are engaged in presenting their identity through the personal information they disclose as they write about their daily lives. In this sense, keeping a weblog shows similarities to the act of 'diary writ-ing', with the weblog author as diarist (McNeil, 2003; Sorapure, 2003; van Dijck, 2005). Both Herring et al. (2004) and Sorapure (2003) mention the fact that most lifelogs are kept by women. This is in accordance with what Hogan calls the 'particular congeniality of diary writing as a preferred form of autobiography for many women' (Hogan, 1991, cited in Sorapure, 2003: 20). Thus we are confronted with a remarkable intersection between the traditionally feminine act of diary writing and the traditionally masculine environment of ICT. From a mutual shaping perspective, the feminine use of the weblog can be seen as 'emasculating' a historically masculine technology, thereby 'regendering' the weblog.

In a different study on weblogs, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) examine the ways teenage 'bloggers' present and express themselves. They con-clude that 'the online presentations of teenagers demonstrate that blogs are an extension of the real world, rather than a place where people like to pre-tend' (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005: 24–5). They found that both male and female teenagers reveal a similarly large amount of personal information on their weblogs and that males used more emoticons to express them-selves than females did, employed 'a more active and resolute style of language' and were more likely to present themselves as gay (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005: 1). While they carefully avoid locating these gender

differences in biological sex, they nevertheless contend that these teenagers are engaged in 'the very serious business of creating a stable cohesive set of images about who they are' (Huffaker and Calvert, 2005: 30). This recalls studies that focus on the representation of a unified self that may 'explore' and 'play' with different identities online, but whose 'real' identity is considered to be located in the offline, physical world (Turkle, 1995). Teenagers, here, are seen as 'on their way' to attaining that 'cohesive set of images' that will allow them to find their 'true identity'.

Our aim is to investigate how weblog authors present their gender identity on their weblogs, in order to examine how these modes of presentation fit into the present research landscape about gender identity and CMC. To summarize, our research questions are:

1. How do weblog authors present their gender identity on their weblogs?
2. How does the presentation of gender identity on weblogs fit into the existing research landscape about the relationship between gender identity and CMC?

METHOD

To study the presentation of gender identity on Dutch and Flemish[4] weblogs, approximately 500 weblogs were reviewed for personal information. These weblogs were accessed through three weblog portals, each of which featured an alphabetically ordered list of Dutch and Flemish 'blogs'.[5] From this list, every 10th weblog was chosen and searched for personal information. When this sequence was finalized, every 11th, 12th and 13th weblog was searched in the same manner.

On this basis, 97 weblogs including personal information – either on the main page or 'one mouse click away' – were selected. The final sample included 100 different weblog authors, whose personal information was examined and categorized into the following 'representational domains':[6] sex, age, education, occupation, relationship status, nationality, location, language, presence of pets, hobbies/interests, inclusion of photographs, sexual preferences and reason for blogging.

A basic descriptive analysis was conducted based on this personal information. Frequencies were run for all variables ('domains') except 'age' – the only non-nominal variable. Crosstabs were produced for the variable 'sex' with every other variable except 'age'. An 'independent samples t-test' was run for the variable 'age'.

The second part of the study features a qualitative analysis of the entries posted by four of the 100 weblog authors. These authors were selected based on the descriptive analysis, which suggested a profile of

the 'typical blogger': Dutch, heterosexual, urban, man or woman, aged 29, college-level education, employed and writes in Dutch. Two bloggers fitting this profile were selected for more detailed analysis and two people were selected because they deviated from this profile in significant ways.

For each of these four authors, the last 10 entries on his/her weblog were subjected to a content analysis, working back from 15 November 2005. This was done in order to examine how these people present their gender identity beyond the display of their basic personal information. Consequently, our discussion excludes any information that did not pertain to the online performance of gender identity. The content analysis focused on the use of images, the use of hyperlinks, choice of topics and language use, including the use of emoticons.

These four aspects function as different dimensions in which the presentation of gender identity can occur. In addition to focusing on the discursive performance of gender identity, we emphasize the possibilities of performing gender through technical features like the display of images and the inclusion of hyperlinks. Each aspect was analysed to examine how it contributed to the bloggers' presentation of gender identity. Thus, we looked at the images used and how this choice contributed to the presentation of gender. We also examined whether the bloggers made use of hyperlinks to web destinations with a particular masculine or feminine connotation. In addition, the choice of topics was analysed for gender cues. Finally, language use was checked to evaluate their writing style. Traditionally, formal or business-like language has been associated with masculine behaviour, while informal, personalized language has been linked to femininity (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990).

The following section provides the results of the study, first presenting a descriptive analysis based on the bloggers' personal information and then analysis of examples from the two typical and two atypical bloggers regarding their implicit and explicit presentations of gender.

REPRESENTING GENDER IDENTITY

We begin this section by giving an overview of the basic personal information that was displayed by the 100 Dutch/Flemish weblog authors. Of the 100 bloggers in the total sample, 43 were male and 57 were female; the average age was 29.9 for the men compared to 29.4 for the women. Twenty-nine bloggers disclosed information about their sexual preference (M = 10, F = 19), of whom 27 indicated themselves to be heterosexual (M = 8, F = 19). Forty-six people mentioned that they lived in an urban environment (M = 24, F = 22, with 40 people not disclosing their location). Of the 36 bloggers who disclosed information about their education, 17 mentioned they had completed (or were in the process of completing) a

college-level education (M = 9, F = 8). Finally, of the 100 bloggers, 96 wrote in Dutch (M = 39, F = 57).

At first glance, this suggests a profile of the 'typical blogger', as described above. However, this depiction of a 'typical' Dutch blogger masks a considerable amount of diversity within the total sample. As can be seen, much information is missing. For instance, when only 36 bloggers disclose information about their education this means that 64 withheld this information. The exact reasons for such a decision remain uncertain, but it does suggest that educational status does not play an important role in the self-presentation of many Dutch and Flemish bloggers. Also, 71 bloggers refrained from giving information about their sexual preference. It is not clear whether this is indicative of an assumed heterosexuality among Dutch/Flemish bloggers, or whether it is another domain that these bloggers choose to omit from their 'presentation of self'. The majority of bloggers also chose to leave 'relationship status' and 'reason for blogging' undisclosed.

Male and female bloggers present themselves differently on Dutch/ Flemish weblogs. Most notably, of the 74 bloggers that mention their hobbies or interests, seven women refer to having a 'domestic' hobby, while no men refer to such an interest.[7] In contrast, nine men mention their affinity with ICT, whereas only one woman does so. This relates to the 'occupational' domain (66 valid answers), where 12 men refer to their occupation within ICT, compared to only two women ICT professionals. Eight men present themselves as 'students', compared to only four women. Regarding occupation, 37 men and 29 women choose to present this information. Keeping in mind the division between men and women in the total sample (M = 43, F = 57), it is clear that 'occupation' is an important representational domain for these male bloggers.

Of the 25 bloggers who mention owning a pet, only two are male. The men seem to want to avoid presenting themselves within a domestic context, while the women feel less apprehensive about doing so.

Only 29 people provide a reason for their blogging: 15 want to share their experiences and interests, while 10 feel that writing has become a hobby. Only four (all women) mention blogging as an emotional release. In contrast, more men say they have a weblog to share their experiences and interests with others (M = 9, F = 6). These results suggest that the men in this sample are careful not to represent themselves as too 'emotional', but instead choose to contextualize their blogging in a more formal way, emphasizing sharing information and ideas. Like some of the women, some men might also feel that keeping a weblog provides them with an outlet that cannot find in their daily offline lives, but they decline to state this because of gender-stereotypical expectations. Finally, the four bloggers who do not write in Dutch are men, two of whom state that they keep a weblog to share their experiences. Perhaps they feel that writing in English provides them with a larger and more international readership.

This analysis has shown how Dutch/Flemish bloggers present their identity through various 'representational domains', addressing some while omitting others. Initially, this suggested a profile of the 'typical blogger', but we have shown that our sample included a wide variety of people who do not easily fit into this generalization of a 'typical' Dutch/Flemish blogger. Still, this general profile formed a good starting point for selecting the four weblog authors whose entries are analysed later where we see how these authors present their gender identity in ways that surpass the static display of basic information.

Carrie and Maarten were chosen because they largely fit the profile of a typical blogger. Carrie, a Dutch woman, aged 26, lives in Amsterdam. She has her 'HBO' diploma[8] and now studies Dutch at university. She is also the editor of a magazine and works in a museum. Maarten, a Dutch man, aged 34, lives in the east of the Netherlands. He completed his 'HBO' in order to become a teacher, but now works as an editor/reporter/commentator for various radio and television stations (both regional and national). In addition, he helps to organize sporting events.

Ingrid and Jetty were selected because they deviated from the typical profile: neither lives in an urban environment; they do not mention their education; and they are unemployed. Both suffer from serious illness and Jetty is considerably older than the 'typical blogger'. Ingrid, a Dutch woman, aged 28, is married. They have several pets, but above all they would like to have a child. Ingrid is a Jantje Smith fan[9] who also enjoys making cards, watching television, computing and reading. Three years ago she found out she had fibromyalgia, a rheumatic disease. Jetty, a Dutch woman, aged 47, lives in the east of the Netherlands. She is married with three children. She does not mention her education or occupation, but instead mentions those of her children. She refers to her love of musicals and Boudewijn de Groot.[10] She says she keeps a weblog to 'blow off steam' as in 2003 she found out she had breast cancer and needed a single mastectomy.

Below is an extract from a blog entry by Ingrid:

> Well . . . Monday again . . . The weekend already over . . . Doesn't it always go quickly eh . . . Chris is back at work again, he's got seven days ahead of him. This week is a very busy week for cabdrivers, because this week it's Dance 2005 in DeSmelt in Assen once again. A big international dance competition, with competitors from all over the world. And Brink has been doing the transport for years. So the sleeves will have to be rolled up for the next few days . . .
>
> It looks rather grey outside today, and also cold I think. Oh well all I have to do this afternoon is quickly run to the store, and take Doeschka for a short walk . . . Other than that I am staying put inside. Soon I just have to put the dishwasher on the cleaning programme, and when that's finished I can do the laundry.
>
> Other than that there isn't much scheduled.

Ingrid opens her entry with a highly stylized image featuring an eroti-cized depiction of a woman. With her blouse open, the woman hides her face behind a black hat, signalling both sensuality and mystery. On the image, Ingrid indicates that she made it herself and she signs it 'love Ingrid'. By choosing to include this particular image with her blog entry, Ingrid is explicitly linking herself to a representation of femininity as mys-terious sensuality. She constructs her female embodied gender identity through this sexualized image.

In contrast to her explicit visual depiction of eroticized femininity, Ingrid's discursive performance connotes domesticity. She appears to be happy to stay indoors and take care of the home, while pitying her hus-band's busy work schedule. Her informal writing style suits the mundane topics she discusses, using the casual abbreviation 'ff' (meaning 'just' or 'quickly') and ending her post with multiple exclamation marks. This entry juxtaposes two different versions of femininity to create a heteroge-neous interpretation of female gender identity.

The next excerpt is from Carrie, in which she writes about the death of a horse she used to own:

> Years ago I saw her once or twice, at the stables.

> She asked me questions until my ears hurt and looked at me like I was a **celebrity**.

> I didn't know what to do with her, I remember. All those questions. Dufa, my Dufa, had become her 'care-horse'.

> Now, about seven years later she writes to me that she stayed with her until the end. She sends me pictures she took this summer, of a fresh, healthy horse that didn't yet seem to show any signs of ageing.

> Nobody really seems to understand that you can cry for weeks because of the death of a pony.

> I too don't understand how you can carry with you such a sense of mourn-ing for a horse, while you don't shed a tear for some people.

> At night I talk to her on MSN. For a little while I am once again unasha-medly a pony girl. We tell each other stories about jumping trails, stubborn-ness, exercises to music.

> It almost feels like I am wearing my cap again, and my knitted sweater with horses' heads.

> Even though I can sometimes barely decipher her MSN language, on the other side there is a pony girl who understands me.

> And that's just what I really needed.

Carrie's blog entry contains both an image of Dufa, the horse, and a hyperlink, but neither directly contributes to the presentation of her gender identity. However, they do illustrate the topic of her entry: the death of her beloved horse. In this entry, Carrie explicitly presents her female gender identity, through the invocation of the term 'pony girl'. Horse riding is traditionally perceived as a feminine activity in the Netherlands. Carrie identifies herself as part of this group by expressing the connection she feels with another girl who is equally passionate about horses. Through this example of 'girl bonding', the reader gets a sense of what it means for Carrie to live out this particular female role and cope with the loss of an animal. Instead of a one-dimensional, stereotypical depiction of a 'pony girl', a more nuanced and in-depth representation is presented in Carrie's entry.

The following excerpt contains part of a blog entry by Jetty, who shares some very personal thoughts:

> One day a week, sports consists of swimming . . . Terribly frightening . . . not the swimming in itself, I can do that. No, it's more that for the first time since the mastectomy I am hoisting myself into a bathing suit. And that's scary . . .
>
> Because if there's one occasion where you can see that I've only got one breast it's then. Fortunately there are five other breast cancer-women present so that makes a difference. Have to buy a bathing suit by the way. I have to think immediately about getting one that has room for a prosthesis or whether I just go without. I have been told that if you get one in which you can fit a prosthesis you then have to fill it up with aquarium wadding. They don't absorb fluids and keep their form . . . yeah that's right, I have to think about things I previously didn't even know existed . . . Advice is always welcome.

Jetty discusses her first day of physiotherapy, following the mastectomy. By disclosing this intimate information about herself, Jetty explicitly presents her embodied gender identity. Although she does not make use of images or hyperlinks, she discursively performs an image of her 'modified' female body. By expressing her anxiety about showing her body in public, and sharing her thoughts concerning the use of prosthetics, Jetty shows what it is like to be a woman whose embodied experience of femininity is altered through a disease that mainly strikes women. In addition, she expresses a sense of comfort when talking about the other women in her group who have also had breast cancer. Revealing herself in the presence of these women is less awkward since they have had similar experiences.

We now turn to more implicit presentations of gender. On his weblog, Maarten often mediates between presentations of his 'private' and 'professional' self. Although he rarely gives information that explicitly mentions his gender identity, he nevertheless 'gives off' gendered signals. One way in which Maarten implicitly presents his gender identity is through

his use of 'Tip-Plugs'. For example, on 27 October 2005, Maarten directs the attention of his readers to a website featuring a 'fantastic photo collection of aeroplanes'. He uses a hyperlink, what he calls a 'Tip-Plug', to express his interest in aeroplanes, adding one of the collection's pictures of a Boeing 747 coming in to land at Los Angeles airport to illustrate the object of his excitement, signified by an exclamation mark. By linking to this particular online photo collection, Maarten implicitly presents his male gender identity, as aviation is traditionally a masculine social territory. That he does not elaborate on his interest can be read as an indication that there exists an unspoken assumption of a 'natural' connection between men and technology, in this case aviation.

Maarten also writes short diary entries, for example:

> **Show must go on feeling . . .**
>
> It still gave me a bit of a 'show must go on feeling' yesterday. First an emotional goodbye to Uncle Herman and then off to work 'as usual'. It was hard on me. The ceremony and the cremation were emotional and I had a really tough time. But there wasn't much time to cope, I had to get back to work. And what does some news about Arjan Robben [Dutch footballer] or the presentation of the TVM ice-skating team still do to you then . . . Or Champions' League football . . .
>
> Oh well, everything continues. The show must go on. Still it's odd . . .

Maarten's display of emotional involvement suggests a presentation that is at odds with the typical portrayal of masculinity as tough and composed. Yet the emphasis on his loyalty to his work signifies a professionalism that is stereotypically connected to masculine identity. Maarten thus discursively presents his gender identity in a way that is more ambiguous than when he used the aviation link.

The following example, again from Ingrid, also demonstrates that gender can be implicitly presented in the writing of the blogger:

> Chris has started very early this morning . . .
>
> I don't have plans myself, yeah I'm going to rewire the phone line into our bedroom, the telephone is still in the spare room now, but I really want to have a phone by the bed, and do you know, the @home installation package includes a nice little phone . . . So that problem's solved. Just have to drill a hole in the wall tomorrow so the wire can go through, but that's no problem, and the wire is already equipped with plugs, so it's quite simple really . . . I think . . . hehehe . . .

Earlier, we saw how Ingrid discursively presented herself as a housewife who stays at home while her husband goes out to work, performing female gender identity as domesticated and mundane. In this entry, her

performance proves to be more complex than previously expected. While she starts off by claiming she doesn't have plans herself, she goes on to present herself as a technically proficient person (albeit in a somewhat hesitant manner), which is a trait traditionally related to masculinity.[11] These examples illustrate how bloggers can present different interpretations of their gender identity on the same weblog, showing that weblogs are able to facilitate multiple and diffuse gender presentations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how weblog authors present their gender identity in order to see how this fits into the existing research landscape about gender identity and CMC. Even though the descriptive analysis of the bloggers' personal information initially suggested a 'typical blogger', our sample included a wide range of people. Of the 100 weblog authors in our sample, 57 were female, providing support for Herring et al.'s (2004) claim that the media's portrayal of blogging as a male activity is inaccurate.

   The Dutch/Flemish bloggers in this study present their gender identity in relation to their offline lives, using images, hyperlinks or discursive invocations to their everyday experiences and the people they share them with. Although they do not seem to 'play' with their gender identity, instead choosing to present their identity through rather mundane domains such as hobbies or educational status, these bloggers are constantly performing their gender as they post new entries. While weblogs facilitate a mode of gender presentation that remains closely related to the binary gender system that structures people's daily lives, they also offer a 'rich' environment (through the various technological features that weblogs are able to combine), resulting in multiple heterogeneous performances of gender. In practice, these bloggers present themselves as 'men' and 'women', but this presentation is achieved through various performances of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', incorporating both discursive and visual means to create an image of a gendered self whose embodied identity is shaped offline.

   These results mainly fit into the strand of research that focuses on the representational aspect of the relation between online and offline gender identity. We found that the presentations of gender identity on weblogs remain closely related to the idea of a 'real life' self and the everyday experiences that form it. However, the results have also shown that these male and female bloggers express their identity in multiple and diffuse ways, performing different forms of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. This complicates the understanding of the relation between gender and CMC within this strand of research, which often emphasizes the representation of a 'fixed' offline gender identity, by showing that weblogs facilitate the expression of multiple gendered performances by a single weblog author.

Recalling Herring's discussion of the media's construction of weblogs as masculine, marginalizing women's activities as webloggers, our study suggests that lifelogs offer an important forum for *both* men and women to present their gender identities in multiple ways. The traditionally 'feminine' act of diary writing, present in the majority of these lifelogs, is adopted by both men and women, challenging the traditional understanding of technology and the Internet as masculine territories. Instead of creating another masculine sphere, the weblog is introducing diary writing to a group of men looking to express themselves online. This practice could open up space for an expansion of 'feminine' discourse on the web. These results largely concur with insights from studies that adopt a mutual shaping perspective: the act of diary writing on weblogs can be seen as blurring the gendered connotations of the weblog as an ICT, thereby showing that the use of a technology is pivotal in shaping its gender.

Finally, this study is not able to offer support for previous research that has emphasized the online construction of 'alternative' gender identities. Weblog authors tend to present themselves in almost exclusively 'real life' categories, such as hobbies, family, work and place of residence. The everyday self and its physical surroundings are foregrounded on these weblogs, leaving no room for the construction of gender identities that bear no relationship to the authors' offline lives.

NOTES

1.   For example, the Dutch blog GeenStijl.nl encouraged their readers to vote for the late André Hazes' widow (Hazes was a popular Dutch singer) as the most important Dutch person of 2005. She won, mainly because of the enormous response by the GeenStijl.nl readership. Another example is that of the 'Iraqi Blogger', who published his daily experiences of the Iraq War.
2.   A 'filterblog' provides hyperlinks to information about world events, online happenings and other 'newsworthy' occasions. These are mostly produced by adult males (Herring et al., 2004).
3.   These features are derived from a list made by Hourihan, one of the original developers of Blogger, a tool for developing and maintaining weblogs (Ó Baoill, 2004).
4.   The Netherlands and Flanders in Belgium both belong to the Dutch-language area.
5.   The three portals used were: www.weblogs.zoekpagina.net; Weblog-ABCD.pagina.net; and Weblog-EFGHIJKL.pagina.nl
6.   These 'representational domains' were developed after our preliminary analysis of the personal information on the weblogs, when it became clear

that the authors presented themselves by referring to personal attributes that could be grouped into these 'domains'. They were then used as categories in order to structure our descriptive analysis.

7. A 'domestic' hobby/interest can be characterized as one relating to the 'domestic sphere', i.e. playing with children/siblings, taking care of a pet, watching television and even 'sleeping in'.

8. HBO is a Dutch form of higher education offering vocational training.

9. Jantje Smith is a popular young Dutch pop artist, who mainly sings in Dutch.

10. Boudewijn de Groot is a popular Dutch folk singer, famous for his protest songs in the 1960s and 1970s.

11. For one of the few discussions on the ambiguous relationship between gender identity and the ability to do household wiring, see Cassidy and Wyatt (2001).

REFERENCES

Bruckman, A. (1993) 'Gender Swapping on the Internet', proceedings of INET93, San Fransisco, CA; at: ftp://media.mit.edu/pub/asb/papers/gender-swapping.txt (accessed October 2005).

Cassidy, J. and S. Wyatt (2001) 'Plugging into the Mother Country', pp. 63–75 in F. Henwood, H. Kennedy and N. Miller (eds) *Cyborg Lives? Women's Technobiographies*. York: Raw Nerve Press.

Danet, B. (1996) 'Text as Mask: Gender and Identity on the Internet'; at: atar.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msdanet/mask.html (accessed October 2004).

Donath, J. (1999) 'Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community', pp. 29–59 in P. Kollock and M.A. Smith (eds) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.

Döring, N. (2002) 'Personal Home Pages on the Web: A Review of Research', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 7(3); at: jcmc.indiana.edu/vol7/issue3/doering.html

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

Herring, S., I. Kouper, L.A. Scheidt and E.L. Wright (2004) 'Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs', *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*; at: blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html (accessed December 2005).

Hogan, R. (1991) 'Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form', *Prose Studies* 14: 95–107.

Huffaker, D.A. and S.L. Calvert (2005) 'Gender, Identity, and Language Use in Teenage Blogs', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 10(2); at: jcmc.indiana.edu/vol10/issue2/huffaker.html (accessed January 2006).

Kennedy, H. (2005) 'Subjective Intersections in the Face of the Machine', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12(4): 471–87.

Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper and Row.

Lampa, G. (2004) 'Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing', *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*; at: blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/imagining_the_blogosphere.html (accessed December 2005).

McNeil, L. (2003) 'Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet', *Biography* 26(1): 24–47.

Miller, H. (1995) 'Goffman on the Internet: The Presentation of Self in Personal Home Pages', paper presented at Embodied Knowledge and Virtual Space

Conference, Goldsmiths College, University of London; at: ess.ntu.ac.uk/
   miller/goffman.htm
Miller, H. and R. Mather (1998) 'The Presentation of Self in WWW Home Pages',
   paper presented at IRISS 98 Conference, Bristol.
Miller, H. and J. Arnold (2000) 'Gender and Web Home Pages', *Computers and
   Education* 34: 335–9.
Ó Baoill, A. (2004) 'Conceptualizing the Weblog: Understanding What it is in
   Order to Imagine What it Can Be', *Interfacings: A Journal of Contemporary
   Media Studies*; at: www.comm.uiuc.edu/icr/interfacings/articles.html
   (accessed October 2005).
O'Brien, J. (1999) 'Writing in the Body: Gender (Re)production in Online
   Interaction', pp. 76–104 in P. Kollock and M.A. Smith (eds) *Communities in
   Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.
Packwood, N. (2004) 'Geography of the Blogosphere: Representing the Culture,
   Ecology and Community of Weblogs', *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Commu-
   nity, and Culture of Weblogs*; at: blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/geography_
   of_the_blogosphere.html (accessed December 2005).
Reid, E. (1993) 'Electronic Chat: Social Issues in Internet Relay Chat', *Media
   Information Australia* 67: 62–70.
Rodino, M. (1997) 'Breaking out of Binaries: Reconceptualizing Gender and its
   Relation to Language in Computer Mediated Communication', *Journal of
   Computer-Mediated Communication* 3(3); at: www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/
   issue3/rodino.html (accessed September 2004).
Schaap, F. (2004) 'Links, Lives, Logs: Presentation in the Dutch Blogosphere', *Into the
   Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*; at: blog.lib.umn.
   edu/blogosphere/links_lives_logs.html (accessed December 2005).
Sorapure, M. (2003) 'Screening Moments, Scrolling Lives: Diary Writing on the
   Web', *Biography* 26(1): 1–23.
Tannen, D. (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*.
   New York: Ballantine Books.
Terry, J. and M. Calvert, eds (1997) *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in
   Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the Screen*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
Van Dijck, J. (2005) 'Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs', *Fibreculture* 3; at:
   www.journal.fibreculture.org/issue3/issue3_vandijck.html (accessed February
   2006).
Van Zoonen, L. (1992) 'Feminist Theory and Information Technology', *Media,
   Culture and Society* 15(1): 12–35.
Wajcman, J. (2004) *Technofeminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Niels van Doorn *was a research assistant at the University of Amsterdam while he was
   preparing this article. He has recently completed his MA dissertation on gender and
   IRC. [email: nielsvandoorn@gmail.com]*

Liesbet van Zoonen *is Professor of Media and Popular Culture, and head of the
   Department of Communication Studies, University of Amsterdam. Her most recent
   book is* Entertaining the Citizen: Politics in the Fan Democracy *(Rowman and
   Littlefield, 2004). Address: University of Amsterdam, Kloveniersburgwal 48, 1012
   CX Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [email; E.A.vanZoonen@uva.nl]*

Sally Wyatt *is a senior research fellow at the Virtual Knowledge Studio, Amsterdam. She is the co-editor (with Flis Henwood, Nod Miller and Peter Senker) of* Technology and In/equality: Questioning the Information Society *(Routledge, 2000). Address: Virtual Knowledge Studio, KNAW, Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [email: sally.wyatt@vks.knaw.nl]*

◆