'SO CRUEL... YET SO COOL': TEENAGERS' READINGS OF LOVE AND ATTRACTION ON '*SIN TETAS NO HAY PARAÍSO*'

Abstract

This research focuses in the way in which teenagers negotiate the high-rating global format Tv series *Sin tetas no hay paraíso/No tits, no paradise* (*STNHP*, Telecinco, 2008) regarding the representations of affective and sexual relationships. Results from two focus groups of teenagers show that they do not problematise the link between violence and desire proposed by the storyline. Girls express a consensual admiration toward female characters with post-feminist traits and at the same time show a desire to experience the love story attributed to the woman which reincarnates traditional femininity. For both cases, a justification of suffering and sacrifices for love's sake is implied, as well as the consideration that men which are at the same time tough and sweet are extremely attractive. Boys assert to be more reluctant to establish difficult relationships and tolerate trouble within it and try to distance themselves from the narrative of the series, mocking the main male character. In both cases teenagers express to be not affected by media products but show strong identification with the characters and the storylines.

This research deals about how Spanish teenagers read and give meaning to the sexual and affective relationships portrayed by a high-rating Spanish TV Series, *Sin tetas no hay paraíso/No tits, no paradise* (*STNHP*, Telecinco, 2008), which has had multiple adaptations and thus has become a global (mostly Hispanic) format. In a previous discourse analysis of the series, the authors found that this product displays a traditional model of affective and sexual relationships which emphasizes violence and power as valuable traits in male behaviour as well as affirms beauty as an inevitable prerequisite for women (Capdevila et al. 2011). But, do youth audiences give the same meaning to the series? How the product's preferred readings interact with values and personal experiences of Spanish teenagers?

This research is based on the assumption that sexual and gender identity, as well as ideas about love and desire, are socially constructed, and that media have a key role in defining these meanings (Galician and Merskin 2007, Gill 2007, Gómez 2004, Moran 2003). Media offer a quite narrow view of romance (Galician and Merskin 2007) and display a traditional model of sexual and affective relationships (Gómez 2004). Even if new roles for women are detected, these are problematic and not necessarily lead to emancipation, since they reify traditional codes of femininity and depend strongly on consumption (Gill 2007, Lazar 2009, Tortajada and Van Bauwel 2012).

This research focuses on the identification of teenagers with the series and its characters, and on the meanings they build around gender roles, sexual relationships and love, with specific attention to violence.

Mediated intimacy and teenagers

This paper understands gender as a non essential 'identity in progress' (Giddens 1995) related to the sexual and emotional ties that individuals are expected to establish with others in a given society. As Izquierdo (1998) states: 'individual are individual, not sexes, and amongst its multiple traits there is sexual dimorphism, to which the whole person is not reducible'[1] (Izquierdo 1998: 9). From this standpoint, gender identity goes with love socialisation processes: at the same time that we learn the correct behaviour for men and women, we are given 'adequate' desires about who should we fell in love with or who could be sexually interesting to engage with. Thus the heteronormative paradigm is before and within gender identity, by defining our will in intimate experiences (Inagraham 2006). Within the hetero norm that establishes the complementary quality of men and women, different patterns are given for each sex, and these differences vary also in different societies, as well as the ways in which each member of the couple is expected to behave towards the other. In the Western cultures, emotional labour has been a task traditionally assigned to women, whilst men have been more demanded in the public spheres and this understandings are on the base/ground of some inequalities amongst genders (Giddens 1993). Some authors

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[1]   [translation by the authors from the original in Spanish].

have traditionally critiqued the way in which representations of women as 'naturally' self-sacrifying and gifted to take care of reproduction tasks has allowed for their exploitation (Juliano 2004: 26). Besides, the cultural understandings of love and relationships may explain gender violence (Gómez 2004, Galician and Merskin 2007). The current study observes the ways in which Spanish teenagers *culturally* understand sexual and affective relationships and which role media play in related meaning-making processes.

Adolescence is a key stage regarding the acquisition of personal and social identity. According to Hill (1983), during this period teenagers face vital tasks such as building intimacy -the establishment of close relationships with others- and sexuality -the expression of sexual feelings-. In this complex vital scenario, according to Chapin (2000), family and formal education lose their central role in the development of teenagers as media gain influence. Authors such as Barker (1997) have highlighted the relevance of soap operas for teenagers everyday school life and talk, and Ging (2005) concludes that young people spend a lot of time talking about films and television. Other studies stress that sexual scripts and television characters may become models of behaviour for adolescents who are developing intimacy (Chapin 2000) and that media characters provide social knowledge to build identities (Barker 1997). Thus media are key players in love and sex socialisation processes providing vicarious experiences to teenagers and becoming mediators of intimacy (Gill 2009). That is to say the media are key sites in the definition of sexual conduct, setting the rules of play (McRobbie 2004); moreover, in most mainstream media products feminism is continuously disparaged (McRobbie 2006), which poses problems to the ideological content implied by media (sexual and affective) socialisation. Similarly, in the vicarious experiences provided by the media only certain relationships are shown or represented, thus limiting the array of choices depicted as reasonable. If research outcomes, as well as theoretical approximations, recognise teenagers' ability to build oppositional readings, these readings rarely challenge gender traditional gender stereotypes (Ging 2005). Other studies argue that personal experiences may counteract the dominant readings of media scripts (Moran 2003) but, still, as Buckingham (1993) asks himself, resistant readings won't necessarily have political content and, if they do so, they won't necessarily be progressive nor supersede fixed gender positions (Buckingham 1993).

Regarding preferred media readings, studies show how active or passive, intelligent or dull, female characters tend to be represented as sexual beings unable to live outside the masculine rule, so they become submitted to a heterosexual economy (Wittig 1992). Until the 90s the mainstream media offered very stereotyped images of gender, showing 'active, decisive, courageous, intelligent and resourceful' male characters in front of women portrayed as the love interest and the sexual object of these men, or housewifely and depending on husbands in advertising and women's magazines (Gauntlett 2008: 60, Gill 2007: 78 - 82). Advertising imagery was specifically targeted by feminist groups for its resistances to incorporate the new roles that women were actually acquiring in 'real' life (Gough-Yates 1987: 67) and its insistence on focusing in reducing women to something visually attractive (and even submitted to sexual implicit violence,

and a vulnerabilized pornification) whilst showing men as symbols of authority (Gill 2007). Recent studies highlight that TV series are still based on -mainly- traditional gender scripts (Capdevila et al. 2010, Van Damme 2010, Bernárdez 2007, Araüna 2012) that offer relationship models based on inequalities between the masculine and the feminine part; moreover these products degrade women's bodies and alternative sexualities (Capdevila et al. 2011). Other authors suggest that a post-feminist ideology is changing female representations on the media, stressing their sexual subjectivity, emphasising natural sexual differences, and promoting individualism and consumerism (Gill 2007, McRobbie 2006, Tortajada and Van Bauwel 2012), and even portraying women as aggressive (Araüna 2012, Gill 2009).

Gómez (2004) is the author of one of the sparse texts on the representation of sexual and gender relationships on media, and from an analysis on some magazines he concludes that these publications promote traditional models of relationships which link passion to risk, fuel competitiveness and lack of solidarity amongst girls and suggest instrumental and tactical strategies for women to get a partner or a date. Gómez (2004) also conducts focus groups dealing with teenagers' beliefs about love and sex, but the links of these values and media representations are not clearly set out in his research. Galician and Merskin (2007) draw as a conclusion of their studies on media that those instances portray relationships and love stories which are mostly 'toxic' in the sense that they are rooted on anti-values and parameters which are opposed to personal development, mainly for women. One example could be the myth -common in romances and TV narratives- that the love provided by a good and honest, fair lady, can turn the beast into a prince.

In this context of complex media representations of gender identities and relationships, teenagers acknowledge to be informed by soap operas and feel actively engaged in judging characters and situations (Buckingham and Bragg 2004, Moran 2003), but what is at stake is their possibilities to challenge the hegemonic representations and deconstruct gender identities aired by the media.

Traditional and alternative model of attraction and choice

From the analysis of fashion and teenager magazines, as well as focus groups and communicative storytelling with teenagers, Gómez (2004) comes up with two broad models of attraction and choice in love and sex: the traditional and the progressive one. The author gathers different beliefs and values shared by teenagers and media and classifies them as traditional or progressive regarding the degree of inequality and coercion that each statement may imply. The traditional model, which according to the author is the hegemonic in contemporary urban societies, regards violent behaviour as an attractive trait in men. This model normalises aggressiveness in male behaviour, in coherence with other studies about gender violence that state a normalisation with the believe that 'certain doses of violence were inherent in masculinity'[2] (Osborne 2009: 42). It is found in several cultural products, and even teenage-oriented series, where masculine

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[2]   [translation by the authors from the original in Spanish].

stereotypes are organised around taciturnity, aggression and violence (Van Damme 2010) participating to a problematic socialisation of masculinities (Kellner 2008). Giddens (1993) also finds these definitions of masculinity in the romantic literature of the 19th century, where despite much of these texts are written from a feminine perspective, they depict difficult, untreatable and unreachable men, which would be women's object of desire. This prescription of masculine ontology and behaviour is complemented by a socialisation of women according to values related to life, maternity, care, sweetness and dedication (Osborne 2009); characteristics that in popular narratives allow the redemption of the difficult man (through love). This model promotes mutual dependency of the members of the couple, as if love were to change women's status, or as if females would need men to have a life which is worst to live: 'from childhood to adulthood, the potential bride is socialized to prepare for the day when her handsome prince will sweep her away into a happily-ever-after life, free from class and sex oppression and away from the abuses of the workplace' (Inagraham 2006: 317). From a different perspective, Galician and Merskin (2007) study different media products such as films and TV series from where they draw the 'myths of love', which are narratives, values and statements which make people get 'unrealistic expectations about coupleship' (Galician and Merskin 2007: 2). Despite the straightforwardness of Galician and Merskin, they have good reasons to assert that these myths would justify oppression from one sex in favour of the other, and would validate violent or dominant behaviours, as well as the submission of the lover. Moreover, these unreachable myths of love would cause suffering to both members of the relationship, as well as 'depression, abuse and violence' (Galician and Merskin 2007: 2). The most problematic feature of this traditional model is the link that establishes between attraction and violence, which means that desire is related to someone who mistreats and exhibits power.

Women's movements along the Twentieth Century and their liberation from procreation, as well as gay and lesbian movements afterwards, have led to a new model of affective relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995), more contingent and based on dialogue and consent which Giddens calls 'confluent love' (Giddens 1993: 63-65). These same values are framed by Gómez (2004) in what he calls the alternative model of sexual and affective relationships, based on equality amongst the partners, mutual respect and the compatibility of stability, passion and care. The alternative model implies a radical democratisation of relationships and promotes the end of gender violence. It recognises eroticism in a communicative context (Giddens 1993) and redistributes the emotional responsibilities traditionally assigned to women; these redistribution of tasks and roles allows, at the same time, the emergence of new masculinities, since it recognises the sentimental vulnerability of males (Giddens 1993) as well as their emotional capabilities. This new way of understanding relationships does not attach to an idea of 'everlasting' love, but the relationship is expected to last as long as both of the partners want and agree (Giddens 1993, Gómez 2004). Opposing to the biological -and some cultural- theories that assert that passional love has a restricted endurance, usually of around four years (Fisher and Plante 2007), here the symbolical and cultural power of love is attached to the will and interaction of lovers. Like other vital

aspects in contemporary societies, choices are broadened.

Despite demographic changes in sexual and affective relationships, cultural and media representations may be still offering quite traditional images of romance as based in the inequality between the members of the couple and conflict as a fuel for passion (Gill 2007, Bernárdez, García and González 2008).

STNHP as an extreme example of the traditional model of sexual and affective relationships

STNHP is a Spanish high-rating TV series adapted from a Colombian serial. This TV program is already based in a novel written by Gustavo Bolívar Moreno and published on 2005; with the asset of being based on 'real facts'. Besides the Colombian serial, that was distributed to a lot of American countries and turned the series into a global-Hispanic format, Finland and Greece made their own adaptations, as well as Spain. The Spanish program was aired on 2008 by Telecinco (the first private broadcast TV channel in Spain) and was produced by *Grundy Producciones. SA*. The series was addressed to a broad range of public but the channel made a special effort to get youth targets by offering the products through different platforms such as the Internet[3].

A discourse analysis of the first season of the series (Capdevila et al. 2011, Araüna 2012) showed that *STNHP no hay paraíso* portrays a blocked heteronormative world, with only some exceptions which are depicted as shameful and stigmatised (a lesbian character, who hides her condition and is forced to establish a heterosexual intercourse). Gender division is clear: in this case men are dangerous gangsters or policemen and older brothers obsessed in protecting women, and women are prostitutes or good girls that are swept along by men. The three main characters are involved in a love triangle, based on a traditional model of sexual and affective relationships: they are unfaithful, passionate and instrumentalise each other for their own private aims. Attraction and desire are linked to violence, since the most attractive male character is particularly aggressive; although power and wealth are also traits that make him desirable. Beauty is the main value when assessing women's attractiveness. Moreover, this model works for almost every plot and character of the series. The main character is called El Duque (which in Spanish means The Duke) and is a handsome drug-trafficker and gang leader which falls in love with Cata, a working class (fair) girl which hopes that love can redeem this mafia boss. At the same time that they start an impossible and everlasting (until one of them dies) romantic relationship, El Duque is unfaithful to Cata and maintains sporadic sexual intercourses with Jessi. She is an attractive and strong woman who helps him in his businesses and looks for other poor girls to prostitute. Despite she is portrayed as strong, at the end of the first season this presumed emancipated woman is also mistreated by the man. Moreover, the more she is hurt, the more she falls in love with him. In the end, El Duque is pressured into abandon Cata in exchange of a truck of 'merca' (drugs) and

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[3]   All the three seasons of the series aired until now are available from the site of the channel (http://www.telecinco.es/sintetasnohayparaiso/). For the moment, the series has ended up but they are still available in the net.

kills the paternalist brother of his mate, who is obsessed in trying to interfere in their relationship by ruining the mafia boss. As a result of both actions, Cata turns to hate El Duque and marries his worst enemy to get El Duque killed. The gang leader starts a non-passionate relationship with Jessi, since she is still in love with him and accepts this subsidiary role.

Thus the preferred reading (Hall 1973) of the text of this series is based on a traditional model of relationships (Gómez 2004). In any case, as Hall (1973) asserts, the closure of the text in itself is not determining since it may be decoded according a contrasting map of meanings. Thus media not only promote the '(re) production of sexist norms, values and beliefs' but are also key players in 'bringing to world-wide attention the material harms that women may suffer as a result' (Carter and Steiner 2004: 6).

Therefore, for a deeper understanding on meaning-making processes and the role of media in everyday life, it becomes necessary to look at the complex processes of interpretation made up by audiences, which give the final significance to the media products studied (Eco 1994, 1996). Liebes (1999) states that identity is a negotiation process in which youth build their subjectivity through a dialogue between television inspired models and their own experiences. Previous studies highlight the complexity of interpretation processes and the factors which take part in it.

Interpretation is related to sociocultural factors (Liebes and Katz 1997), with the subculture and privileged codes in the reception context (Morley 1996), as well as psychological aspects such as identification, recognition and evaluation (Livingstone 1990).

This study wants to contribute to this area by deepening into the conceptions shared by teenagers about gender, love and sex and the way in which they negotiate these meanings with media products. Our objective is threefold. First, we want to compare similarities and distances amongst media texts and social discourses of teenagers about love and sexual relationship models. Second, we aim to study adolescent meaning appropriation from the TV series *STNHP.* And third, this work must help to understand in which ways gender interacts with the interpretation of media texts.

Specifically, the research questions are the following:
-Which storylines and characters do youth audiences identify with?
-How youth audiences negotiate sexual and affective relationships displayed by the series?
-Given that TV series establish a link between desire and violence, which are the readings that teenagers make about it?

Method
Two focus groups were conducted with teenagers (16–18), one composed by 8 girls and the other one by 8 boys. The boys and girls who participated in the research were selected using a database from the Catalan Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists, under the requirement that

they were viewers of the series *STNHP*. Participants come from public and private schools as well as from different neighbourhoods of Barcelona. All of them were students -some of secondary school, others of professional studies- except for one of the participants, who was looking for a job at the moment that the focus group took place. Both focus groups had place in different days in other settings than the school and they were not natural groups but formed specially for the research.

The focus group schedule addressed:

- the spontaneous imaginary of teenagers regarding love and sexual and affective relationships,

- the consumption and opinion about the series *STNHP*,

- commentary on some specific sequences of the series which dealt with core issues regarding the gender relations model presented in the product.

The questions were designed according to the research questions and categories derived from the theoretical background. To introduce the dialogue about these topics, an adapted version of Dr. FUN's Mass Media Love Quiz, designed by Galician and Merskin (2007) was delivered to teenagers. This quiz gathers the most pervasive stereotypes and beliefs about romance and connects them with media representations. The quiz allowed getting a first insight into teenager's beliefs about love and helped to stimulate discussion. Afterwards, responses were debated and issues related to the spontaneous imaginary were asked following Gómez (2004) models of relationships as well as consumption items. The questions were broad and opened to unexpected information. Some sequences of the series were selected to be watched in order to facilitate detailed comments about the situations and characters (when we were conducting the focus groups, the series was airing its third and last season). Some limitations of the fieldwork are related to the fact that the screening of STNHP sequences did not take place in the everyday context of reception. Also, the participants did not know each other before the focus groups, thus their responses may have been inhibited, especially regarding sexual issues[4]. Despite these restrictions and the impossibility of extrapolate the outcomes of the focus groups, the dialogue and reflexivity enhanced allow to grasp significant readings of the media representations regarding sex and love.

Complex identification with the characters and the storyline

Teenagers affirm that the storyline of the series is 'very different' from their everyday life, although they engage emotionally with the main characters. There are some differences amongst interpretation and internalisation of the script by boys and girls as described below.

When the focus group is displayed, girls admit that issues related to love, sex and relationships are usual in their conversations, and very important for them. The reasons they argue

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[4] In any case, as Buckingham (1993) problematises, it is difficult to get the differences between individual and social readings of a media text, even if we may assume that the context in which the fieldwork is done will influence the subject's responses. Furthermore, talking about issues and, in this case, about relationships, is always contextual (Buckingham and Bragg 2004).

to speak about romance-related issues are to share experiences and to give or receive advice. Peer influence is implied in these statements, but both girls and boys express that they do not feel influenced by media representations in their everyday relationships. Responding to Galician's quiz, boys had a total consensus in that 'since mass media portrayals of romance aren't real, they don't really affect you', and girls had also a high (although not total) consensus on that point.

Girls express that they were intensive viewers of the series because of its novelty and also because 'El Duque is very hot'. Fidelity to the series was justified for the intriguing plot, the relationships amongst the characters but above all, again, because of the attractiveness and 'morbo' (a Spanish slang word for 'unhealthy attraction') of the main character, who they labelled as 'the man of the hour'. Conversely, boys considered that the series were entertaining but felt them more remote from their lives than other media products which they feel closer, such as college series.

Girls have a clear and fixed idea of the main characters and they recognise them as highly sexually attractive, specifically El Duque. One of the participants expressed that 'there are more men but it is not the same', addressing to the special personality of El Duque. They give value and like that this male character has two opposite faces, one violent and show-off, and the other one sweet and romantic. They assert that these traits make him really attractive and very special amongst all media celebrity men. Girls consider that these traits are feasible in real world men, which may have a mask to face the world and another one to deal with love affairs. They evaluate that it would be good to have sex with him ('an experience') but one of the girls asserts that 'I would not like him to be my couple'. Boys express that El Duque is 'unreal' because he is 'too perfect'. They highlight that girls are turned on by him and that men respect him; moreover, they say that he is a womaniser, a show-off, a drug-trafficker, and that he is ambitious and goes by his own ('to make money').

Girls consider that Cata is, in the beginning of the series, innocent, modest, and sometimes even dull, but instead they give a positive value to her transformation into a drug-trafficker and tough woman. The main trait they choose to stress about her is her relationship with El Duque, because it makes her face to harsh situations, such as going to prison, taking a breast augmentation surgery, and even killing someone. Even if girls express distance from this character, they 'understand' her extreme behaviour, since she does it all for love. Girls stress that for real love 'you can do a lot of things'; afterwards, 'when you open your eyes', then 'you realise how stupid you have been'. For boys, this female character is unstable, but (visually) 'hot'. She is defined as a crazy lover, she is a 'head over heels in love', and this emotional characteristic seems to diminish her appeal or admirability to boys.

Conversely, Jessi is admired by girls for her exotic beauty as well as for her strength. She is attractive because she exerts power over men through sex. She is defined as a smart girl without qualms doing what she wants. Girls observe as a positive characteristic that this cold woman progressively gets more interested in being loved and cared and not so much in power and money.

For boys, Jessi is also physically 'hot'. They define her as an ambitious and rational woman which has good feelings deep down.

Conceptions of Attraction and Love

Teenagers show similar values regarding attraction, desire and choice in their everyday life to those offered by the series. Notwithstanding, they assert not being influenced by media representations. These values are framed in a traditional model of affective and sexual relationships which is the preferred reading in the series, not challenged by teenagers. Details are exposed below.

All the girls that participated in the focus group recognised a link between attraction, beauty and sex. They admit that when they think of having sex they would like to do it with a handsome boy, even if they do not necessarily link other values to this desire, not even the willingness to have a long-term relationship. At the same time, they do not believe that sex has to do necessarily with love. Girls differentiate to feel sexually attracted by someone and to love him; the former they relate it to beauty and the latter to more 'common' people and to personality traits. They have a lot of expectations about the behaviour and compromise of (beloved) men towards them, and those are the values they link mainly to love. Some of the main concerns are unfaithfulness and jealousy.

Regarding sex attitudes, girls admit that for them is not socially accepted to go to bed with a lot of men, because this being publicly known could spoil their reputation. At the same time, they express to use self-protective strategies to avoid people knowing with whom they make sex: 'sure, you cannot do it with more than one or two of the same group, or of the class... but one from here and another from there'. Finally, girls manifested also a competitive attitude towards other girls: they admit that when they think that a woman is attractive, immediately look for her weaknesses, faults or handicaps.

Boys highlight that the most important thing that a girl must have to be attractive is physical beauty ('a *hottie*'). One of the participants was concerned about the opinion of their peers regarding this question: 'nobody likes that your friends say that your girlfriend is ugly'. Personality aspects are in a lower position in their attractive values, except for the cases when there was a relationship previous to dating. Another relevant aspect is that boys like girls who take care of her self-image: 'she must have style, and dress nice'. Regarding love there are two broad opinions. Some of the participants believe that love has to do with finding your soulmate -with whom you can maintain love and passion during all your life- and others think that there are a lot of potential *soulmates* but you end to find just one. Boys consider, like girls, that love and sex may be equally satisfactory if splitted one of the other. Anyway, they assert that it is better to have sex with your girlfriend or someone you love, because it links the physical with the emotional dimensions. They think that girls are more dependent on linking sex and love, because they need more trust and compromise to engage in sexual intercourse. Moreover, they admit that if the girl is too easy, 'if there is sex at the first night, men tend to disappear afterwards'.

During the viewing of the sequence where El Duque meets Cata and rescues her from her villain boss in the jewellery and clothes shop where she works, girls scream and emit joyful exclamations about how handsome and charming El Duque is. They consider the sequence as romantic, ideal, 'too much', and they value the importance that the boy shows publicly what he is capable to do for the woman he loves. A participant describes proudly a similar experience, with the general approval of the rest of the girls.

Boys consider that the sequence has nothing to do with love: they affirm that they would not make presents to seduce girls nor to 'buy other's love'. They are critical with El Duque's facade, and describe his actions as building fake relationships and trying to possess the other. They also consider the girl being too easily influenced. In this case they define El Duque as a show-off, being 'the king of the mambo, the king of the jewellery'.

Girls interpret the love story amongst Cata and El Duque as a real love story; while boys see it as a destructive story that helps El Duque to be a better person but degrades Cata. The male character is seen by boys as wanting to possess the woman, while she is seen as living the relationship in a destructive mood ('she is driven crazy'). Girls make a different interpretation and stress that Cata, without El Duque, would have a boring life: 'a poor girl that, without El Duque, would still be in that shop, living a normal life'. Afterwards, they think it over and agree in that if a woman goes into a destructive relationship it must be because she has got caught closed and has not been able to break the circle of mistreatment. According to them, women assume that those bad things are not so bad and that some good things may compensate: 'When the relationship ends, you realise of all the things that you missed for being with him'.

When discussing the sequence where Jessi and El Duque have sex, they highlight unfaithfulness between couples and rivalry amongst women. They consider both facts as very frequent in their immediate environment 'you just need to start to go out with someone and another [girl] comes and steals it to you'. They are conscious that boys should be responsible of being unfaithful but they admit blaming the other girl, since they find easier to face against the girl (to face your boyfriend hurts). Girls assume the infidelity of the male character, reasoning that with Jessi he has businesses and tenderness while Cata is his true love. Notwithstanding, girls seem to feel that Jessi is used by El Duque in order for him to improve his businesses and even they are critical about him mistreating her. They seem to empathise with Jessi when agreeing in that she has always been in love with him even if she tries to hide her feelings. Boys restrict their interpretations of the relationship as an affair amongst business buddies, and consider that both benefit from using the other with practical means.

Regarding the relationship between the two main female characters, girls observe the competitiveness amongst these women (either for being the most beautiful, either for getting El Duque) while boys define both female characters as true friends. In this relationship, they consider Jessi as a kind of a mother that protects Cata, which is emotionally dependent and weak. Girls also perceive this protective attitude but they attribute it to the stronger and more resolute temperament

of Jessi.

Attraction and violence: 'you're so cruel... yet so cool'

The main male character is perceived as extremely attractive even though he kills his girlfriend and is violent during all the series. Boys consider that girls value boys that mistreat them. Thus, both make a link amongst male attractiveness and aggression.

When analysing a sequence of the series where El Duque orders his henchmen to kill his girlfriend while she screams 'I love you', girls get surprised. Even if it is the first sequence of the series -the opening- they say that did not remember El Duque killing his girlfriend. Girls do not justify this action (they say it is rough) but understand the reasons under what he acts, arguing that is a logical behaviour being inside a mafia or the gang world. They manage to make a distinction amongst a show-off (which they consider attractive) versus a hard, tough, violent man (which does not 'turn them on'). In any case, for them, to have sex with a man like El Duque is 'an entire experience'.

This sequence makes them speak about violent cases they have lived in their everyday life, in first person or through family and friends. They assert to be used to testify aggressions in their environment, as well as jealousy scenes. One of the girls explains that got kicked by her ex-boyfriend more than once, and that at that moment she justified his actions because she was blind and considered it as a proof of love ('if he shows himself jealous, it is a sign that he cares for me'). Moreover, girls do not blame media of these aggressive behaviours but make responsible family and friends, and assert that some parents should keep a very close eye on their children because in class and in the disco they are not always 'the good boy' that seems to be at home.

Boys consider that this murder sequence is excessive, and that El Duque is a rough character, coldblooded, and a coward, because he does not dare to kill himself the girl; instead he orders his hitmen to do it. Moreover, when analysing girls' tastes, boys consider that women long for difficult relationships: 'girls like boys to be bad with them, the less you care the more interested they get'.

Discussion and Conclusions

Teenagers assert not to be influenced by media in their beliefs about love and sex issues. When answering Galician and Merskin's test (2007), they expressed distance with most of the clauses, especially for those suggesting that media may be relevant in their love socialisation processes. Besides this rejection to the idea of being media influenced, when teenagers reflect about a series such as *STNHP*, they seem to be quite identified with its characters and with the storyline, especially regarding the intimate dilemmas of the characters. This is particularly the case with girls, and not so much with boys, who insist in being critical against narrative scripts, notably against the male character (even if admiration is in some discourses implied: 'he is too perfect to be real'). This striking refusal of the kind of masculinity embodied by El Duque does not imply, however, an alternative deconstruction of gender stereotypes, since boys judge female characters according to

very traditional gender criteria. Instead, it is more plausible, like other authors suggest, that boys feel constrained by the tough hypermasculinity that the character represents. Ging (2005) finds out that young male participants in focus groups are 'critical of the constraints imposed on boys to suppress emotion and act hard' (Ging 2005: 41) even if the performance of tough masculinities may also conceive pleasures to teenage spectators.

Notwithstanding, it must be said that there is a strong coincidence amongst values related to attraction in the series and in their personal opinions and experiences in everyday life. Our study reinforces the conclusions reached by Gómez (2004) when he asserts that a traditional model of attraction and election is still the love referent for teenagers. This research shows that boys still highlight that a big point in the series is that female characters are hot. The same criteria when they speak about everyday life and assert that women must be beautiful in order to be attractive, and that at the same time they must have a beautiful girlfriend lest their friends would laugh at them. Girls appreciate the male character for their beauty and for his ambivalent personality, which can turn from a charming attentive *casanovas* to a callous gangster and a killer. It is interesting to note that El Duque is considered the only attractive male in the series and the more interesting in the entire Spanish mediascape, arguably because he has these two faces: a cruel, aggressive one, and another sweet, tender, and compassionate. Even if they consider that fictional situations in *STNHP* and characters such as El Duque are quite unrealistic, yet they narrate multiple experiences of being victims of disdain and mistreatments by boys. It may be stated here that the set of values regarding love and sex that teenagers hold are broader and more contradictory that what this study would suggest, since the issues raised by the portrayal of relationships of *STNHP* may have forced a debate around violence and traditional gender positions. In any case and as Buckingham (1993) suggested, it seems that teenagers are not necessarily being critical with media gender ideologies, even if they may be creatively interpreting texts.

Regarding identification with female characters, all participants demonstrate a clear preference for Jessi whom, according to the girls, holds desirable characteristics: she acts and dresses consciously and highly sexualised, she shows a self-oriented ambition, and she instrumentalises men to get her own aims. Instead, girls voice numerous objections about the naiveté and idealistic dimwittedness of the classical depiction of woman that Cata incarnates. Either the characterisation of Jessi as well as the identification of girls to her model femininity as a preferred gender position responds to a post-feminist sensibility (Gill 2009) which is also observed in the positive assessment of all female participants of Cata's transformation into a tough woman. Post-feminist identities are under discussion since they promote apparent empowering images of women, displaying them as active beings who use freely their bodies. At the same time these images often recreate traditional feminine stereotypes tied to products such as cosmetics and other icons of the consumer culture (Gill 2007, Lazar 2009); thus it is said that post-feminism is closely linked to a neoliberal subjectivisation (Gill 2009) that includes feminist claims but with an agenda which consigns feminist ideology and its achievements to the past (McRobbie 2004). Girls feel much

more attracted to the post-feminist feminine archetype than to the classical (good) woman that Cata incarnates and do not provide an oppositional discourse about the post-feminist frame. Nevertheless they seem to fully understand Cata's reasons to be in love and to sacrifice herself for this passion, and are eager to experience a similar love story. It may seem contradictory that girls finally accept traits of these two characters, which in the series are presented as opposite examples of 'being a woman', so we should consider here the inclusiveness of post-feminist identities, especially in maintaining, and even fuelling, traditional stereotypes. Besides, both characters represent the two axes of a patriarchal model of femininity linked to the traditional model of relationships: the selfless and self-sacrifying woman and the woman who imitates a masculine model, as described by Gómez (2004).

It is striking that all the girls have narrated experiences of violence within their couples or dates, as well as the fact that some aggressive sequences in the series have gone unnoticed, such as the assassination of the male's main character couple, which the participants did not remember at all. It should be further analysed until to which extent some degrees of violence are normalised in some understandings of sexual and affective relationships. The aggressive attitudes of El Duque, the relentless competition amongst women, and even the transformation of the female characters into ruthless gangsters are processes which do not pose problems teenagers, even if fiction would, of course, draw a line on their moral judgements. Teenagers argue that they would not behave the way that characters so, but at the same time show concern with the reasons that move El Duque, Jessi and Cata. It is noteworthy that violence does not diminish the attractiveness of the characters but, opposite, it seems to make them more fancyful. In any case, these results should be contextualised within the pervasive media representations of battles between the sexes, as well as a paradigm of 'new cruelty' (Gill, 2008) which may beautificate violence between men and women, especially when a sexual or affective relationship is running amongst them (Tortajada and Van Bauwel 2012).

Despite this study deals only with one TV series, the dialogue established with these teenagers is suitable to show in which ways a TV product is read from an everyday experience basis. Thus we can gather some clues onto how audiovisual scripts shape the desires and expectations of youth regarding sex and love, and how these young people use their everyday experiences to give meaning to media products. If a reflexive society is characterised by a plurality of ways of living love and sexuality, the restricted ones that appear on media should not be those ones that promote inequalities.

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