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# The Gendered Sense of Self: Performing Identities Within Biographical Narratives

Noemi Basanta  
Galician Language Institute  
University of Santiago de Compostela  
noemibasanta@gmail.com

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to define how femininities and masculinities are performed in an oral Galician corpus of three groups, lasting one hour and a half and involving conversations between three heterosexual couples who are friends and neighbours from a small village, divided firstly in two separated groups according to their sexes and then assembled in a mixed group.

In the wake of recent studies on gender and identity in language, I argue that identities are a discursive product that emerges in the intersection between social ideologies and biographical narratives. Telling one's own life experience constitutes a restrictive identification mechanism because during narratives people not only organize a particular life experience but also show self-perception. The narrator is transformed into an agent who controls and constructs discourses determining the self-representation in the story. Narratives are therefore a decisive way to access to gender construction mechanisms.

In particular, I will study the discursive construction of youth to explore the social changes and different representations of sexuality from a rural point of view. This perspective allows us to investigate the complex processes of the symbolic reconfiguration of space and time as an identity construction mechanism. As a result, I will show how gender categories are shifting and how they interact with other social aspects, such as in this case, class, age and ethnicity.

**Key words: narratives, gender and sexuality, discourse analysis, identity, performance**

## 1. Introduction

Traditional views about identity research postulated that it is situated, firstly, in the human mind. Because of this, the only possible relation between the self and linguistic usage is through individual behaviours. In this sense, we should consider linguistic practices as a way of accessing the internal mental state; that is, identity. Although self-perceptions are an important variable in identity definitions, some researchers (Johnstone 1996) have shown that it is not the only dimension and that the way in which self-perceptions are related to the social world cannot be explained without the mediation of discourses.

Recent studies consider identities as a product that does not pre-exist the self as a psychological mechanism of autclassification reflected in diverse behaviours, but as something that is created through social actions, specially linguistic and semiotic practices. As a result, language does not show who we are but instead constructs us and our identities (Joseph 2004). Sociological fields such as ethnomethodology (Fenstermaker and West 2002, Garfinkel 1967, West and Zimmerman 1987) have proposed the idea of "doing" different types of identity and many philosophers have developed performativity theories (Butler 1990) over postulates of Goffmann (1981).

Currently, this is the starting point not only for language and identity studies but also for a large amount of works on language, gender and sexuality (Cameron 2003, Motschenbacher 2010, Baker 2008). Related to this, the emergence of a theory of identities is easily perceptible in cases where bodies do not enable self-adscriptions to normative social categories. In this sense, there are many works on transgender and cross-gender identity (Barret 1999, Hall and O'Donovan 1996, Kulick 1997, Hall 1997) that show different ways in that identities, perceived as social processes, precede semiotic practices. Nevertheless, emergence theories are not only applied in these cases but also when we cannot recognize evident drifts about normative assignments such as, for example, masculinities performed by men (Basanta 2014, Cameron 1999, Johnson / Meinhof ed. 1997, Millani ed. 2014).

It is true that identities observed through the emergence principle permit a plurality of categorical identity constructions into the same person although we cannot argue that these constructions are independent from different social facts that produce discourses that create expectations about how we should be. People position themselves in relation to these expectations, agreeing or not with them, but nevertheless bearing them in mind. They negotiate in every context their positions through discourses about categories –gender, age, etc.- but not necessarily with complete

ascription or distance to them. This idea was a turning point in gender and identity studies because it implies the impossibility of arguing that men always construct masculinity and women femininity.

Nevertheless, in addition to macro identity factors that, as we have seen, do not determine but influence choices, there also exist local positionings which emphasize the idea that identities are negotiated in context, and as a result we should understand this as a product of a relational activity. Identities are never independent but integrate social meanings in relation to other identity positions and other social actors (Bucholtz e Hall 2005). For example, mother-daughter roles, couples, friendship, etc. in a conversational group also constitutes fundamental conditions in which to identity construction apart from macro categories.

## 2. Corpus and Method

In this article, we will focus on the discursive analysis of conversations regarding dating as a mechanism of identity construction through an empirical qualitative methodology. It is the analysis of a corpus of three conversations, lasting one and a half hours, between three heterosexual Galician couples aged over fifty years old. These people come from a small village within a Galician rural context and enjoy a firm friendship.

Firstly, we recorded two same-sex conversations -three men and three women-, separately, and secondly a third recording was made with all six speakers, which was therefore a mixed-sex conversation. One of the most important concerns about recordings was to minimize the artificiality of this kind of linguistic materials in which the presence of a recorder can hamper a fluid and spontaneous conversation. For this reason, the researcher was absent during the recordings, except when suggesting the theme of conversation. Recorded conversations were completely transcribed with the ELAN software program, a tool that allows an alignment between audio and different levels of annotation. We used the orthographic transcription criteria developed for the CORILGA project of the Galician Language Institute.

## 3. The discursive construction of (gender) identities

### 3.1. Masculinity and social changes

The men's group starts the conversation about dating through the narrative of their own biographical experiences: they talk about people who met near the river, go for a ride by car or discuss and fight about courting women. From the first moment they establish a discursive separation between “we” [“*nós*”] and “they” [“*elas*”] that enables us to begin the linguistic analysis of gender identities from the constructionist perspective.

Amadeo e des# ||  
 Nemesio despois de | **elas** | bañába-se nun | chamában-lle o pozo dos homes e  
 o pozo das mulleres ||  
 Amadeo pero | eu o que me facía gracia era despois cuando | xa ||

[...]  
 Lourenzo no | pero tu non estabas aquel día ||  
 Nemesio no | aquel día non me acordo {<valoración> eh} ||  
 Lourenzo bueno | eu sei que: | **nós** eramos tres i-**elas** eran tres ||

[...]  
 Amadeo tiña mui lonxe o matrimonio | entonces el || o que iba era á juerga | como ibamos todos | ¿non? || pero | de calquera maneira || a forma de | de | de | de | de | de ligar cunha rapaza || e: | está | non: | non é: | siempre igual || **nós** acordamos un:ha época dunha maneira || pero é que os nosos antepasados eran doutra ||

The pronoun “they” clearly indexes women in opposition to “we”, which we should interpret in relation to different referential levels:

- a “restrictive we” that only includes the conversational group: “we remember a period”
- A “more open we” that includes the group of friends who socialized together when they were young “there were three of us and there were three of them too”

- And a “macrocategorical we” that refers to men as a sex category “his purpose was to have fun, like all of us”.

This division makes me think that gender performance is located on the first level as they permanently delimited a group of women versus a “we” that, independent of being more or less restrictive, always includes only men. However, it is not only a question of gender but also sexuality, or rather, heterosexuality, because they never discussed non-normative sexualities.

As a result, we can see how they construct gender through the selection of the pronoun in the narratives about what they did during adolescence, and simultaneously construct themselves as adults, as when I suggested the topic of dating, they started the conversation by focusing on the past when they were young. This period reconstructs their youth in order to make sense of what they are now and at the same time establishes a border between what they were in the past and what they no longer are: young men. As we have seen in the previous extract, they talk about “remembering a period”, that is, a past in which dating was socially accepted, in contrast to the present time. The memory is, in this case, what establishes the intergroup borders.

Frosh et alii (2002:10) argue that “general stories about how lives may be lived in the culture, serving to justify certain behaviours”, and for this reason it will be precisely through the organization of life experiences that people project self-perception by reconstructing the past and selecting only stories in which they were interested.

People who talk create protagonists by selecting the significant elements, the characteristics that define them, etc., and this definition serves at the same time to define people who are talking. For example, they talk about a man who did not treat women well and in that way they project themselves as narrators who are against that behaviour: they “don't know”, do not understand things that men did because they were “strange” and they explain their acts as a result of being a “rough” man.

Amadeo e eu dicía-lle a <nome propio> | "¿pero tu que hostia lle dixeches?" || dixio | "{(risas) eh}" || "o que lle ficen eu a xulia (risas)" || bueno | pero nunca me dixio || el tuvo que: || tuvo que: | lle facer algunha cousa mui rara porque ela || ela <incomprensíbel> ||

Nemesio pasou | pasou-lle con outra que dera a queixa tamén || e | e | pero | nun principio parecía que lle gustaba e tal e: || e foi-me a dicir || {<valoración> pf} | {(risas) nunca máis | aquilo} || fuxía ||

Lourenzo eu creo que había varias | eu creo que había varias ||

Nemesio fuxía | fuxía del coma | coma do | do: lobo ||

Lourenzo o que lle facía non-o sei | pero ||

Amadeo porque el | vivía: | ó bruto | eu que sei ||

Lourenzo si | eu eso: | non o sei || pero ||

Through narrative control, story selection and their own presence in narratives, they project themselves as men from whom women did not “flee” because they were respectful with them. They “are now” because they were respectful men, in contrast to other “rough” [“bruto”] men. This will be the compelling quality of past narratives: the narrator controls the past from the present, our current expectations and purposes (Mishler 1999). That means that when we tell stories about our lives, we make sense of these past facts by constructing a person who lives in the present like a continuation of the story (Atkinson 1998, Sims 2003).

In the next extract we will see how a new reality such as the extensive use of cars creates new relationship dynamics between individuals with consequences for ethical codes:

Lourenzo si | o que pasa é que agora | eses costumes todos | i-eso todo | eso aboliu-se | eso | morreu || [...]

Nemesio cambiaron as tornas totalmente | ou sea | que || son cousas totalmente diferentes ||

Amadeo no | porque a min tamén me parece encima || cuando agora empezou a haber coches || sobre todo as vellas || como estaban noutro: | noutro ámbito e noutro sentido || dice | {<apelación> "ei"} || ¡aho# | agora son unhas zorras" ||

Lourenzo "marchou con el no coche | marcharon <incomprensíbel>" ||

Amadeo "mar# | marchou con el" || "marchou con el no coche" | dígo-lle ||

Lourenzo ese era coma o benito ||

Amadeo como lle dixen eu a Eusebia | díxen-lle | "tu non te metiches con xosé no coche || porque non-o tiñais" ||

Lourenzo (risas) ||

Amadeo "pero escondíaste entre as uces da <nome de lugar> | ¡leve dios!" [... ] ¿e lo? || ó acaba-la festa | de noite || polas calizas arriba || ¿non pode ser tan malo | coma nun coche? ||

The identity consequence of discursive constructions that we will show is the emergence of identities constructed as innovative in the context of social changes with respect to a past of which these men feel heirs. The importance of changes is that, when they occur, social groups must define themselves in relation to them and construct new borders: in the past, people who wanted to have a sexual encounter “hid in bushes” and now “go for a ride in the car”. In the process of group construction, borders should be negotiated. As a consequence, dynamics of resistance appear from other groups. In this case they were discursively expressed through the voices of “ancient women” who call young women “slags” for taking a ride by car with men. However, discourses of resistance cause self-affirmations in innovative groups; in this case, this is according to generational demands. This is not a problem of gender because in this conversation some men criticize old women by arguing that they had done “in bushes” the same things that they themselves did in cars. The deeds they recount are the same, “the essential things between a man and a woman”; that is, the heterosexual encounters of young men and women, although the identity point of view changes because age establishes a border.

Amadeo as formas cambiaron | porque o mundo cambiou e: || e hoxe pois: | vivimos doutra maneira || pero | o esencial || entre o home i-a muller | eu penso que: ||  
 Nemesio igual ||  
 Amadeo é igual agora como hai centos de anos || o esencial ||  
 Nemesio o esencial || que | certas bases ||  
 Amadeo cambian as formas ||  
 Nemesio son as mesmas ||

The border is discursively focused on the appearance of cars but it is the clash between old and new ethical norms that clearly indexes age. Indirectly, it also indexes gender if we notice that the criticism of “old women” is focused in the assumption of feminine liberation or licentiousness (“now they are slags/ she takes a ride on the bike or in the car with him”).

### 3.2. Talking feminine social restrictions

As in the men's group, women also assume that a direct relation exists between dating and youth, because when I ask them to talk about dating they express the difficulty in remembering what they did when were young because of being married for a long time. As a consequence, we can see in the first moments how they anticipate some identity variables that will be fundamental in the posterior discursive construction. On the one hand, gender and sex identities through the explicit mention of marriage and on the other, generational identity implicitly assumed in the idea that “dating” is a not socially acceptable topic for them because it is far removed from their current life stage. This ideology can be appreciated at the temporal emphasis made through the adverb “so” [“tanto”] in “We married such a long time ago” [“hai tanto que nos casamos”].

Euxenia {<valoración> oi} pero xa hai tanto que nos casamos que non sei se nos acordaremos como era o mocear daquela {<apelación> eh} ||  
 Noemi do que queirades ||  
 Frida (risas) ||  
 Euxenia por que: ||  
 Xosefa (risas) ||  
 Euxenia de mo# | de mocear de cuando nós eramos mozas a hoxe cambiou muto ||

They use a collective pronoun “I don’t know if we will remember what dating was” [“non sei se nos acordaremos como era o mocear daquela”] that enables them to create a conversational group in the dialectic between what they have done before and do not do now, not only because it is not socially accepted but also because they do not remember how to do it. It seems that dating is forbidden in adulthood as an activity and as a discourse too: these women state that they do not do it now and do not remember how to do it because they have not sustained their memory by talking about it for a long time.

This sentence reveals hegemonic discourses around engagement: they do not remember how to date because they are married and their civil status means that they no longer flirt. It seems that marriage is an inflection point related with a certain point in life because, like age, it acts as a border between dating and not dating any more. As a result, it divides youth and maturity too.

Moreover, in the previous extract we can analyse the ethnic discursive construction when women emphasize the existence of social changes that alter the traditional relational code between man and women during flirtation “since we were young | everything has changed a lot” [“mocear de cuando nós eramos mozas a hoxe cambiou muto”]. We will show how, through narratives about ancient spaces and times, they present social changes in dating rituals that enables them to vindicate a traditional Galician identity that progressively disappears. A local identity is therefore indexed, particularly when talking about a traditional festive context: the Galician carnival.

As we can see in the next extract, women talk many times about their problems in leaving their houses at night. The feminine problems to date are presented, firstly, in the socially established work obligations before they were allowed to go to parties: “we had to work all morning to be allowed to go out for a while” [“había que andar toda a mañá pa que che deixasen saír un pouquiño”]. It is important to notice the contrast between hard work effort “all morning” and the insufficient results “go out a while”. It is used to emphasise the social oppression and, consequently, serves them to reinforce the group’s cohesion in opposition to others, such as their parents’ group.

Frida pe# | pero ser: | era un compendio | i-había que andar to# | toda a mañá <incomprensíbel> xa pa que che deixasen saír un pouquiño ||  
 Euxenia sóbra-lle | esa ||  
 Xosefa e despos ||  
 Frida ¡ala! | e escurecía antes de | viña ás dez ||  
 Frida {<valoración> ala} | pá casa ||  
 Euxenia si ||  
 Xosefa pá casa | eso si que era ||  
 Frida queríamos ir a unha festa | non: | non podíamos ir a unha festa | eu tiña non sei cuantos anos || cuando me deixaron ir ás festas de fóra ||

This example enables them to index class and age in different ways. The most evident is the focalization on work during their youth. We will see how they construct working class identity by talking about workforce as a social requirement, and age-family identity through obedience to their parents “I was | I don’t know how old | when they allowed me to go out to parties” [“tiña non sei cuantos anos || cuando me deixaron ir ás festas de fóra”]. However, this affirmation is important for the discursive signification of spaces such as “parties” [“festas” e “verbenas”] located in or outside their village. On the one hand, talking about these spaces is used to distinguish more or less socially acceptable contexts in which to flirt. In the opposition between “house” [“casa”] and “parties” [“festas” e “verbenas”] there is a class construction because potential places to date can be very diverse: a square, a club, etc., but they focus specifically on the “androlla party” [“festa da androlla”] as we show in next extract. The emphasis placed on this type of party is important, because “androlla”, a kind of traditional sausage, is a dish that celebrates Galician cuisine. It is Euxenia complains about having to stay at home while other women went to the “androlla party”. Moreover, the distinction between their own village’s parties and those elsewhere [“festas de fóra”] allows them to establish a gradation in social restrictions that, ultimately, also contribute to emphasize the complexity and rigidity of ethical codes that affected women.

Euxenia ¿tu acórdas-te un ano na festa da androlla? ||  
 Xosefa porque | te: ||  
 Euxenia <tose> | marchas-tes á festa da androlla ||  
 Euxenia que empezaron a dicir que non me deixaban ir | e fostes alí | e non me deixaron ir e non me deixaron ir-e! ||  
 Frida si | é verdá ||  
 Euxenia e dar gracias que xa <Amadeo> taba comigo ||  
 Euxenia e quedou e non foi tampouco ||  
 Euxenia se non é | aquel domingo | quedaba | era domingo <incomprensíbel> e quedaba aquí | e nin a festa da androlla nin: ||  
 Xosefa {<asentimento> hum} | bueno ||  
 Frida ai {<apelación> ho} | e <incomprensíbel> ||  
 Euxenia non me deixaran ir e as outras foron á festa da androlla: e eu quedei en casa ||

In this case, ageing construction is especially interesting because youth is also used to index gender. They assume that the restrictions on leaving home were related to their feminine condition. Euxenia tell them that once she could not go to the “androlla party” [“festa da androlla”] and she establishes an opposition between herself (who must stay at “home”) and “other” girls (who could go). The plural feminine demonstrative “outras” [“other”] creates a categorial meaning related to women: they are the individuals who experience social restrictions in going to parties (as opposed to men) and who are different to her because in that exceptional case they were allowed to go to the androlla’s party. The men’s group is symbolized in Amadeo, her boyfriend. He can go because he is a man and does not take part in the “other’s” [“outras”] group of women. In fact, he stayed at home too but this circumstance is presented not as a social restriction “allow to go” [“deixar ir”] but as his own decision that Amadeo takes as boyfriend “lucky me that we were in a relationship and he stayed and didn’t go either” [“e dar gracias que xa <Amadeo> taba comigo || e quedou e non foi tampouco”].

Constantly these women describe a society divided according to two variables, age and sex, that create social groups and engagement dynamics. Age criteria pits young people against their parents as an oppressed or oppressive group and sex distinguishes women from men because of the more or less social restrictions that affect them. In this context of making the feminine date problematic we should understand the emergence of carnival as a desirable topic:

Frida    ¿e logo despois que non nos deixaban ir ó folión de noite? ||  
Euxenia            {(risas) esa si que foi máis gordá } ||  
Xosefa            ;outra! ||  
Frida                                {<valoración> a:i} Jesús mira que ||  
Xosefa            aí si que o pasabamos mal ||  
Frida    e que | i-o <incomprensíbel> só era pa homes | ou era pa | pós mozos  
||  
Euxenia            ;sabémo-lo | sabémo-lo! ||  
Xosefa                                pe# ||  
Euxenia            e non viche a <nome propio> na ventana {<apelación> eh} ||  
Frida    ;carallo! ||  
Frida    se queríamos ser malas | ¿que máis tería que fósemos ó folión que que  
fósemos? ||  
Euxenia            e que fo# | e que salises de noite ||  
Xosefa            pe# ||  
Euxenia                                e que salises de noite coma de día ||  
Xosefa            as mulleres marginadas ||

In the same way that previously these women did, they use the categorial we in “we were not allowed to go to the *folión* [“non **nos** deixaban ir ao *folión*”] to refer to women as a social oppressed group. At this time, they oppose explicitly “marginalized women” as an uniformed group to “men” and “young men” who, once more, have the social permissiveness to go to the *folión*. In Southern Galicia, carnival is a festival period lasting many days in which different traditional rituals such as the *folión* take place. During the *folión*, young men go through the streets playing a distinctive rhythm from their village with drums and scythes. Traditionally, these rhythms were executed by men after sunset, and this explains how women could not only play drums but they could not even leave home. In the dating spatialisation context mentioned above (De Fina 2009), the house was a non-dating space in contrast to festivity contexts such as “*folión*”, “*festas*” and “*verbenas*”. Moreover, in addition to specialisation there is a demoralisation too that is revealed by these women. Darkness transforms “night” in the best moment to date and, because of that, dominant groups and social codes symbolized in parents forbid women to leave home. As we will see, this circumstance is directly related to social links between date and sexual activity.

Frida    se queríamos ser malas | ¿que máis tería que fósemos ó folión que que  
fósemos? ||  
Euxenia            e que fo# | e que salises de noite ||  
Xosefa            pe# ||  
Euxenia                                e que salises de moite coma de día ||  
Xosefa            as mulleres marginadas ||  
Euxenia                                era igual ||  
Xosefa            {<valoración> bah | bah} ||  
Frida    bueno | home bueno | bueno ||  
Xosefa            porque | as mulleres tiñamos que estar alí ||  
Euxenia            siempre houbo fillos de solteira: ||  
Frida    bueno | e seguirá | {<dúbida> m:} ||  
Euxenia                                antes de das nosas eras ||  
Frida                                        i-eso que ||  
Euxenia            nas nosas eras | e despois hai-o seguir habendo ||  
Xosefa            oes | toda a vida se fixo ||  
Euxenia            eso | anque non: | anque non salisen de casa de noite | (risas) ||  
Frida    (risas) ||  
Xosefa            {(risas) digo eu} ||  
Euxenia            {(risas) hai muitas ocasións pa facelo ||                                e entonces ||  
Xosefa                                        ;buénó:! ||

As we will see in the next extract, the relation between date and sexual activity seems to be projected onto the archetype of “single son”. Single women cannot leave home at night because it was the proper moment to “do it”; that is, to have sex. The logical consequence of the sexual act should be procreation, a hardly desirable circumstance outside marriage. Because of that, these women talk about “being bad” as a result of having sex when they have taken advantage of the hypothetical nocturnal permission to leave home and also criticize “single women” who have children. As we have seen at the beginning of this conversation, marriage means, or should mean, an inflection point between to date and to stop doing it. In the next extract, flirting is clearly related to the sexual game and, because of that, parental control is applied in different ways. Firstly, we can deduce that the most restrictive code affects women because they talk about “single women” and not “single men”. Moreover, life stage constitutes an important variable too, because these women cannot leave home during girlhood and only when they get married.

Immediately afterwards, they quickly give up on the sexual repression topic and start to talk about another traditional activity during the carnival: the “*lardeira*”. This discursive jump around shows that it is a linguistic taboo and they are not comfortable talking about it. It seems that they cannot even name the sexual act because they use sentences like “it was always done” [“*toda a vida se fixo*”] or “have opportunities to do it” [“*ter ocasiós pa facelo*”]. However, they never specify what about what kind of activity they are speaking.

Previously, they had used “*folión*” to reinforce the idea of feminine flirtation as a problem, insisting upon the fact that they could not leave home during this festivity and it was really disgusting for them “in this case we have a really bad time”. Talking about *Lardeira* means to avoid the sexual topic and focus on the previous sentimental stage in carnival, a period of time when it was socially accepted that women were active.

Xosefa { (risas) digo eu } ||  
 Euxenia { (risas) hai muitas ocasiós pa facelo || e entonces ||  
 Xosefa ¡buenó:! ||  
 Frida a min era unha das cousas que me gusta muto | correr a lardeira |  
 Euxenia <tose> || si pero no ||  
 Euxenia pero nos carnavales pasabámo-lo mui ben tamén | {<valoración> eh } ||  
 Frida si || poruqe como eramos mutos ||  
 Xosefa claro ||  
 Frida e | e viña muta xente | de fo# ||  
 Euxenia pero é que nos carnavales ||  
 Frida viña un montón de mozos | si ||  
 Xosefa muta xente á fariña ||  
 Euxenia que agora así eso de vir á fariña non: ||  
 Xosefa bota aquí nena | porque ||  
 Frida tu acórdas-te aquel ano que lle pinchamos as: ||  
 Euxenia xa é distinto ||  
 Frida as rodas do <incomprensíbel> ||  
 Xosefa <incomprensíbel> || (risas) ||  
 Euxenia si: ||  
 Xosefa as rodas | {<valoración> ai} | Jesús ||  
 Frida entre <nome propio> e que | íbamos tres | <nome propio> | i-eu e  
 despos non sei que qued# ||  
 Xosefa ¡cuatro ficémo-las! ||

Carnival constitutes the moment when roles are subverted and relativized. A good example of this is “*lardeira*” and “*fariña*”. As these women say, during carnival days, young men came to the village and fight with women by throwing flour [“*fariña*”]. Women are transformed into active agents during a period when anything can be taken seriously and jokes are socially legitimated. Because of that, they “puncture tyres” [“*pinchamos as rodas*”] and “play four [pranks]” [“*¡cuatro ficémoslas!*”]. It is a period of social flexibility that contrasts with the restrictive environment of the *folión*.

Although *Fariña* permits them to make contact with men during the day, the *Lardeira* is more subversive. It is a carnival ritual in which unmarried men run through the village with a decorated cross in their hands called “*lardeira*”. The purpose of women is to grab men’s crosses, a symbol of their honour. In this case, gender roles are reversed and women become completely active individuals.

Apart from gender identity constructions, carnival and more specifically the *Lardeira* are used to index age and Galician rurality because it is a specific traditional activity from a little village of Galician rural context. In the next extract we show a moment when these women consider “*lardeira*” as an ended tradition that was recently recovered: “it was a little lost but now it is recovered” [“*algo xa se perda e volveuse a recuperar*”].

Euxenia si | pero | eso | agora | sei co | despós | o de corre-la lardeira |  
 eso acabou-se | a | corre-la lardeira ||  
 Euxenia sigue porque: | <click> ||  
 Xosefa bueno | vamos indo ||  
 Euxenia vai seguindo a tradición non sei o por que | por algo | algo xa xe  
 perda e volveu-se a recuperar-e ||  
 Frida {<asentimento> hum} ||  
 Xosefa claro ||  
 Euxenia pero | pola lardeira tamén non hai así | muito quen: ||  
 Frida <click> | si | i-ademais que agora non hai xente coma | eu cuando nós  
 eramos novos ||



Today, *Lardeira* has been recovered although the situation was different in the past because the number of young people in Galician rural contexts has decreased. These women use that circumstance to reconstruct their youth in the past as a best moment for “*lardeira*” and consequently reaffirm their actual adult identity in contrast to other young persons. However, in addition to ageing being performed through narratives about social changes, rural Galician identity is performed too because women talk about themselves as heiresses of a culture that in some ways has disappeared and in others has been recovered, although it will never be the same as it was.

### 3.3. Taboo encounters and the construction of a couple’s identity

The mixed conversation starts with people talking about the problem of talking about dating in the context of couples. Euxenia reveals that she is afraid of this topic with the sentence “we can’t talk about it now | how we will say it to them and them to us?” [“non-o podemos falar | ¿como lle imos decir a eles ou eles a nós eiquí uis ó outros?”]. This extract represents the first discursive division of conversational group in two, according to gender/sexuality and civil statuses. Both variables are performed together but in a clearly hierarchy that indexes identity too.

Euxenia pero eiquí || non-o podemos falar ¿como lle imos? ||  
 Amadeo ;si home! ||  
 Euxenia ¿decir a eles ou eles a nos eiquí uis ós outros? ||  
 Lourenzo {<incerto> bueno xa se verá ||  
 Frida entonces ||  
 Euxenia eu que sei o que pudo pasar e: ||  
 Frida entonces eiquí repíte-se todo | outra vez ||  
 Lourenzo estamos-che apañados ||  
 Frida pois non pode ser || a ver se falamos dos vellos || (risas) || (risas) ||

The topic proposed by the researcher determines gender and sexuality performances because all people in these conversations are heterosexual women and men talking about dating. In their negatives can be detected discourses about the engagement that prescribe the possibility of talking about previous relationships in the presence of their partners. As a result, when I propose talking about dating, they only tell biographical stories concerning the period previous to their marriage and which are related to their actual partners.

Afterwards, they insist on the same social restriction in the moment that men tell a story about a party in a club. The curious aspect of this extract is the fear of discovering previous life stages: “they continue discovering things” [“siguen descubriendo cosas”]. Euxenia and Frida make jokes about the men’s silence, suggesting that they have decided not to continue speaking about that because they “are afraid” [“cala porque ten medo”].

Nemesio e querían-nos cobrar a entrada ¿acordais-vos? ||  
 Euxenia a:i que se che empe# siguen descubriendo cosas ||  
 Nemesio e: | e dic# ||  
 Amadeo non ||  
 Frida el non dice nada | mira: agora qu# que caladiño ||  
 Lourenzo mira que tamén ten que salir de eí: ||  
 Euxenia oi calou de todo ¿eh? ||  
 Nemesio ¿si oh? ||  
 Euxenia el || el cala ||  
 Frida el non descubre nada ||  
 Nemesio e zurra burra ||  
 Euxenia cala porque ten medo: ||  
 Euxenia de mete-la pata porque lle descubran ||

In women’s conversation, marriage was discussed as a border that establishes a distinction between the social acceptance of a date or not. Because of that, they said that they could not remember how to do it. In this case, it is not a question about marriage but engagement. In terms of identity construction, talking about previous relationships means giving access to their partners to a non-engaged self, a person that they are no longer.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper supports empirically the socioconstructionist and performance approaches which defend not only the existence of intragender differences but also the complexity of individual identities and their dependence on the

interactional context. Moreover, it shows how gender categories are shifting and how they interact with other social aspects, particularly age, class and ethnicity.

Finally, it explores the relevance of the interactional context by comparing the analysis of three different groups of people talking about dating. Their conversations show how people manage biographical narratives to positioning the self not only in relation to interlocutors but also other social groups that are constructed in the interaction according to inclusion or exclusion dialectics.

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## Biography

Noemi Basanta studied Galician and Portuguese Language and Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela where she researched language and gender studies in her degree dissertation “Language and gender in conversation”. For the last three years she has worked at the Instituto da Lingua Galega as a researcher in the CORILGA and Dicionario de Pronuncia da Lingua Galega projects. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation, supervised by Professor Xosé Luis Regueira at the University of Santiago de Compostela and is a researcher in the group “Linguistic change in modern Galician” (FFI2012-33845).