# From "I" to "You":

# A look at discursive hegemony of love in Iranian love blogs

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## Abstract

The idea for this paper emerged out of a discussion about positioning gender in romantic relations, while the hegemonic structure of the society aligns 'love' with power. Then I decided to explore the idea that the concept of 'power' in discourses of online romantic relations constructs and represents identities aroused from a hegemonic society.

Foucault notes 'power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society' (1978: 93), and Feminist Poststructuralist theory has interesting parallels with this position. The recognition of the force of 'discursive practices', the ways in which people are 'positioned' through those practices and the way in which the individual's 'subjectivity' is generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices are commensurate with the 'psycho-socio-linguistics' (Davies, 1989; Henriques *et al*., 1984; Potter and Wetherall, l988; Weedon, 1987) enfolding discourse analysis.

In Iran, the concept of 'shame' is the main component of 'love'. Therefore, 'love' is aligned with the family and private relations. In this paper, I discuss the way these relationships are publically expressed, by examining the phenomena of "love blogs", or blogs which are used as public expressions of love between two people. I examine how love blogs are used in order to construct gendered identities and power relations, drawing on a number of theoretical stances.

# Introduction

The focus of this paper on love suggests that love can be understood as a particular kind of human power, which brings about some effects. I presume the identification of love as a "power" to make something new in humans' life represents it as a discursive power.

Therefore, an important part of this paper is to investigate and elaborate on theoretically how love as a set of relational, practical activities and discourses that are formed and regulated through complex cultural powers and political institutions, intersects with hegemonic construction and cultural institutions and ideologies in Iranian society. Therefore, in theory, this study owes a certain amount to the works of Raewyn Connell (1995) on hegemonic masculinity, and Judith Baxter's (2003) Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) approach of the web of power.

Additionally, in current Iranian society there are a number of restrictions on the ways that gender, sexuality and desire can be expressed. Homosexuality is illegal and gay men have been publicly executed while lesbians have been imprisoned or lashed (although the government appears to be more sympathetic towards some men and women who are labelled as 'transsexuals' and helps them to have gender-reassignment surgery). While heterosexuals do not face such stringent measures, sexual relationships or even friendships between un-related men and women prior to or after marriage are forbidden by the government (although such relationships still occur).

Iranians must take care to monitor their own behaviour in public at all times – for example, kissing is frowned upon. Therefore, Iranians have found other ways to express aspects of their identities that are publically suppressed, by using the internet.

This study focuses on the ways that love relationships between couples are publically expressed, by examining the phenomena of "love blogs", or blogs which are used as public expressions of love between two people. A blog is a personal journal which is published on the internet, and is a relatively new form of media, becoming popular in the last decade around the world. Bloggers write about many topics, although in Iran, many chose to frame their blog postings around the concept of love.

Bloggers in Iran are afforded freedom via anonymity, but blogging is closely monitored by the government – for example, web filtering programs remove any pages that contain certain banned words like *women*. Bloggers must therefore develop strategies in order to express themselves without being censored. In this paper, I intend to examine how love blogs are used in order to construct gendered identities and power relations, using Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) approach and Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) analysis.

Looking at the crucial role of power in the gendered construction of love, this research provides information on how people orient themselves to relationship restrictions in the Iranian context by using language creatively in a relatively new form of media.

These debates lead me toward two significant questions. Firstly, how are romantic relations in Iranian society affected by the dominant hegemonic masculinity?, and secondly, what is the role of love blogs in responding to this dominant power imposing on discourse of love? In other words, are they reinforcing or deconstructing this wall between individuals in their romantic relations?

In response to the above mentioned questions, I also analyse a blog posting to exemplify the achieved answers.

## Discourse of Love in a web of power

Backing Judith Butler's theatrical notions, I say love is a strategy, medium, site and scene. Love is an act rather than a quantifiable element able to be parsed between politics and poetics, because it constantly transforms the definitions of those very terms. Distinguishing this discourse of love as one that implicitly speaks about resistance and change, we do not take for granted modes of reproduction, and exchanging values. Love as a medium is part of an economy of resistance, ecstatic resistance provoking questions of (hidden) rules and strategies. What is love for? Or how are we positioned in romantic relations? Therefore, I discuss the concept of love within the relations and attitudes put into the *Discourse(s) of love*.

A look at the Foucauldian notion of discourse clarifies the complexity of the term, because it draws on other concepts such as power and subjectivity. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to:

> ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987: 108).

Therefore, a significant feature of discourse is its '*network formation*'. There are many discourses connected with each other and used by various people for different processes, social situations, interpersonal relationships and even technologies.

*Power* being represented by language is another core concept in the Foucauldian notion of discourse. Baxter (2003: 24) argues that Foucault's view of 'language as a system does not represent experience in a transparent and neutral way but always exists within historically specific discourses. These discourses are often contradictory, offering competing versions of reality, and serving different and conflicting power interests'. By this notion, Baxter (2003: 9) binds the concept of discourse and power with 'competing discourses' when she concludes, 'individuals are rarely consistently positioned as powerful across all discourses at work within a given context – they are often located simultaneously as both powerful and

powerless'. Thus, the relationship between discourse and power is one that concentrates on subjugation. Who speaks for whom? In answering this question Baxter (2003: 8) defines "power" and "powerfulness" as 'the way in which individual speakers are often *better placed* than others to benefit from the experiences, interests and goals of a particular context – by virtue of their more privileged positioning within a combination of dominant discourses'. In other words, the power relations which interplay with the discourse authorize the sets of beliefs, actions and ideas that they help to create, justify and legitimize. Therefore, discourse of love carries with it specific expectations and affects the verbal or non-verbal behaviour of the subject (lover). This behaviour is self-regulated and the ways in which we as a society value and locate the romantic relationships is a good example of how power relations operate at some hidden levels.

In response to the subjectivity embedded in the discursive power of love, the economy of resistance can be highlighted when the agency of individuals resist their positions of powerlessness within prevailing or dominant discourses in order to open up alternative voices, and diverse points of view (Baxter, 2002b: 831). Then not only the complex and contingent web of discourses and positions for subjects to navigate between is underlined but also subjects are located and locate themselves in and by different discourses (Krolokke, 2006: 58).

In terms of Iranian society, this discourse of love is very complicated, because love and romantic relations are much privatized legally and culturally. By law, any romantic relationship between couples should be legitimized under the heterosexual marriage contract. Therefore, homosexuals don't have marriage rights. Gay men are executed by the government and ignored by the people; while lesbian women are lashed by the government and rejected by the people. Couples (even many married ones) don't talk about their romantic feelings in public, especially women. One reason might be that any behaviour showing romantic feelings in the public is investigated by the police. For example, if a couple kiss each other in public, they are arrested, or if they are holding hands, police can ask if they are married or related, and they should *prove* that they are related.

From a cultural point of view, in more privatized spaces like houses, couples normally don't say 'I love you' when they are with others. And although sex is a part of a couple's love, couples are expected to ignore it. Also, it is not accepted for a woman to talk about her passion for a man. On the other side, people write about their feelings and emotions toward each other in public pages of love blogs more explicitly than in real life.
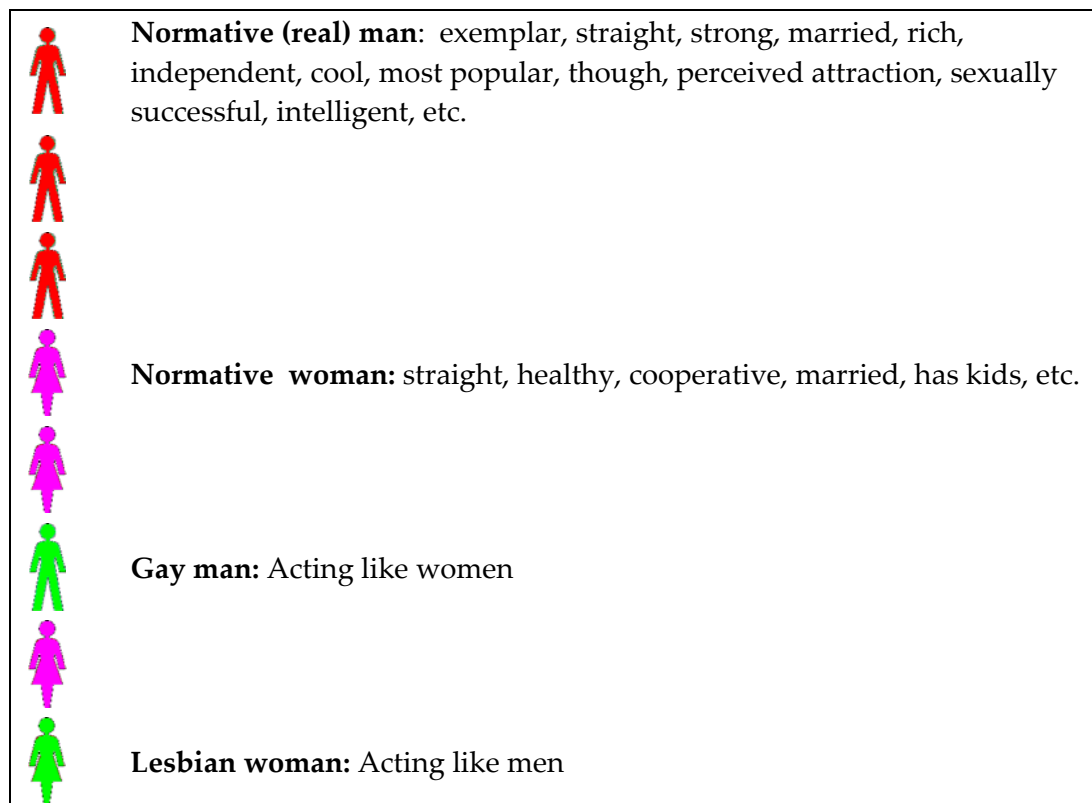
Therefore, I attempt to highlight 'the possibilities for resistance and reinterpretation of social practices' based on existing moments of *strength* in individuals' (particularly women's) interactions with others (Baxter, 2003: 66), by using FPDA as an approach which considers gender construction in a "localised" or diversified context. I also point out the ways women (in particular) are positioned as 'relatively powerful, powerless or a combination of both' (Baxter, 2003: 66).

## Constructing a wall: Hegemonic masculinity in romantic relations

The concept of 'hegemony', driving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than any other is culturally exalted (Connell, 1995:77). Hegemony does not imply total control because masculinity is dialectical; it is not just a process of one-way socialisation. What it does imply is that hegemonic masculinity is a form of social dominance which excludes women and men who do not conform to the hegemonic model in question or who fail to do so (Connell, 1995: 37). Because of the variety of hegemonic masculinities (complicit, marginalised, or subordinate), the hegemonies can come into conflict with each other; a good example in Iranian society is the usual conflicts between fathers and young sons. The exclusivity of dominant hegemonic masculinity leads to other forms which are usually under the support of the law, in the lower classes or belong to ethnic and sexual minorities. However, it should be noted that these various forms of hegemonic masculinity have much in common and typically re-work elements from the dominant hegemony that they do not already share (Connell, 1995: 114). Connell describes the dominant form of hegemonic masculinity to be "exemplary". The dominant form sets standards, has popular support and rejects those who fail. Exemplars are represented in the major genres of popular culture, often the exemplars at the top of the hegemony are purely fictional, or idealised. Connell describes three other types of hegemonic masculinity which are not the dominant form as: marginalised, complicit and subordinate. What is expelled from the dominant form is subordinate (typically gay masculinity). Marginalised hegemonic masculinity is 'always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group' (Connell, 1995: 77-81). It seems that the majority of men practice complicit masculinity, the form that benefits from "the patriarchal dividend" in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command, leading to subordination of women and some other (marginalised) men. These men have a connection to the exemplar form, but they do not embody it. They are not involved in overt domination or absolute displays of control. These are the "ordinary" men who do not question the gender order (Connell, 1995: 80-82).

Though extremely useful as a theoretical tool for this study, certain problems with the notion of hegemonic masculinity present themselves which make theoretical alterations necessary. One of these problems goes back to the concept of multiple hierarchies. This re-conceptualisation is in terms of multiple hierarchies defined by the struggle for status of people based on their gender and sexuality taking place on a day-to-day level. This is the inequality in power between men and men, men and women, and even women and women, implying that some people are more privileged or oppressed than others. Looking at Iranian society, I propose considering a hierarchy in terms of the arrangement of cliques in a descending scale from being most powerful masculine to lacking powerful masculinity, an

arrangement which doesn't exclude heterosexual and homosexual women, transsexuals and bisexuals. In Figure 1, I have tried to show a schema of such a hierarchy in Iranian society.



**Normative (real) man**: exemplar, straight, strong, married, rich, independent, cool, most popular, though, perceived attraction, sexually successful, intelligent, etc.

**Normative woman:** straight, healthy, cooperative, married, has kids, etc.

**Gay man:** Acting like women

**Lesbian woman:** Acting like men

*Note: transsexuals and bisexuals are ignored completely; they are not even named inside the society.*

Figure 1: Hegemonic masculinity in Iranian society

On the other hand, as Jackson (1999: 120) states 'emotions are culturally constructed; they are not fixed for all time. Recent accounts of love suggest that it has indeed changed its meaning over time and that this has come about in part because personal life has been the object of political, especially feminist struggle (Baruch, 1991; Cancian, 1990; Giddens, 1992; Seidman, 1991)'. This notion underpins the possibility of change in power equation by means of, for example, complicity and resistance lied in struggle for gaining power.

Considering the different masculinities which Connell introduced, we can claim that power in masculine hierarchies is not just "top-down" from a central institution or exemplar, because power is always in constant flux, struggle and entanglement, expressed in social relations, which are always subject to change and unevenly spread. Thus, power permeates, structures and changes hierarchies, resulting in the multiplicity of masculine hierarchies. As Baker (2008: 176-7) suggests, '[w]ithin the gay subculture, men who look or behave as though they are typically heterosexual are afforded higher status (yet are still positioned as inferior to heterosexual men). The conflation of masculinity and heterosexuality (or gender

and sexuality per se) is not just restricted to hegemonic masculine identities, it occurs within subordinate identities also'.

This process leads to subjugation of less powered people by making them silent and unheard. Therefore, the hegemonic power coming from the society constructs a wall against love and romantic expectations. In fact, 'although romantic relationships are often seen as egalitarian, the compulsiveness and insecurity of romantic passion imply a struggle for power. To be in love is to be powerless, at the mercy of the other, but it also holds out the promise of power, of enslaving the other' (Jackson, 1999: 117).

Connell (1995:196) notes that '[f]rom the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, the potential for homoerotic pleasure was expelled from the masculine and located in a deviant group, symbolically assimilated to women or to beasts. There was no mirror-type of "the heterosexual". Rather heterosexuality became a required part of manliness'. Therefore, romantic love is culturally constructed via a link between love and 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) institutionalized in marriage. Though many lovers are banned from doing so, because they are homosexual, transsexual, or already married. In this way, the marriage contract is underpinning the social gender order by putting people in some pre-made boxes of socio-culturally conceptualized romantic feelings and expectations.

Jackson (2006) suggests applying four intersecting levels of social construction to practice hegemonic masculinity (Figure 2). I have adopted these facets in my data analysis, because these intersecting levels work very well in recognizing the web of power embedded in discourse of love in Iranian society.
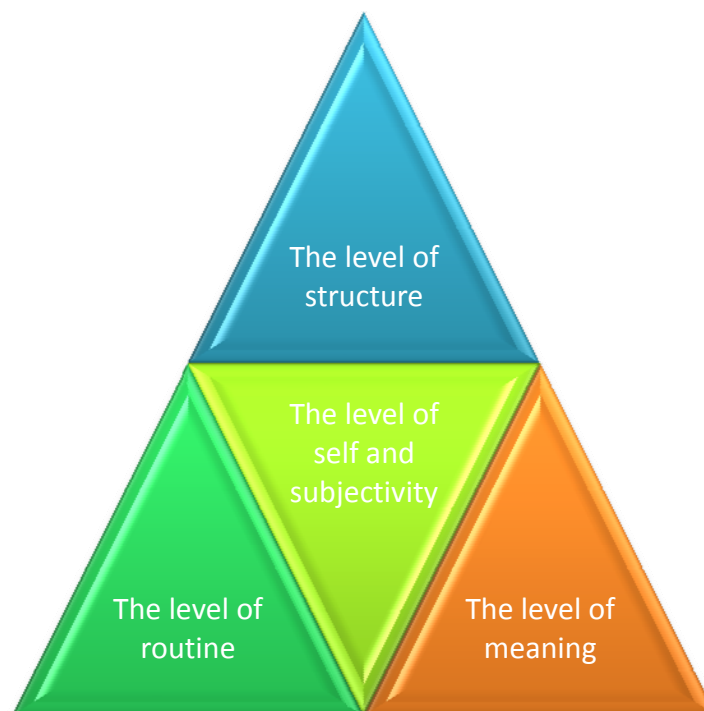


Figure 2: Intersecting levels in a heteronormative construction

The first level points out the structure in which gender as a hierarchical social division is constructed and heterosexuality is institutionalized; for example, by marriage or the law. The second level includes the meaning, encircling the discursive construction of gender and sexuality by the conceptual themes negotiated in everyday social interaction. The third one backs as routine everyday social practices through which individuals *do gender* (Butler, 1990) within localized contexts and relationships. And the forth level adds subjectivity as a framework through which individuals experience desires and emotions leading to constructing and representing themselves as embodied gendered and sexual beings (Jackson, 2006).

For example, in Iranian society, the heterosexual family is the core unit of social institutions and power practices are formulated through it. Polygamy for men is legal, though culturally it is not accepted. Moreover, the government considers the barrenness as an acceptable appeal for divorce. It makes bearing child the offspring and reason for continuing the marital life by the law. Therefore, in structural level, love is needed to be approved and constructed based on the marriage contract and ability of child bearing.

On the level of meaning, both heterosexual sex which is legitimized, and attributes and emotions like attraction, warmth, and affection which are called 'love' are parcelled into marriage. But the marriage contract considers an almost unlimited right of sexual relations (polygamy) for men and a limited one (monogamy) for women. Therefore, for most of the women:

> Monogamy has come to be the definition of love, a yardstick by which we measure the rest of our emotions. 'Real' love is only that which is exclusively focused on one person of the opposite sex - all else is labelled 'liking'. Like so much butter, romantic love must be spread thickly on one slice of bread; to spread it over several is to spread it' thinly' (Comer, 1974:219).

Then conspiracy and resistance appear as major themes amongst women in response to the polygamy right of men.

On the level of routine, romantic love has not even the same meaning for heterosexual men and women, because it is constructed based on a systematic notion of hegemonic masculinity imposed by unfair marriage laws. Therefore, in desiring power over a man, women attempt to enslave men by using different strategies under the name of romantic love, like mothering or humbling themselves to nothingness before him as a kind of conspiracy. Men also learn to deny feelings of intimacy, 'and are encouraged further to see physical affection and intimacy primarily if not exclusively in sexual terms' (Brod, 1992: 128). Such strategies by women may make men dependent on a woman's nurturing and she may continue to gain a sense of power providing it. But what she is providing is emotional labour which, like domestic labour, may offer her a sense of self-worth while simultaneously being exploitative (Bartky, 1990; Delphy and Leonard, 1992). Therefore, as Jackson (1999: 105) argues '[l]ove is often requited and rarely balanced". A recurrent theme in Barthes' *A lover's Discourse* is this imbalance which is played out around the theme of waiting. For Barthes, the concept of 'waiting' encapsulates the powerlessness of the lover, being in the

power of the other. 'The lover's fatal identity is precisely: I am the one who waits.' The other does not wait (Barthes, 1978: 40).

Finally, on the level of subjectivity, Iranian society interiorizes practices of power in romantic relations from the outside, but one that does not involve determinism or total dependence. As Deleuze (1988: 96) argues '[t]he outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside'. Therefore, discourse of law in Iranian society subjugates heterosexual women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals as well as non-exemplar men by privatizing discourse of love in the concept of family and heterosexual marriage. Today, this wall which is made of the non-egalitarian system of hegemonic masculinity is faced with different strategies which bring love to the public like blogging and making narrations by silenced groups in order to use intertexualities and make changes based on the agency of individuals.

## Destroying the wall: The Hegemonic masculinity in Iranian love blogs

During recent years, the use of the Internet has rapidly increased; consequently, computer mediated communication (CMC) has attracted more and more attention by many Iranians. Although CMC technology, contents and usage patterns are still in a process of rapid change, the use of CMC as a popular medium for reinforcing self-expression, and socialization is increasing dramatically. In fact, the internet operates in a complex way that, upon closer inspection, appears to affect the real world by resembling it and may at times require a critical eye to uncover. The focus on content and communicative practices in CMC highlights the possibilities of new gendered identities being constructed through online interactions. These new gendered identities may appear in a different form from the more fixed forms of "real life".

Referring once more to Butler (1990:25), 'gender is always a doing... no gender identity behind the expressions of gender. Identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results'. On the other hand, Mullany (2000:3) notes that 'masculinity and femininity are not traits that we inherently have, rather they are effects that we perform by the activities we partake in'. While fully aware of the existence of dominance and power structure through performing hegemonic masculinity in the society, it is believed that the differences implemented in the socialisation process profoundly affect male and female discourses (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990, 1994). That is, although there are 'norms that govern how individual speakers decide to perform either masculinity or femininity... men and women are fully capable of resisting and subverting these norms' (Mullany, 2000:4).

Such an instance shows itself when looking at the collected information from some Iranian love blogs, in which actual people construct their gender identity through an online

representation of the self. Love blogs are a type of diary blogs by CMC settings, whose main topic is love and expressing it through various forms.

Love bloggers as owners and writers of blogs coming from a real society in which dominant hegemonic masculinity subjugates them by pervading the gendered norms of real life. On the other hand, they resist this subjectivity by constructing their gender identities through expressing their emotions, values and attitudes toward their romantic relations and representing their agency. The possibility of appearing anonymous is a significant privilege for the bloggers, male or female, though it is found that females prefer anonymous interaction through CMC because it does not allow judgment on the basis of gender (Gopal, Mirana, Robichaux, & Bostrom, 1997). Further, anonymity actually leads to increased idea generation (Connolly, Jessup & Valacich, 1990).

By the way, it is clear that real life and love blogs are affecting each other through doing gender and subverting the gender norms simultaneously, when love bloggers change the position of love from the private and put it in the hands of the public. However, it is important to know how love bloggers may affect hegemonic masculinity in real life, while they as non-exemplar people will also be affected by it just as they are in real life.

It is also important to understand and attempt to ascertain the effects that such an environment may have on both bloggers and blog readers -- are they picking up on these norms and conforming to them? With blogs like "Lost Gender", which as an example, I analyse one of its postings in this paper, this is a matter that could be having a major impact on the social life of those involving production and consumption of love blogs.

## Exploratory Data: Lost Gender

Baxter (2003: 67) introduces the concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia as being important considerations for FPDA based research. Such research places emphasis on diversity and provides a space to hear unheard voices, which fits well with the concept of Iranian love blogs.

Ideally, the data should be as easy to collect as possible. In my study, the selected texts are in electronic format, published in publicly accessible pages. As the area of study is on blogs which are public spheres of CMC, ethical issues are minimal, although I have chosen to examine blogs where the blogger has taken care to hide their own identity (which was actually the case for the vast majority of the blogs I examined). Data is taken from a popular Iranian blog server called Persian Blog. I collected 9998 blogs which were created from September 2001 (when blogging became popular in Iran) to October 2007. As I am carrying out a qualitative analysis using FPDA methods, I needed to reduce my sample to a manageable number which was felt to be both representative and interesting in terms of

analysis. Looking at some approaches in the study and classification of CMDs[1] some criteria for data selection is used. These criteria are classified into three categories such as: type of blog, type of blogger, and type of blog posting.

Additionally, taking a post-structuralist approach to language, intertexuality has a very important role in this study. In talking about competing discourses, Baxter (2003: 8) argues that 'Such discourses do not operate in discrete isolation from each other but are always intertextually linked, that is, each discourse is likely to be interconnected with and infused by traces of others'. Therefore, diversity in self identity of bloggers and their relation in constructing their on-line world (and the off-line one later on) are emphasized in this study. This intertexuality is discussed mainly when the web of power in the posting is under question by classification of Jackson (2001).

Trying to provide a structure for analysis, which makes answering the research questions possible, I have used four steps in analysing all of the selected blog postings, as: (1) Translation of Posting; (2)Descriptive overview of the posting; (3) Line by line discourse analysis of the posting and looking for linguistic features such as metaphors, euphemism, referencing, and self-referencing; and (4) Analysis of social constructions within a web of power through the four intersecting levels of structure, meaning, routine, and subjectivity.

As an example of my data, I look at a posting[2] from a blog called "Lost Gender":

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[1] Computer Mediated Discourse(s)
[2] Dated in 17/10/2004, URL: http://jensiyat-e-gomshodeh.blogsky.com/1383/08/

01    **Dear Respected Gentleman; I am not your** (singular, informal) **wife. I am a pot of tea!**

02



03    I am not just your (singular, informal) wife.
04    Sometimes, I become a pot of tea [for you (singular, informal)] to swig its tea,
05    when you (singular, informal) are tired and you (singular, informal) have come back from work,
06    Then [you (singular, informal)] stare at my eyes and with your (singular, informal) manly rudeness tell me that nothing more than a pot of tea refreshes you (singular, informal).
07    And I look at you (singular, informal) ;
08    and my glass of tea stays on the table for hours, and becomes cold!

This posting belongs to a blogger who writes as a female heterosexual artist. Her lover has left her some years ago and now she is married to another man. In most of the postings in the blog, the blogger writes about her previous love and her sorrow from what has happened to her, rather than writing about her relationship with her current husband. In a few postings like this one, the blogger writes about her feelings in her legitimized romantic relationship of heterosexual marriage.

Pronoun use is interesting in this blog entry and I will refer to pronouns in the analysis below. Grammatically, Persian pronouns have special characteristics that make their resolution more difficult than that of English pronouns. Persian pronouns do not provide any information about gender. Additionally, second-person plural pronouns are sometimes used in place of singular human pronouns to show respect. These features make gender and number agreement (which are two of the most effective features in pronoun resolution)

either useless or less effective in Persian pronoun resolution. Tables 1 and 2 clarify the situation of singular and plural second-person pronouns in Persian language.

| | Singular | | Plural | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Persian** | **English** | **Persian** | **English** |
| **Informal** | tʊ | you | ʃʊmɑ | you |
| **Formal** | ʃʊmɑ | you | ʃʊmɑ | you |

Table 1: Second person subjective or objective pronouns

| | Singular | | Plural | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Persian** | **English** | **Persian** | **English** |
| **Informal** | {t | your | Itʌn | your |
| **Formal** | Itʌn | your | Itʌn | your |

Table 2: Second-person possessive pronouns

Therefore, in translation of this posting, the use of *you (informal, singular)* instead of *you* shows the informal and intimate relation between the blogger and his lover. Persian has two second person pronouns in order to distinguish between single and plural references. The second-person singular pronouns are also used to show close relationships between a speaker and a referent. I have translated them to *you (informal, singular)* and *your (informal, singular)*, whenever intimacy and informality has been conveyed by them.

The original text was written as a paragraph (in Persian language). I have divided the translated text into eight parts, including title, applied photo, and main paragraph. Each part includes one complete sentence in Persian embedded by several clauses which are connected by adjunctive elements like *and* or punctuation like commas.

On the other hand, the blogger produces a monologue by using the self-referencing pronoun '*I*' in the text, to construct her gender identity within expressing her expectations and conceptualization of her romantic relationship.

In the title (line 1), the blogger clarifies her position as a *wife* positioned in two different levels of relationship. She addresses her husband very formally as *dear respected gentleman* and immediately objectifies herself as *pot of tea* in an intimate relationship. Using a very formal address for the 'other' and objectification of 'self' in a sentence refers to a huge

gap between the position of involved people in this relationship. This gap points to an exaggerated respect for one against humiliating the other. Therefore, by using some referencing techniques and objectification, she positions herself in a lower hierarchical order (less powerful) in an intimate relationship which comes from the combination of a social position defined by a legitimized contract (marriage) and an interpersonal and emotional relation (romantic relationship). Emphatically, she objectifies herself as *a pot of tea*.

The photo (line 2), has many connotations too. It is probable that the blogger has been inspired by the work of the surrealist Belgian artist, Magritte, called the Great War (1964)[3]. The woman in this photo is using a traditional Islamic covering called 'chador'. The textile pattern of chador which is called "Persian pickles[4]" is a traditional pattern rooted in Iranian culture (and not Islam). The pot in front of the woman's face might be a metaphor for the objectification of woman. The steel tea pot might show the reflexivity of the outer world or identity of other versus the identity of self. The reflection of light in the surface of the pot shows an indoor space, which can reflect the inner relationship between the blogger and her husband. It can also refer to the domestic sphere allocated to the blogger as a woman.

In line 3, the blogger uses *just* to emphasise a (maybe hidden) role rather than her apparent role of being a *wife*. In this way, the blogger refers to attributes and expectations attached to the concept of *wife* by the husband or social norms.

In line 4, the blogger explains her other role from that of being a wife. The adverb *sometimes* is referring to shifting times between these roles. Tea is a popular drink in Iranian culture and serving tea is a traditional role for Iranian women in traditional families. The metaphor of *becoming a pot of tea* is an odd metaphor, probably referring to restricting the identity of the blogger to a 'male server' and emotional labour of 'husband care'. As the tea is the content of container (tea inside the pot), the verb *swig* refers to the certainty and calmness of the drinker (here, the husband). The possessive pronoun of *its* may stand for man's feeling of ownership as well as woman's duty to devote and propose her inner emotions to her husband (the role that Iranian married women are expected to play in their marital life).

In line 5, the blogger explains the adverb *sometimes* by referring to the setting in which she is expected (at least in the eyes of the man) to play a 'husband carer' role. The blogger refers to expected labour division between her and her husband as man works outdoors, becomes *tired* and in returning home needs some refreshment, while woman is expected to do housework and emotional work (explained in following lines).

In line 6, the verbal phrase *stare at my eyes* refers to a rude manner of looking at somebody in Iranian culture which correlates with directness and shamelessness. As there is no shame (indirectness) in this way of looking and shame is considered as a sign of love in Iranian culture, the blogger denies the love from the man's side. By using the adjective of *manly* for the word *rudeness*, she generalizes her husband's behaviour as a gendered norm for men. I mean she accepts man's behaviour as a social norm for men while it is considered

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[3] http://bertc.com/g9/magritte3.htm
[4] It is also called Paisley Design

negative behaviour for women. It might be referring to this point that men are not expected to be indirect in their romantic relations. Using the noun *rudeness*, clarifies the negative view of the woman toward the man's behaviour, because she feels that the man has taken her for granted. In other words, 'heteronormativity structures heterosex and intimate heterosexual relationships by setting out the 'taken–for-granted' gendered norms in different areas of social life' (Jackson 2006).

In line 7, the blogger uses the verb *look* for herself rather than *stare* used in the previous line for her husband. She also uses the pronoun of *you (singular, informal)*. By this technique, she may shows her tenderness and her appealing for love, whichshe doesn't see in her husband's manner. A comparison between the verbs *stare* and *look* respectively for husband and wife implicitly refers to their different positions leading to more powerfulness of the man in this relationship.

In line 8, the blogger refers to *her* glass of tea. Comparing *glass* to *pot*, which are serving respectively woman and man, the woman might be referring to fewer rights for her in this legitimized and institutionalized romantic relation. Though she introduces herself as the provider (pot of tea) of emotional care, what she owes is less than the man. The process of coldness of *tea glass* stands for the feelings of the woman which are ignored by the man.

This posting is a good example of the hegemonic construction of love in Iranian society. On the structural level, heterosexuality is institutionalized by the marriage contract and the (traditional) family as an important aspect of heteronormative society. As the marriage contract doesn't provide the same rights for both parties (husband and wife), its endowed social power forms the hegemonic masculinity in the couples' relationship. Therefore, the romantic relationship between the blogger and her husband has been put into the legitimized contract of marriage.

On the level of meaning, it is arguable that 'each heterosexual couple 'does' heterosexuality as much through divisions of labour and distributions of household resources as through specifically sexual and reproductive practices' (Jackson, 2005: 14). This posting shows that the blogger and her husband are doing gender since, despite the emphasis on togetherness and sharing feelings in modern life-style of hetero-relations, the evidence suggests that it is still women who do most of the domestic work necessary to keep the household running and most of the emotional labour necessary to maintain the relationship itself (Van Every 1996). Here, the emotional work[5] of woman in the form of objectification (denial of subjectivity) treats it as if there is no need to show concern for the blogger's feelings and personal values; specifically when she emphasises that "*I am a pot of tea*".

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[5] Delphy and Lenard (1992) define the "emotional labour" as the:
*work which establishes relations of solidarity, which maintains bonds of affection, which provides moral support, friendship and love, which gives people a sense of belonging, of ontological strength, of empowerment, and thereby makes them feel good. This too requires effort and skill. It is not just a question of thinking about someone, but of doing actual activities: talking to them about things that interest them, fetching them things that give them pleasure, smiling at them, cuddling them, and stroking their bodies and their egos.*

On the level of routine, the blogger depicts the emotional labour defined for her in a marital relationship, when she refers to fetching her husband by serving tea for him. She uses metaphors, like '*glass of tea*' or adverbs of frequency, like *sometimes* and wh-adverbs, like *when.*

And finally, on the level of subjectivity, some strategies of address (reference/self-reference), like *you (informal, singular), I, dear respected gentleman* are used to represent the hegemonic construction of the marital relationship between the couple of this posting. This hegemonic system puts the woman in a less powerful position, though by expressing her feelings and thoughts as well as network formation, the woman resists this oppression and provides a competing discourse rather than accepting the dominant discourse.

# Conclusion

This paper has presented a review on contradictions between self and subjectivity in Iranian online societies (particularly blogs) with respect to the dominant hegemonic masculinity indexing some gendered social norms, web of power and discourse of love in Iranian love blogs that is a relatively new topic in this field.

It is important to realise that the circulation implied in the concept of discourse makes it possible to move from the off-line society (real life) towards the on-line society and back it with new concepts and changes in gender construction. Demonstrating the current dominant hegemonic masculinity in Iranian society, I have attempted to clarify whether love blogs are an equaliser in romantic relations of Iranian internet users. Although research in this field is still scant, it clearly shows that 'just because the technology is presented as 'genderless,' though this is very highly debatable, it does not mean that the interactions taking place through the technology will lose any of their complexity nor will the technology strip away existing social structures' (Yates, 2001:32). Though, the focus on content and communicative practices in love blogs highlights the possibilities of new gendered identities being constructed through online interactions. These new gendered identities may appear in a different form from the more fixed forms of "real life." In particular, the research reviewed in this paper regarding discourse of love leads one to conclude that although 'the "democratic" perception of CMC is seriously flawed' (Yates, 2001:32) because there are some other social and cultural variables needed to be included in the study of gender issues within the blogs, the CMC through blogs makes it possible to make a more 'democratic' society. For example, expressing emotions and attitudes toward romantic relations by the bloggers increases the competing discourses of love which leads to a more democratic perception of romantic relations in day-to-day life.

The concept of "power" in discourses of online romantic relations constructs and represents identities aroused from a hegemonic society. Having said this, it is important to realise that individuals are 'fully capable of using strategies associated with either

masculinity or femininity' (Mullany, 2000:4), both in love blogs and face to face settings. Though, regardless of the environments, other factors beyond gender, such as culture, age, ethnicity, and class, also play important roles in conceptualising the discourse of love. For example, emotional labour identified in the analyzed blog is happening in various forms and different levels in the real life of many Iranian women, and the blogger conceptualizes it from her own point of view. In this regard, bloggers use various linguistic techniques and strategies to construct their identity within a romantic relation such as metaphors, objectification, reference strategies and so on.

Therefore, it seems that the web of power in love blogs is constructed based on the identification of the blogger's self with other (lover or society) in a co-constructed and relational contact with the real life.

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