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**NB. All of the research participants are Spanish Honours language undergraduates in a British university context in their fourth and final year of language study. Their names have been changed to ensure anonymity. The data gathered were all in Spanish and have been translated into English for the purpose of this workshop.**

### **QUESTION ONE**

**What are the underlying beliefs of Latin American gendered identity in the students' narratives and observations?**

*Machismo* is another word for *chauvinism*, the belief that men are better than women demonstrated in their attitudes towards women.

*Data collected from class discussions and personal diaries.*

#### **Martine, French**

The first thing that shocked me in this story was the fact that women have to reveal so much of their bodies. French women are more prudish about their bodies. There's no need to show so much flesh to be sexy. I think we don't share the same notion of 'femininity' or 'sexiness' with Latin American women. For me, dressing sexily means elegantly, not necessarily with a miniskirt or a plunging neckline. The sexiness is in the detail like the way I arrange my hair, my make-up or jewelry. To my mind, the style of a miniskirt and a plunging neckline can be sexy, but above all, it is vulgar, and people might think that the girl is up for sex. So this aspect of vulgarity is the major difference between both cultures.

#### **Emma, English**

When I was in Ciudad Real (Spain) during my year abroad, I taught English as a foreign language to children. Most of their mothers didn't work, they were housewives, and this can be related to sexism. It is the man who goes out to work to support the family ... also, in Spain, I lived with a Mexican guy. I noticed how much he disliked being contradicted by a woman. Every time his mother came from Mexico, she would cook for him, make his bed, put his rubbish in the bin ... she would do

everything for him! So we had lots of arguments. We were so different. He showed his lack of respect for me one day when he put some of his hair on my toothbrush. That's why I say that Latin American men have no respect for women.

## **QUESTION TWO**

**Can you identify any altered schemata and/or different viewpoint(s) in the students' comments?**

*Data collected from class discussions and final exam essays.*

### **GROUP 1**

1. You just can't generalise. Not all Latin American countries are the same. They are all very different. I went to Bolivia, to a *quechua*\* area, where I met many *quechua* women. You just can't compare these women with Mexican women, for example. Even in Mexico, you need to take into account the different social classes, different cities ... I once had the same idea as you, but now I know there are differences from one woman to another. It could be that one woman has high self-esteem and another one doesn't. (Hilary, English)

*\* Hilary refers to the indigenous Andean people in Bolivia, South America.*

2. (This discussion) reminds me of the culture shock I experienced during my year abroad in Bolivia. At the time I was very angry about everything, about the vegetables, the people, the animals in the street, well, absolutely everything! Then I started thinking about the way I was looking at the place, from what perspective I was viewing it, because the village I was placed in Bolivia was so very different from any place in England. It is such a different culture ... then I decided to leave all my prejudices and feelings behind and thought to myself 'Well, I'm here, in Bolivia, how can I fit into this culture? What can I do to integrate into this society?' (Hilary, English)
3. At the beginning, the story "Norma y Ester" makes us believe that it is about weak and submissive women. Yet, as the story unfolds, Gamero makes us question our stereotypes. (Gemma, English)

### **GROUP 2**

1. These women (*Norma and Ester*) are submissive to a certain extent. Yes, they do have to do things they don't really want to do, but they are a lot more intelligent than Víctor. They use their intelligence not to be submissive and obedient. (Raini, Anglo Indian)
2. Ester appears to be submissive and obedient, but deep down inside she is not. She's plotting revenge under the guise of being a lamb. She's counting

the days and the hours to achieve her goal. She gives the appearance of being a submissive woman, but you never really know what somebody is really like, what they are truly like. (Anna, Belgian)

3. Ester's strength lies in her resourcefulness to achieve her objective: to strangle Víctor and exact revenge for the unfair treatment her best friend received while she worked in the same salon ... the power actually lies in the hands of the women in the story, who adapt and manipulate man-made rules to their advantage. (Jenny, English)
4. The women in the story use the patriarchal social structure to their own advantage as an instrument to exploit and control men. Thus, they develop strategies to manipulate and dominate, and in so doing, survive in such a society. Norma sees the 'real' Víctor – a loving and sweet man who puts on a powerful and *macho* facade at the salon. (Lizzy, English)

### GROUP 3

1. I thought of this at one point ... I was shocked by the fact that the story was written by a man in his forties, well-read and who travels widely ... for me, this is a story of denunciation. Every time I have read a story like this one, it's been written by a female writer. Gamero is sort of defending women in his story. (Billy, English)
2. I quite agree with you, Billy. I see what you mean when you say that he's defending women in a way ... he's also showing that these women are capable of defending themselves against men. (Raini, Anglo Indian)
3. This male supremacy is all a vocal facade. Víctor undervalues women and boasts loudly about his sexual adventures when he is surrounded by other men ... this behaviour is due to social pressure to fit into a *macho* role ... Ester's boss, for example, acts differently when Víctor is not in the salon and he appears to be a decent man, as Norma points out in the story. (Nigel, English)
4. The reader witnesses Víctor's transition from a 'fierce wolf' to a 'lap dog' ... Víctor cries like a baby, falls at Ester's feet and offers her all of his financial possessions in an attempt to beg for forgiveness. (Emma, English)