

Gender-based violence in virtual environments: a look at adolescent reality

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Abstract

Introduction. Smart devices are here to stay, and in adolescence they have become the means of socialization par excellence, the fundamental instrument for communicating and relating to the world. While it is true that these types of devices offer innumerable advantages, improper use involves risks and dangers. One of these dangers is the furtherance of gender inequality, reinforcing existing social and cultural structures and provoking new types of patriarchal violence. The aim of this study was to identify behaviors of gender-based violence practiced by male and female adolescents in virtual environments, and to confirm whether there are significant differences based on the variables of gender or school grade.

Method. A cross-sectional, descriptive, ex post facto study was carried out in, involving 615 participating adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years. The instrument used in this research was an ad hoc questionnaire developed for this study.

Results. The results showed that behaviors of gender-based violence in virtual environments were carried out to a greater extent by the male adolescents, except in the case of behaviors related to myths of romantic love. This type of gender-based violence has been recognized by experts in the field and is carried out mainly by women. It was also observed that gender-based violence was practiced more by the 10th-graders.

Discussion and conclusions. The results of this study reveal the need for educational interventions to prevent gender-based violence in virtual environments, as well as measures designed to treat the especially detrimental effects of this type of behavior in adolescence.

Keywords: virtual environments; gender-based violence; adolescence; behaviors.

Resumen

Introducción: Los dispositivos inteligentes han llegado para quedarse, convirtiéndose en el medio de socialización por excelencia, en el instrumento fundamental en la adolescencia para comunicarse y relacionarse con el mundo. Si bien es cierto que este tipo de dispositivos ofrecen innumerables ventajas, es necesario ser conscientes de que entrañan riesgos y amenazas si no se emplean de manera adecuada. Uno de estos peligros es la transmisión de la desigualdad de género reforzando las estructuras sociales y culturales vigentes y provocando nuevos tipos de violencia patriarcal. Este estudio pretende conocer las conductas de violencia de género ejercidas por los y las adolescentes en entornos virtuales y comprobar si existen diferencias significativas en función de las variables sexo y curso.

Método: Se llevó a cabo un estudio ex post facto descriptivo de corte transversal en el que participaron 615 adolescentes con edades comprendidas entre los 14 y los 18 años. El instrumento utilizado en la investigación fue un cuestionario elaborado ad hoc para el estudio.

Resultados: Los resultados muestran que las conductas de violencia de género en entornos virtuales son realizadas en mayor medida por los varones, excepto aquellas conductas relacionadas con los mitos del amor romántico, una de las tipologías de violencia de género reconocida por las personas expertas en el ámbito, que son llevadas a cabo mayoritariamente por mujeres. También se observa que este tipo de conductas son más realizadas por el alumnado de 4º curso de ESO.

Discusión o conclusión: Los resultados de este estudio ponen en evidencia la necesidad de llevar a cabo intervenciones educativas que permitan prevenir la violencia de género en entornos virtuales, así como diseñar medidas de tratamiento debido, sobre todo, a los efectos perjudiciales de este tipo de conductas en la adolescencia.

Palabras Clave: entornos virtuales; violencia de género; adolescencia; conductas.

Introduction

Recent decades have seen major technological advances in society, with new technological tools being incorporated into people's daily lives. As Castells (2001) and García Avilés (2015) have stated, this has led to today's "network society" lifestyle. Our reality, whether online or offline, is interconnected, and human communication and personal and professional relationships are largely played out via technologies. In many cases these technologies have become indispensable for human interaction.

The advancement of information and communication technologies, our immersion into the information society, the ease with which new relationships are established (Arab & Díaz, 2015), and the ease of maintaining contact with family and friends, are all bringing about changes in society and the way that people get informed, communicate and relate to each other (Malo-Cerrato & Viñas-Poch, 2018; Perdomo, 2016; Silva et al., 2018). The social networks that are present in society in some measure define our way of being and of learning -- especially important in adolescence (Blanco Ruiz, 2014).

Mobile devices for communication and Internet access have become a fundamental means of socialization for adolescents (Del Prete & Redón, 2020; García-Gómez, 2010; Hawk et al., 2019; Levis, 2002; Rial et al., 2014), influencing their behaviors and attitudes. Today, being an adolescent means being immersed in social networks (Sevick-Bortree, 2005), virtual games, texting and other emerging technologies. While it is true that these technological elements offer immense advantages both personally and professionally, it is also true that they bring about new risks, and harbor or reproduce certain social dangers (Barragán & Ruiz, 2013). Inappropriate use can give place to harm, when technology is used to intentionally abuse, hurt, or damage other persons or groups (Álvarez-García et al., 2017).

One such danger is the furtherance of gender inequality, where prevailing social and cultural structures of society are reinforced through misuse of these devices, thus carrying forward the normalization of gender roles. Social networks and mobile applications do not directly cause inequalities or gender-based violence, but rather reproduce the existing social reality between women and men. Girls and boys practice different usages of social networks (Estebáñez & Vázquez, 2013; Oberst et al., 2016) based on prejudices, stereotypes and sexist attitudes that bring about new forms of gender-based violence in these age groups, or they

validate such practices offline. This type of violence is understood to be any act that, based on the sex-gender binomial, violates one's physical, psychological, moral, economic, institutional or other type of integrity. Instead of seeing this violence disappear, we find that its foundations continue to be reproduced, and new forms of affective and sexual socialization appear. Despite this, adolescents as a class do not acknowledge gender-based violence as such in their daily context, considering it to be something distant from their affective-sexual relationships and experiences (Amorrio et al., 2010; Caro, 2008; Caro, 2010 & Cantera et al., 2009, cited in Ruiz Repullo, 2016). In addition, they show little perception of cyberharassment (Quesada, 2015). Adolescents feel comfortable using technology, and through this medium they can play out their abilities and relationships without the limitations imposed by life offline; hence, they are less perceptive of the risks produced by their online behaviors.

In this way, the prevailing social order of life offline crosses into virtual environments; the two planes overlap, and their boundaries are blurred (Calvillo & Jasso, 2018; Machado, 2017). Oppressed roles and positions (Beyens et al., 2016) are assigned to the female population, and to all people who do not comply with the dictates of the cisheteropatriarchy (i.e., homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals or others who deviate from the normative sexual orientation and/or gender identity).

While there are different classification criteria for behaviors of gender-based violence, in its broadest sense, this article uses a classification based on the motives behind these behaviors, as identified by experts in the field of gender-based violence (Barragán, 2006a; Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2017). The motives for aggression that are analyzed and described in this paper are as follows: patriarchal morality, LGBT phobia, the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty, sexual violence, intolerance toward women, and myths of romantic love.

Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2016, p. 15) state that attacks against behaviors that deviate from the patriarchal morality take place from an early age, in life offline and life online. Not fulfilling the female norm that is established by the patriarchal system can give rise to such attacks. This female concept, when fully internalized, means that categories associated with women, and formed from the criteria of the heteropatriarchy, are adopted as natural and objective. This creates enormous difficulty in breaking away from the prevailing concept of femaleness, even in contexts where there is a fight for equality. This female patriarchal morality is imposed, implicitly or explicitly, by the different agents involved in the socializing process,

leading to discrimination and violence against women who do not adopt the sexist sexual role assigned to them, and spread historically through gender stereotypes and prejudices, sexual and moral norms accepted by society, and differentiated socialization.

On the other hand, being part of the LGBT community (or appearing to) and not complying with the socially designated heterosexual norms for each sex is one of the most common causes of bullying and, according to Pichardo et al. (2014), provokes everything from insult and mockery to exclusion and physical violence. The cisheteropatriarchal system that shapes society and the way we live and relate to each other is responsible for violence against all human beings who do not fit into the dualistic role, it encourages LGTBI phobia, understood as hatred, rejection, denigration or negative and/or aggressive attitudes against the particular cases of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals (Platero, 2014) and intersex persons, or against sexual and gender diversity in general (Fumero et al., 2016). In this area as well, information and communication technologies have become yet another forum where, for example, verbal abuse takes place: 14.43% through the internet and social networks and a 7.7% via mobile phone (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013; Ortega et al., 2008).

Perhaps one of the most naturalized forms of violence on the part of women is acceptance of the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty. Patriarchal society has dictated the way that women are to live, feel and conceive of their bodies, and women as a group are under an exhaustive visual appraisal that requires them to always remain at the disposal of men as an object for their benefit and disposal (Mora & Montes, 2009). The female body, since time immemorial, has been adapting to the needs of the imaginary, to the representations of an ideal context that fills it with traditionally rooted symbolisms and elements (Butler, 2006). These canons of beauty fall in line with patriarchal ideology where beauty is seen as a physical property, detached from the moral and intellectual aspect of women. Media and communication technologies transfer these canons to the online world, using social networks and mobile applications to humiliate women, particularly adolescent girls, who do not fulfill the established heteropatriarchal canon of beauty.

Another form of online gender-based violence is sexual cyberharassment, sexting and sextorsion, behaviors that are closely linked to sexual violence, having crossed over to the realm of electronic devices to exert their aggression in the online environment. Female ado-

lescents, at the height of discovering their sexuality, use information and communication technologies to attain their desires through violence against their female peers.

Next among the different reasons that cause gender-based aggression, we find intolerance toward women, linked to the misogyny that has formed part of the dominant patriarchal system since time immemorial (Silva et al., 2019). Present today in increasingly subtle ways, it adapts to advances in society and finds its way into virtual forums (Tortajada & Vera, 2021).

Finally, it should be noted that gender violence in youth is directly related to myths of romantic love (Pérez, 2019), where clearly violent behaviors and situations are made out to be demonstrations of what true love should be (Ruiz Repullo, 2016). According to Herrera (2013a), romantic love has historically been the most powerful tool for oppressing women, and continues to be so today, controlling women and subjecting them.

With mass communication flourishing throughout the 20th century, romantic love gradually spread until it settled in the world's collective imagination as a utopian goal to be achieved (Herrera, 2013b). The current technological revolution led to the emergence of an online life wherein we establish our social relationships, communicate and stay in touch with other people. Cyberspace has become the new relational space, an everyday context, especially for youth. Romantic fiction reproduces the myths of romantic love in social networks (Bosch et al., 2013; Ferrer et al., 2010; Luzón, 2011; Ruiz Repullo, 2016; Yela, 2003), and both male and female adolescents take them to be absolute, irrefutable truths, due to the differentiated socialization that they have experienced. So emerges the concept of romantic love 2.0, and just as there is gender violence in the offline environment, in social networks this is transformed into cyber control, jealousy and manipulation (Estébanez, 2012).

In conclusion, with the arrival of the technological revolution, the patriarchal structure that is present in society makes its way across and settles into cyberspace as well. This gives rise to a new type of gender-based violence: gender-based violence in virtual environments.

Most studies of gender-based violence in the virtual world have focused on couple relationships (Durán-Segura & Martínez-Pecino, 2015; Martín Montilla et al., 2016; Muñiz, 2017; Muñiz et al., 2015), and only a few contemplate gender-based violence in social net-

works outside of heterosexual relationships, to consider aggressions against any person who does not fit within the cishetero normal (Donoso-Vázquez et al. al., 2017 and 2018; Rebollo et al., 2018). These investigations show that the prevalence of this type of behavior is generally low, with aggressions related to LGBT phobia and myths of romantic love occurring at a higher percentage. As for differences according to sex, male adolescents carry out most of the aggressions, except in the case of control behaviors linked to the mythification of romantic love, where female adolescents show a higher percentage, according to studies by Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2017 and 2018), but in contrast to Rebollo et al. (2018), who affirm that the male youths are the ones who exercise greater control violence.

The scarcity of these studies reveals a need for further inquiry into these issues, to shine light on these situations that occur in adolescence, a period of personal instability, where young men and women are in a process of identity construction. It is essential that educational interventions be carried out to prevent gender-based violence in virtual environments, treatment measures must be designed, since violent behaviors suffered in this life stage of high vulnerability can traumatically affect a person's mental, cognitive and relational development.

Objectives and hypotheses

The aim of this paper is to analyze the experiences of Galician youth in relation to online gender-based violence, specifically, behaviors of this type that are being practiced by a sample of adolescents enrolled in compulsory secondary education in the Galicia region of Spain.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we have not formulated hypotheses, but rather a series of specific objectives that have guided the research: (1) To ascertain what behaviors of gender-based violence are practiced by male and female adolescents in virtual environments, (2) To establish whether there are differences in the practice of behaviors of gender-based violence according to the variables of sex and school grade.

Method

Participants

Participating in the study were 615 adolescents selected by nonrandom, convenience sampling; mean age was 15 years, and a slightly higher proportion were girls (52.0%), as compared to boys (48.0%). All of them were students in the 9th (50.1%) or 10th grade (49.9%), attending compulsory secondary education at six public schools in urban and semi-urban areas of the provinces of A Coruña, Lugo and Pontevedra (Galicia, Spain).

Instruments

For data collection, we developed and applied an ad hoc structured questionnaire, VGEV (*Violencia de Género en Entornos Virtuales*: gender-based violence in virtual environments), which was validated through judgment of experts. The questionnaire contains the following content areas: mastery and use of technological media, perception of the network as a violent environment, cyberbullying, degree of perception of sexist violence in the online realm, perceived risk of violence in virtual environments, and experiences related to gender-based violence in social networks. This final content area examines experiences as an aggressor, victim, and/or spectator of gender-based violence in virtual environments; it contains three Likert-type scales with three response options (0=never, 1=sometimes, 2=many times).

This study focuses on experiences as aggressors, measured by the scale of aggression in virtual environments. This scale contains 23 items, where one is to indicate how often they performed following types of behavior: aggression for transgressing the patriarchal morality assigned to women (three items, including “criticizing a woman for polygamy on the network”), aggression related to LGFT phobia (five items, for example, “calling someone sick because their gender identity or sexual orientation is different from the norm”), aggressions related to the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty (four items, including “insulting a girl for being physically unattractive”), aggressions related to sexual violence (five items, for example, “threatening a woman in order to establish a couple relationship”), aggression associated with intolerance toward women (two items, for example, “provoking someone for being a feminist”) and aggressions related to the mythification of romantic love (four items, including “monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks”). The scale presents good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha value between 0.85 and 0.62 (Díaz et al., 2006).

Procedure

Once the schools were selected, we requested their participation in the study. Necessary permissions for applying the instrument (school administration, homeroom teachers, and families) were requested before its application. Later, members of the research team visited the schools and administered the instrument to students, in order to ensure that application conditions were as homogeneous as possible, and the procedure would have validity.

The instrument was applied in a group setting at each school, within normal school hours, and average completion time was 40 minutes. Students had been previously informed of the nature of the study; their participation was voluntary, and all their rights regarding research participation, as stipulated by current law, were respected.

Data analyses

Once the questionnaires were completed online, data analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 22 for Windows). The information obtained was analyzed quantitatively through descriptive analysis, and the Chi-square test was applied to check for any statistically significant differences according to sex or school grade, in students' behaviors of online gender-based violence.

Results

Regarding the first objective, to ascertain behaviors of gender-based violence practiced by male and female adolescents in virtual environments, the behaviors analyzed had low prevalence in most cases. A few behaviors, however, were practiced by more than 10% of the sample (see Tables 1, 3 and 6): "monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks" (20.8%), "criticizing a woman for polygamy on the network" (18.5%), "insulting a girl for being physically unattractive" (18.5%), "insulting a boy for not looking very masculine" (17.9%), "rating a woman's looks on a point scale, on web pages or social networks" (13.5%) and "checking your girlfriend/boyfriend's smartphone to see who they talk to" (10.8%).

Below are the results obtained, grouped into the types of gender-based violence in virtual environments that were explained in the introduction: aggression for violating the patriarchal morality assigned to women, aggression related to LGBT phobia, aggression related to

the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty, aggression related to sexual violence, aggression associated with intolerance toward women, and aggression related to the mythification of romantic love.

Aggression for violating the patriarchal morality assigned to women

The percentage of the Galician adolescents who practiced this type of behavior, and its frequency, are shown in Table 1. In our sample we can observe that the most frequently practiced type of behavior in this category was “criticizing a woman for polygamy on the network”.

By contrast, these adolescents stated that other behaviors of this type were practiced in lesser degree: “Insulting a girl on the network for refusing to have relations with men in the past” (2.3%) and “harassing a provocative woman on the social networks” (4.7%).

Table 1. *Frequency and percentage of aggression for transgressing the patriarchal morality assigned to women*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Criticize a woman for polygamy on the network	501 (81.5%)	114 (18.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Harassing a provocative woman on social networks	586 (95.3%)	24 (3.9%)	5 (0.8%)
Insulting a girl on the network for refusing to have relations with men in the past	601 (97.7%)	9 (1.5%)	5 (0.8%)

Regarding the second objective, to establish whether there were differences according to the variables of gender or school grade in the types of gender-based violence practiced, we found that girls proved more violent in the behavior of “criticizing a woman for polygamy on the network” (65.8% were girls, compared to 34.2% boys). This difference is statistically significant [$\chi^2(1) = 9.945, p=.002$].

When analyzing the data obtained according to school grade, Chi square test results showed no statistically significant differences in this category of behaviors.

Aggression related to LGFT phobia

As for aggression carried out because of LGBT phobia, Table 2 reveals that the most frequent behaviors were: “calling someone sick because their gender identity or sexual orientation is different from the norm” (7%), “insulting someone on social networks because they think they belong to the LGBT group” (5.4%), and “posting someone’s sexual orientation on the network without their consent” (4.7%), while the least frequent behaviors were “impersonating someone to make fun of them, making them out to be in the LGBT group” (3.2%) and “offend a woman because she is not interested in men” (3.6%).

Table 2. *Frequency and percentage of aggressions related to LGBT phobia*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Posting someone’s sexual orientation on the network without their consent	586 (95.3%)	24 (3.9%)	5 (0.8%)
Insult someone on social networks because they think they belong to the LGBT group	582 (94.6%)	27 (4.4%)	6 (1.0%)
Impersonating someone to make fun of them, making them out to be in the LGBT group	595 (96.7%)	13 (2.1%)	7 (1.1%)
Call someone sick because their gender identity or sexual orientation is different from the norm	572 (93.0%)	33 (5.4%)	10 (1.6%)
Offend a woman because she is not interested in men	593 (96.4%)	16 (2.6%)	6 (1.0%)

Concerning the second objective, on possible differentiation by sex, the persons who claimed to “insult someone on social networks because they think they belong to the LGBT group” were mostly male (69.7%), compared to 30.3% female, a statistically significant difference [$\chi^2(2) = 7.737, p = .021$].

Regarding possible differences by school grade, no statistically significant differences were found in the behaviors included in this category.

Aggression related to the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty

In this category of aggression, we find two of the behaviors most often practiced by male and female adolescents (see Table 3): “insult a girl for being physically unattractive” (18.5% of the sample) and “insult a boy for not looking very masculine” (17.9%). One must also note that 13.5% of the sample had “rated a woman’s looks on a point scale, on web pages

or social networks”. The least frequent behavior was “treating women as objects through photos on social networks” (3.3%).

Table 3. *Frequency and percentage of aggressions due to imposition of the cisheteropatriarchal canon of beauty*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Insult a girl for being physically unattractive	501 (81.5%)	106 (17.2%)	8 (1.3%)
Rate a woman's looks on a point scale, on web pages or social networks	532 (86.5%)	74 (12.0%)	9 (1.5%)
Treat women as objects through photos on social networks	595 (96.7%)	16 (2.6%)	4 (0.7%)
Insult a boy for not looking very masculine	505 (82.1%)	98 (15.9%)	12 (2.0%)

Within our second objective, looking at differentiation by sex, we note that among those who claim to have “insulted a boy for not looking very masculine”, there is a predominance of boys (60.9%), as compared to 39.1% girls. This is a statistically significant difference [$\chi^2(2) = 10.061, p=.007$].

There were no statistically significant differences in this behavior category as a function of school grade.

Aggressions related to sexual violence

As shown in Table 4, it should be noted that sexual violence behaviors were the least-practiced behaviors. The following behaviors are included in this category: “blackmail someone with photos in order to have sexual relations” (2.1%), “threaten a woman in order to establish a couple relationship” (2.4%), “harass someone by sending e-mail with sexual overtones” (4.4%), “share provocative pictures or videos of a woman without her consent” (4.4%) and “send graphic content or laugh about aggressions against girls” (7.5%).

Table 4. *Frequency and percentage of aggressions related to sexual violence*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Threaten a woman in order to form a couple relationship	600 (97.6%)	8 (1.3%)	7 (1.1%)
Harass someone by sending e-mail with sexual overtones	588 (95.6%)	21 (3.4%)	6 (1.0%)
Blackmail someone with photos in order to have sexual relations	602 (97.9%)	8 (1.3%)	5 (0.8%)
Share provocative pictures or videos of a woman without her consent	588 (95.6%)	22 (3.6%)	5 (0.8%)
Send graphic content or laugh about aggressions against girls	569 (92.5%)	33 (5.4%)	13 (2.1%)

Concerning the second objective, in reference to differentiation by sex, significant differences [$\chi^2(2) = 9.364, p = .009$] were found in the behavior “share provocative pictures or videos of a woman without her consent”, where those who practiced the behavior were predominantly male (74.1%), more than female (25.9%). Of those who claimed to have practiced “sending graphic content or laughing about aggressions against girls”, 10.9% were girls, and 89.1% boys [$\chi^2(2) = 33.826, p = .000$]. Finally, Chi square results showed no significant differences in this category of behaviors according to school grade.

Aggression associated with intolerance toward women

In this category, as shown in Table 5, we find the least representative behavior of male or female Galician adolescents, “throw someone off a social network or chat for being a girl” (2%). Similarly, only 8.8% of adolescents surveyed had often practiced behaviors of “provoking someone for being a feminist”.

Table 5. *Frequency and percentage of aggressions associated with intolerance toward women*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Provoke someone for being a feminist	561 (91.2%)	46 (7.5%)	8 (1.3%)
Throw someone off a social network or chat for being a girl	603 (98.0%)	8 (1.3%)	4 (0.7%)

Regarding the second objective, specifically, differentiation by sex, those who claimed to have “provoked someone for being a feminist” were split between 24.1% girls and 75.9% boys, this difference being statistically significant [$\chi^2(2) = 19.044, p = .000$].

Once again, in this category, no statistically significant differences were found between school grades.

Aggression related to mythification of romantic love

In this category (see Table 6), we find the aggressive behavior that was most acknowledged, being practiced by two of every ten adolescents: monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks (20.8% of the sample). Another behavior present in 1 in 10 adolescents was “checking your girlfriend or boyfriend's smartphone to see who they talk to” (10.8%). The other two behaviors included in this category were practiced to a lesser degree: “demand that your boyfriend/girlfriend delete pictures with friends on social networks” (6.4%) and “having your boyfriend or girlfriend's password so you can delete friends in their social networks” (4.4%).

Table 6. *Frequency and percentage of aggressions related to mythification of romantic love*

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Many times
Monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks	487 (79.2%)	110 (17.9%)	18 (2.9%)
Having your boyfriend or girlfriend's password so you can delete friends in their social networks	588 (95.6%)	17 (2.8%)	10 (1.6%)
Check your girlfriend or boyfriend's smartphone to see who they talk to	549 (89.3%)	52 (8.5%)	14 (2.3%)
Demand that your boyfriend/girlfriend delete pictures with friends on social networks	576 (93.7%)	25 (4.1%)	14 (2.3%)

Regarding the second objective, specifically in differentiation by sex, two behaviors with significant differences were found, both of which were more practiced by girls than by boys: “monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks”, where 71.9% were girls and 28.13% boys [$\chi^2(2) = 26.471, p = .000$] and “checking your girlfriend or boyfriend's smartphone to see who they talk to”, where 77.3% were girls and 22.7% boys [$\chi^2(2) = 19.115, p = .000$].

Regarding differentiation by school grade, there were statistically significant differences in all four behaviors in this category, where the 10th-graders acknowledged these behaviors in greater degree: “monitoring and controlling your boyfriend/girlfriend on social networks” (72.7% of those who practiced this behavior were 10th-graders, 27.3% were 9th-

graders) [$\chi^2(2) = 33.429, p = .000$]; “having your boyfriend or girlfriend's password so you can delete friends in their social networks” (37% were 9th-graders, 63% 11th-graders) [$\chi^2(2) = 6.566, p = .038$]; “check your girlfriend or boyfriend's smartphone to see who they talk to” (68.2% were 10th-graders, 31.8% were 9th-graders); and “demand that your boyfriend/girlfriend delete pictures with friends on social networks” (69.2% were 10th-graders and 30.8% 9th-graders) [$\chi^2(2) = 14.483, p = .001$].

Discussion and Conclusions

Analysis of the results obtained in this study has revealed online gender-based violence practiced in the daily life of a sample of adolescents, therefore, our first objective has been attained. Information and communication technologies form part of the daily life of youth, and although their use involves risks and dangers such as those described in this study, violence that takes place in the online realm is a faithful reflection of what already occurs offline. Smart screens and other electronic devices are one more sphere where the violence already present in society can be practiced.

Although a high percentage of the sample affirms that they have never carried out these behaviors, that is, most of the behaviors analyzed showed low incidence, as in results obtained by Donoso et al. (2016) and Palop (2017), this should not lead us a low perception of their effects. These behaviors are very harmful to the people on the receiving end, and the perception of impunity when these behaviors are practiced online can also encourage them to be transferred to offline behavior, where in many cases the already destructive psychological violence may be complemented with physical violence. Hence the importance of secondary schools taking the initiative to implement strategic actions to prevent gender-based violence in social networks, as well as the need for training the educational community in adequate intervention when these behaviors occur.

Comparing the obtained results with those presented by Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2017), the studies concur in that the aggressions occurring most frequently were those related to myths of romantic love. By contrast, one of the results obtained in this study, a high percentage of aggression due to imposition of the cisheteropatriarchal beauty canon, was not shared in the study by Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2017), who highlighted a high percentage of aggressions linked to homophobia.

This study provides new aggressor-related data, indicating a fundamental need for direct intervention strategies to help this adolescent group curb these destructive actions which reveal insensitivity to the pain of another person and a lack of empathy. The interventions, therefore, should focus on increasing empathic competence, and the capacity to reflect on one's behavior.

We would note that all the behaviors detected in this analysis --risk indicators for gender-based violence-- reveal that a male-domineering, chauvinist mentality continues to be sustained in young people. Such a mentality seeks the submission of others who deviate from the socially established norm of gender mandates. For this reason, preventive actions must be taken to detect and eradicate such behaviors, putting forward a constructive use of technology based on reasonable optimism about its contributions and benefits and the responsible management of its risks.

The second established objective has also been met, with results indicating that the tendency to aggression is male, concurring with the results presented by Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2018); in fact, five of the eight behaviors with statistically significant gender differences were performed more often by boys. However, in behaviors related to myths about romantic love, the greater prevalence was among girls, again concurring with Donoso-Vázquez, et al. (2018), and in opposition to Rebollo et al. (2018), who claimed that control behaviors associated with romantic love were mostly acted out by boys.

The results also indicate that behaviors related to the mythification of romantic love were significantly more present among students in higher grades, an element to be taken into account when designing strategic actions to address the phenomenon under study.

But social networks and mobile apps are a means of social interaction. In themselves, they do not cause gender-based violence, but are one more tool for wielding patriarchal power. Due to the widespread use of social networks among adolescents, we must reflect on their great potential within the field of education, and for equality, if they are used from a gender perspective. Furthermore, given that information and communication technologies transmit and propagate social ideals and values, they are an extremely powerful tool for modifying ways of being and acting, in favor of gender equality (Rebollo et al., 2009). Consequently,

smart screens should be considered a vital virtual resource, an opportunity for conveying egalitarian values between the male and female adolescents who use them; they are a potential tool for educating in equality and for eliminating signs of the gender gap in the technological field. Based on this, teachers must understand online technological tools as contexts that can incorporate students' teaching-learning process, and transform social networks into attractive, dynamic instruments for the education and socialization of adolescents; convert these mechanisms for reproducing gender-based violence online into resources from which to work on gender equality (Barragán & Ruiz, 2013). In other words, the risks of smart screens can be redirected into opportunities for change.

School 2.0 is under way, and digital literacy from a gender-based perspective is an urgent need for students (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2016), as reflected in Spanish educational legislation (Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, which modifies Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, *Jefatura de Estado*, 2020). This law also establishes the importance of developing safe and critical use of information and communication technologies, and that curricula should include elements related to risk situations that stem from inappropriate use of ICTs, with special attention to situations of violence on the network. Training of both teachers and students is indispensable in order to achieve this safe, critical use.

The present study offers a contribution toward understanding the gender-based violence of adolescents in virtual environments. Given our findings, we must reflect on the need to generate training and learning opportunities that can be adopted by the educational community, with special emphasis on the school, due to the amount of online gender-based violence behaviors that are identified in adolescence. The following targets should be achieved (Barragán, 2006b; Ruiz Repullo, 2009; Simón, 2004; Vázquez & Estébanez, 2016): adoption of a school model of civic and ethical action where, through the example of different educational agents (families, teachers, etc.), students learn how to behave in the face of these realities; students receive training to be able to easily identify situations that involve violence in the online environment; raised awareness allows them to become active agents, able to report violent behaviors that they observe or experience, so that such behavior is reduced or done away with. Likewise, educational professionals require specialized training in online competence from a gender perspective, so that they know how to act in the face of cyberbullying situations that appear in the course of their work, and can create and enforce action protocols against sexist and LGBT phobic cyberviolence in educational contexts.

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