
Love on the Internet: a Teenager's Date¹

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Abstract. This article discusses the possibilities that social media brings to the love life of adolescents. New communication technologies have a major influence on subjectivity and change life habits and the way that people interact with each other, including romantic relationships. Adolescence is a decisive moment in the life of an individual, during which he or she looks for strategies to find an identification mark; in such phase, friends may be considered the main source of identification. The search for a love partner is also essential, and new instruments that contribute to this process impact actions, thoughts and imageries. Based on the case report presented in this text, the latter approaches the connections between internet, adolescence and construction of love relationships. Sexual-affective initiation may be facilitated by the internet, as it works as an outlet for an adolescent to make room for their fantasies and feel freer, overcoming barriers that make relationships difficult. However, challenges inherent to relationships – virtual or face-to-face – remain.

Keywords: Adolescence; internet; romantic relationship.

O Amor na Internet: um Encontro Amoroso de um Adolescente

Resumo. Neste artigo discutem-se as possibilidades que as redes sociais introduzem na vida amorosa de adolescentes. As novas tecnologias de comunicação influenciam a subjetividade, assim como mudam hábitos de vida e os modos de as pessoas se relacionarem, incluindo-se as relações amorosas. A adolescência é um momento decisivo na vida em que o sujeito procura estratégias para assegurar uma marca de identificação, sendo os amigos sua principal fonte para tal. A busca pelo parceiro amoroso é também fundamental, e as novas ofertas de instrumentos para tal devem impactar ações, pensamentos e imaginários. A partir do relato de caso publicado, trabalharam-se neste texto as conexões entre internet, adolescência e construção de relações amorosas. Observou-se que a iniciação afetivo-sexual pode ser facilitada pela internet, pois com ela os adolescentes podem dar maior vazão às fantasias e se sentir mais livres, destituídos das barreiras que dificultam as relações. Entretanto, também estão presentes desafios inerentes aos relacionamentos amorosos, sejam presenciais ou virtuais.

Palavras-chave: Adolescência; internet; relacionamento amoroso.

El Amor en Internet: un Encuentro Amoroso de un Adolescente

Resumen. En este artículo se discuten las posibilidades que las redes sociales introducen en las vidas amorosas de adolescentes. Las nuevas tecnologías de comunicación influyen en la subjetividad, así como cambian hábitos de vida y los modos por los cuales las personas se relacionan, incluyéndose las relaciones amorosas. La adolescencia es un momento decisivo en la vida, en el cual el sujeto busca estrategias para asegurar una marca de identificación, siendo los

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amigos su principal fuente para tal. La búsqueda por la pareja amorosa es también fundamental, y las nuevas ofertas de instrumentos para ello deben impactar acciones, pensamientos e imaginarios. Desde el relato de caso publicado, se trabajaron en este texto las conexiones entre internet, adolescencia y construcción de relaciones amorosas. Se observó que la iniciación afectivo-sexual puede ser facilitada por internet, pues con ella los adolescentes pueden dejar fluir las fantasías y sentirse más libres, destituidos de las barreras que dificultan las relaciones. Sin embargo, también están presentes desafíos inherentes a las relaciones amorosas, ya sean presenciales o virtuales.

Palabras clave: Adolescencia; internet; relación amorosa.

In the present article we intend carry out a reflection about the possibilities that social media introduces in the love life of adolescents. The number of scientific Psychology articles that address the theme of the impacts of social networks on love relationships is still small (Civiletti and Pereira, 2002; Donnamaria and Terzis, 2009), but when it comes specifically to the love life of teenagers they are even rarer. Thus, with the aim of contributing to this reflection, we present this theoretical essay that deals with concepts like communication technologies and adolescence, attempting to establish a dialogue between both fields and, finally, based on the published case report, to approach the connections between internet, adolescence and construction of love relationships. We have not found many reports or testimonies about the construction of love relationships in adolescence by browsing the cyberspace; for this reason, we have chosen a report from a book by Sampaio (2002) that presents the vicissitudes of the relationship of a teenage boy with an adult woman.

About information and communication technologies, we can state that, throughout history, they have changed life habits and the way that people relate to each other. This happened with the machines of the Industrial Revolution, with the appearance of television and, currently, with the computer and, consequently, with the Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Castells (2000) defines "Information Technologies" as the converging set of technologies in microelectronics, optoelectronics, telecommunications/radio broadcasting, computer (software and hardware), as well as genetic engineering and its growing set of developments and applications.

The ICTs, in addition to causing a revolution in all life styles, habits and customs of a whole generation, also change the processing, the absorption and the circulation of news, information and knowledge. Nicolaci-da-Costa (2002) draws attention to the fact that new technologies can radically transform the ways of being of individuals, that is, the way that they think, organize and perceive the internal and external worlds, relate to themselves and to other people.

According to Turkle (1997, p. 37), "people resort explicitly to computers, searching for experiences that can change their ways of thinking or affecting their social and emotional lives". This assertion carries the idea that the technology produced and used by a society represents one of the main manifestations of its behavior. Moreover, the psychic construction of subjects from a certain society is not detached from what happens at the social level. Simmel (1903/1973) had already drawn attention to this relation between psychic and social aspects in his classical article "The Metropolis and the Mental Life":

... every event, however restricted to this superficial level it may appear, comes immediately into contact with the depths of the soul, and that the most banal externalities are, in the last analysis, bound up with the final decisions concerning the meaning and the style of life. (Simmel, 1903/1973, p. 15).

The internet is a current example of how a technology used by a certain society affects the social and personal life of the subjects from said society. This generates heated debates concerning the use of the internet within the educational and family spheres, emphasizing the huge amount of time that adolescents spend in front of the computer and the way they use it, and proposing reflections about the harms of such use. In addition, we can observe through our professional practice the concern of parents and relatives with being discarded by children, who prefer to stay "online" in their bedrooms instead of participating in moments of interaction with their families, around the lunch table or even watching TV shows. The risks to which children may be exposed on the internet are also a major concern for parents.

According to Valkenbrug, Schouten and Peter (2005), the exploration of the self, compensation and social facilitation are the greatest motivators for adolescents to use the internet as a basis to the experimentation of their identities, and thus to experience new forms of sociability within the cyber space. We should consider herein that amidst this experimentation there is a search for affective relationships. For this reason, understanding how love relationships of adolescents are established as of the advent of the internet is of fundamental importance.

The merit of the internet is not limited only to the fact that it works as a space for adolescents to look for affective relationships but also to the fact that it is a tool through which they can express feelings, fears, frustrations and expectations. An example is the group formed on Facebook called "*Amor Adolescente*" [Teenage Love], AA. In the "About the group" item we can read:

Hi everyone! This group was created for you to share your feelings, reciprocated or not, to leave your questions about it so that more experienced people can answer them, and also to drop your hints and leave statements. All of you who like it feel free to invite more and more people (*Amor Adolescente* (AA), Facebook, 2014).

Dela Coleta, Dela Coleta and Guimarães (2008) conducted a research with 50 Brazilian internet users with the aim of understanding the possibilities that the internet offers as a new platform for love relationships. The research subjects believed that it can promote the beginning of a contact, but that the continuation of the bond depends on a face-to-face meeting. However, 64% of the interviewees said that they had already had virtual love relationships, and 68% believed that they could be successful in a love relationship on the internet. Despite the high percentage that betted on a love on the internet, the researchers concluded that this means did not bring behavioral changes to the sphere of love relationships, even though they believe that the conduction of further researches is necessary.

The research by Donnamaria and Terzis (2009) aimed to listen to couples whose bonds have originated from relationships mediated by the internet and, once again, a face-to-face meeting imposes itself as a condition for the continuation of the relationship.

Following the same line of those researches, we are interested in learning about the possible effects that this new modality of love search and experience may have on adolescents, considering the specific characteristics of this age group. In addition, however, it seems urgent to comprehend the challenges that are proper of adolescence.

Adolescence and Love Relationships

Adolescence is a turning point in the life of a human being and, for this reason, corresponds to a delicate phase, when events may have an irreversible effect. We know that the search for a love relationship is as decisive in the life of an individual as his or her professional choice. In this sense, new offerings by modern society of instruments of search for love should necessarily impact actions, thoughts and imageries. But what are these influences for adolescents?

Despite the age restriction for participating in social media, chats and social networks, it is widely known that adolescents cheat the norms by creating fictitious identities and lying about their ages. Thus, the subscription on these websites that enable the search for a relationship already begins, oftentimes, with a transgressive action. This little lie is a passive point, but what are their impacts on the answer of a possible partner? Does the internet favor the encounter of an individual with his or her own fantasies concerning love life?

Adolescence is a concept historically constructed in the Western culture, emerging during Modernity in the late 19th century and consolidating in the 20th century. Until then the terms that designated children, adolescents and youths were not very clear, pointing towards an indifferentiation in the perception of said individuals. Ariès (1978) discusses that the indifference

in relation to properly biological phenomena caused a long duration of childhood – linked to the idea of dependence –, as childhood was not limited by puberty.

The idea of adolescence just as we know today starts with an unprecedented delimitation of public and private spheres. At the end of the 18th century the architectures of the houses had their spaces transformed. Unlike the houses of the Middle Ages, where there was no clear separation between the spaces, and the rooms had no doors to close and clearly demarcate them, the houses begin to have better delimited environments, providing residents with greater privacy.

The physical space of a family's house is made private, followed by the privatization of customs. This situation creates strategies of singularization, consequently enabling a clearer division between public world and private world. The former becomes increasingly hostile, and the former, a place of warmth and protection (Coutinho, 2009). The family, then, operates within the private sphere, being the agent that separates the public world from the private world; what happened outside the family environment corresponded to the public life and, inside it, to the private life.

Also in the 19th century, Romanticism emerges, a movement that opposed illuminist ideas. While the latter preached worship to rationality and to order, the former highlighted a passion for nature and for the forces of the spirit, nurturing nostalgia and loneliness. "There is a clear articulation between the romanticist movement and the dissemination of individualism and of the conception of a unique individual that cultivates singularities and is always searching for unique experiences". (Coutinho, 2009, p. 45).

In the 20th century we have the consolidation of the concept of adolescence. This occurred due to the prolongation of schooling, to the advance of industrialization, to the growth of cities and to changes in the job market, which extended the period of dependence of youths in relation to their families. However, without denying this historical fact that presents the creation of the concept of adolescence as linked to social factors, it seems important to mention that adolescence can also be defined as a psychic and sociocultural time of puberty, that is, as a moment when it becomes urgent for the adolescent to handle new data that puberty inaugurates in the story of the individual.

Knobel (1992) stresses the griefs that the adolescent needs to elaborate in this moment of his or her life. The first grief is for the loss of the infant body and the appearance of a new one and for all that this means: the relationships that the individual has with himself or herself and with others, especially with parents, and the responsibilities that the body carries. The adolescent also needs to grief for the parents of childhood, which means to lose the refuge and the protection that they once represented. From this perspective, Alberti (2002) argues that being disconnected from parents is one of the most painful psychic events for adolescents, and Corso & Corso (1999) states that "the operation that is proper of adolescence is the agony and death of the real parents as a support to that which is ideal" (p. 85). The parents, who once used to be seen as heroes by their children during childhood, are deidealized and begin to appear like a stranger before to their children.

Another reason for the difficulties faced in adolescence is the fact that our society imposes to youths a moratorium characterized by ratified competitions and defined obligations and, in the same way, by some special tolerance, which we can call learning status. It is a time imposed to adolescents, when they are not seen as children anymore, but do not have the recognition from adults yet, which is justified by the immaturity of youths when facing life.

Calligaris (2000) points to a contradiction present in the logics of the moratorium. On one hand, society preaches an ideal of autonomy for individuals, who should seek their independence in order to be recognized and valued. On the other hand, moratorium imposes a continuation of the dependence to subjects that have a body and a mind ready for competition. We can think of moratorium as something positive – since the subject in this moment is exempt from the assumption of a series of responsibilities –, and as something negative –, for being imposed, and the failure to take it on is extremely hard and painful for the subject, as there is no clear reason in its end. In this sense, the author states that puberty changes constitute a problem as adults do not

recognize in it the transition to adulthood. Thus, adolescents will feel frustrated for being in this situation and will seek forms of social recognition.

A problem identified by Calligaris (200) and Coutinho (2005, 2009) is the fact that Western adolescents have to live this moment in a privatized and singularized manner, without the support of social agents, as it happens in some societies that have rites of initiation. Matheus (2002) highlights that the process experienced in adolescence results from the fact that “the psychic subject does not find in his or her culture devices to support and to conceive psychic conflicts” (p. 86). For this reason, recognizing the absence of rites of passage or devices in the symbolic order is vital for the comprehension of adolescence.

Due to this lack of support in the symbolic order and to the process of disconnection from parents the adolescent resorts to some strategies as a means to ensure an identity mark. The main strategy is joining groups of peers, which will be the great sources of identification in this moment. Friends become the main reference for the construction of an adult identity and of new ideals. Currently, groups of adolescents are organized around a socializing fraternal bond in order to express a certain ideology, being, in general, involved with cultural and ordinary activities (Coutinho, 2005). The sharing of these activities reveals an attempt of joint elaboration of stalemates related to the social bond. It is also a form of social recognition from new identification traits, because, when leaving childhood, the subject feels insecure about his or her identity and social place (Kehl, 2000). The internet has been providing adolescents with possibilities of participation in groups – via social media or blogs, for instance – that ensure them the establishment of social ties and the chance to share the process they are experiencing.

To psychoanalysis, the awakening of sexuality in adolescence is the awakening for the new, for the unknown, even though the young boy or girl has information about his or her body and about sexual intercourse. Thus, it is within the group of peers that the adolescent seeks to construct a possible knowledge of sexuality, which is always partial and insufficient, with which he or she seeks to defend himself or herself against this unfathomable reality of sex.

Freud highlights that in puberty the Oedipus complex is awakened again, with the renewal of oedipal conflicts and incestuous fantasies. Sexual desire reactivates an interdiction but it is expected that in the possible outcome of this oedipal revival Oedipus may decay, with the assumption of a sexual position and the election of a new object of love.

In face of the irruption of the real of sex in puberty the young boy or girl is woken up by unfamiliar fantasies, desires and sensations. Their bodies go through abrupt and uncontrollable transformations that cause in them a sensation of unawareness and strangeness in relation to their bodily image. They are required to situate themselves as for their gender, as men or women. In addition, the deidealization of parents leads to a loss of former references of identification. Adolescence can then be defined as a moment of life when the subject sees himself or herself confronting that which requires them to situate themselves as for their gender, to choose a new object of love other than their parents and to throw themselves inside a broader social universe (Freud, 1905/1974).

In this sense, it is in adolescence that the individual lives his or her first sexual-affective experiences, which participate in the organization of the lives of adolescents and in their subjective construction.

We can highlight three types of affective relationships present in the everyday life of adolescents: “hooking up”, dating and marriage. The last two are types of relationship present throughout history and that go through several changes. “Hooking up” in turn is a new form of relationship that appears in the early 1980s. These three forms are present in the everyday life of adolescents as a current practice or as a possibility and desire for the future.

“Hooking up” can be defined as a relationship marked by lack of commitment, by transience and by search for pleasure as the main goal (Chaves, 1994). It works as a way for one to experiment and to live sexual-affective practices, to meet several partners, to learn about his or her own body, about his or her partner’s body and about the possible limits for each relationship. “Hooking up” also allows the individual to postpone commitment and to make better affective choices.

In our culture, traditionally, dating is seen as a constant, lasting, committed relationship in which there is affection. It is a serious relationship whose purpose is marriage. Currently, the bond between dating and marriage is broken, that is, it is possible – and even desirable, in some circumstances – to date without the intention of marrying. However, an aspect of traditional dating remains present: commitment. “Today commitment does not necessarily lead a couple to marriage, but it presupposes – at least in theory – a stable, monogamous and faithful bond (Chaves, 1994, p. 25).

With this break of the bond between dating and marriage the latter is not expected to be part of an adolescent's universe, unless as an exception, like pregnancy cases. However, marriage appears at the horizon of adolescents as a future perspective, just as the constitution of family (Stengel & Tozo, 2010).

In this way, considering the peculiarities of adolescence and contemporary forms of sexual-affective relationships, we can ask ourselves: how has the internet been used by adolescents that seek to establish affective relationships? What is the impact of this technology on the modalities of relationships? What kind of changes may the internet be causing in the affective experiences of adolescents? So that these questions are discussed it is worth understanding what the cyberspace is.

Understanding the Cyberspace

The term cyberspace was created by the writer William Gibson and began to be used to refer to the abstract space constructed by computer networks. Its emergence is a result of a social and cultural transformation that, in turn, is changed and conditioned by it. The cyberspace is about not only the material structure of this digital communication but also about all information and people that walk through this space. It involves a cyberculture, a virtual reality, a virtual community, a virtual text, virtual experiences, that is, a new and exciting dimension: the virtual one (Lima, 2003). The neologism cyberculture, in its turn, is used to specify “the set of technologies (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, modes of thought, and values that developed along with the growth of cyberspace.” (Lévy, 2000, p. 17).

The immersion in the image presents subjective effects, interfering with the ways of thinking, in the values and in the attitudes of the man. New technologies for producing, capturing, transmitting, reproducing, processing and storing images have become as present as indispensable: from the telescope, the microscope, radiography, to television, the video and the microcomputer, all these vision machines may work as extensions of the man, enabling him to reach a new universe, in other dimensions, with new spaces and new times. The internet introduces countless advances in this area to the point of making virtual/real limits increasingly unclear. The cyberspace includes negotiations about meanings and debates between participants.

Interactivity on the internet is considered as the main reason for its success. “The term ‘interactivity’ generally refers to the active participation of the beneficiary of an information transaction.” (Lévy, 2000, p. 79). Thus, the interactive media promotes dialogue, reciprocity, effective communication, allowing users to interact with a matrix of information, a model capable of generating innumerable different paths. It provides real-time reciprocity. In this sense, this is about an “interactivity that refers to the virtual world” (Lévy, 2000, p. 80).

Sensorial experiences on the computer allowed for the immersion in the image, inaugurating a new modality of interaction with the machine. The virtual reality, which “refers to a particular type of interactive simulation in which the explorer has the physical sensation of being immerse in the situation defined by a database” (Lévy, 2000, p. 70), enables an advance in the illusion in relation to the image of the cinema or television. The development of virtual worlds offers a functional immersion in tridimensional representations with the aid of individual helmets for stereoscopic visualization that connects the body to the virtual world. The virtual image turns into an explorable and habitable place. It makes all it produces real, subjecting the vision to technological interfaces.

The virtual reality promotes a redefinition of the notions of image, of object and of perceptive space.

The conceptualization of virtual reality encompasses a strict sense and a broader sense. If in the strict sense virtual reality requires the use of equipment such as helmets for stereoscopic visualization and datagloves (automatic sensors of bodily movements), the two distinctive characteristics of the virtual world, in a broader sense, are immersion and navigation by proximity. That is, the notion of a virtual world does not necessarily mean the use of said equipment. A virtual world, in the broad sense, is a universe of possibilities calculable by means of a digital model. By interacting with the virtual world users explore and update it simultaneously. Hypertexts, hyperdocuments, simulations and, in general, every logic object, such as software, databases and their contents, are part of this computer virtuality in the broad sense. "Computers and networks, then, appear as the physical infrastructure of the new informational universe of virtuality." (Lévy, 2000, p. 75).

The internet does not offer images only. It offers words, enabling the reading and writing of texts. But this reading and writing on the screen presents their own characteristics, virtual ones. The hypertext is a text in digital, nonlinear, fragmented format, characterized by several windows, by the accumulation of information and by the possibility the user has to follow several and undetermined ways, mixing reading and writing functions. That is, it is reconfigurable and fluid.

The hypertext is, therefore, a virtual text, as virtual as all experiences within the cyberspace. We can say, then, that the internet has its own characteristics, being the cyberspace a virtual space, specific of this new network-like structure (Lima, 2003).

The term virtual is generally associated with immateriality or unreality. With regard to this, Lévy (2000) makes an important remark. According to the author, when talking about the virtual in relation to the digital it is important to have in mind that this type of processing is always based on simple physical operations on physical representations of zero and one. Digitalizing a piece of information consists of translating it into numbers. Almost every piece of information can be translated this way, even an image or a sound. And every number can be expressed in binary language, under the form of zero and one. Therefore, every piece of information can be represented by this system. There are quite diverse technical devices that can record and transmit coded numbers in binary language.

Thus, digits walk through electronic wires, polarize magnetic tapes, are translated in optical fibers, in optical discs, and incarnate in structures of biological molecules. According to Lévy (2000), digitally-coded information is transmitted and indefinitely copied without loss of information, differently from recordings that happen in an analog way, which degrade with every new copy. While analog information is represented by a continuous sequence of values, digital information uses only two values, clearly differentiated, which makes the reconstitution of the damaged information simpler, due to the several processes for controlling the integrity of messages. If there is a growing amount of information being digitalized, the main reason is that digitalization allows information to be treated in a more efficient way in comparison to any other means that currently exists.

The relevance of this discussion is not in understanding the physical structure of a computer or its technical or operational functioning, but in thinking of what this "virtual" of the cyberspace means". Would the coding of the image be "immaterial" in its proper sense? "Fluid and volatile, the digital recording occupies a unique position in the succession of images: implicit in their visible manifestation, it is neither unreal nor immaterial, but virtual." (Lévy, 2000, p. 54). This new dimension puts into question the traditional distinction between original and copy.

Precisely, the terms virtual and real do not oppose each other. The virtual, from the Latin *virtus* (virtue), is everything that has a potential in reality, that which has in itself all conditions that are essential to its realization (Cadoz, 1994). The word virtual refers to that which exists potentially, which is liable to happen (Ferreira, 1986). In philosophy the term virtue relates to capacity or power in general (Abbagnano, 1982). In this sense, Lévy's description of digital recording can be comprehended as occupying a position that is prior to its visible manifestation. And would this anticipation not be the very essence of the image?

According to the process of identification concerning the specular image described by Lacan (1949/1998), the child, fascinated with the unified image reflected on the mirror, still feeling fragmented, anticipates himself or herself in identification with that image, which, therefore, gives back the unit to him or her. Thus, the virtual is similar to the concept of image in psychoanalysis. The virtual would not be necessarily that which opposes the real, but that which somehow is present in the real (in the sense of reality), potentially, prior to its visible manifestation. Its potential presence introduces a new form of presence, which has effects on subjectivity. According to psychoanalysis, imagery does not oppose reality, which actually is an imaginary construction (Lima, 2003).

The anthropologist Le Breton (2003) works with the hypothesis that the cyberspace is the place where the body disappears. In this immaterial space, individuals that are spatially distanced come into contact. However, the body is pending in the virtual space, temporarily forgotten as matter. The cyberspace is a land of images and signs where innumerable potential bodies coexist virtually. Nevertheless, there is no encounter between bodies but rather an interaction between images, creating characters, situations and actions based on words. In this context, the physical body is unnecessary and even undesirable, working as an obstacle to its virtualization. Virtually it is possible to wear whatever masks, to become whatever character, to have whatever imaginable shape, color, touch and smell.

However, we can question this separation between the real and the virtual worlds. To psychoanalysis, the subject has no direct access to the objective reality for it is always crossed by the subjective reality. Fantasies operate as a screen placed between the subject and the external or objective reality (Nobre & Moreira, 2013). The subject interprets the reality of facts according to his or her subjectivity. But, beyond the fantasy dimension, virtual interactions may awake the desire, provoke distress, cause different sensations and emotions, having real effects on the body and interfering with the real life. The complexity of the relations between the virtual and the real leads us to think over the nature of the relationships established in the virtual reality, their motivations, specificities and effects on individuals. With the aim of visualizing the complexity that the virtual space imposes to love relationships, we will discuss a true case presented by Sampaio (2002).

The “Beatriz and Áquila82i” Case: A Possibility For An Adolescent

Sampaio (2002) narrates the encounter within the virtual space between Beatriz (the protagonist’s nick³), from Pernambuco, and Áquila82i, from São Paulo. The chat started at 9 pm on December 8th 1997 and went on until 1:20 am, during which they talked about “the appearance of horoscope in Mesopotamia, metaphysical matters, complex numbers, Hitler, Edir Macedo, the stagnation of science” (Sampaio, 2002, p. 38). and, in the end, about the theme of passion. Áquila doubts that he might fall in love one day and fervently defends that “love is the worst feeling of the human species” (p. 38), and Beatriz denounces the contradiction, because his defense against passion is passionate. From this first conversation they began to meet with each other every day at 9 pm and talked “without knowing exactly with whom” (p. 38), because he said he hated trivial questions concerning objective questions of a person’s life. It is interesting to mention that Beatriz used to go online at midnight and Áquila at 6 pm, but both changed their routines to make room for dialogue, which lasted around three hours. He told her he was a virgin, “extremely ugly” and that he had never “loved somebody to the point of making love” (Sampaio, 2002, p. 39). Beatriz was 31 years old, lived a disastrous marriage with a possessive ex-husband, and was currently dating. However, on December 21st Áquila surprised her when revealing his passion for her. In the following night they talked for five hours and Áquila told that he was applying for college to study

³“Short for nickname, the pseudonym adopted by chat users and for subscription on dating sites, to be used on emails.” (Sampaio, 2002, p. 25).

physics. Beatriz wondered that he might be between 20 and 30 years old. On January 5th he asked her to be his girlfriend. Beatriz invited him to go to Recife for Holy Week, but the boy's mother did not give him permission, so Beatriz went to his family's house in São Paulo and stayed there for 12 days. In September he went to Recife and they got engaged. After staying more than a month together at Beatriz's house, in February 1999 an accident happened with the condom and she got pregnant. The baby, who was given the name Beatriz, was born in October 2000 and, in November, she moved to São Carlos, where Áquila was studying and working.

This case shows clearly how the social and personal life of subjects may be affected by the internet. A relationship that had started in the virtual space, without any intention of a more committed involvement at first, gained the real space.

As Beatriz said to Áquila, "the internet to me is just a facilitator of communication, I have never got involved with anybody" (Sampaio, 2002, p. 40). This facility promoted by the internet enables distant people to get closer, concerning both space and age, as we can observe in this case. Without the internet it would be harder or nearly impossible for an adolescent to have a relationship with a much older person or someone from another city. After the establishment of the relationship between Beatriz and Áquila, however, the distance proved a hindrance to the relationship, because the teenage boy had no financial conditions to afford the trips to Recife. In addition, his mother made things difficult as well for not allowing him to travel.

The permission for the trip leads to the moratorium matter earlier discussed. Although Beatriz had bought a ticket for Áquila to go to Recife, his mother did not authorize the trip, evidencing the obstacle to the full exercise of autonomy in adolescence and the control by parents. The young boy or girl is given the chance to enjoy his or her freedom through the moratorium, being himself or herself not held accountable for his or her own acts, but this freedom is restricted by parents and by society, which impose limits and conditions that go oftentimes beyond his or her possibilities of negotiation.

Nevertheless, adolescence involves some transgression as the subject tests imposed limits, searches for new experiences and breaks with some established rules. This transgressive capacity of the adolescent can be boosted by the internet, which configures a favorable space to this end, since the freedom promoted by the fragility of the rules and of the limits within the virtual space may lead the adolescent to feel, in this context, free from the ties and control of parents, driving him or her towards relationships with unknown people and to the desire to experiment new things. In this sense, the adolescent can constitute bonds that do not fit traditional standards that are socially established, as it is the case of partners with a big difference of age, especially between women and younger boys, like the reported case.

Another aspect that the internet facilitates is the invention of a "new identity" able to satisfy fantasies. Áquila, to some extent, creates the identity of an older and intellectual man who discusses about literature, music and physics. This identity led Beatriz to say: "I thought he was too intellectual and serious to waste his time with me, who is silly and emotional" (Sampaio, 2002, p. 39). There seems to be an inversion between each other's roles in real life: he, an adult, she, an adolescent. We can think that this character, or new identity, created by Áquila meets the ideal type of an adolescent, the type he desired: an adult. As Calligaris (2002) suggested, the greatest wish of an adolescent is to be acknowledged as an adult by the adults, and, for this purpose, he or she appeals to several artifices and expedients to reach this desired place. By putting Áquila on a superior level in relation to her, Beatriz acknowledges him as an adult and relates to him from this place, which also allows him to leave the moratorium, though not fully.

This points to the fact that the internet may radically change the ways of being of individuals, that is, the way they think, organize and perceive the internal and external worlds, relate with themselves and with other people. With the nullification of distances of any order on the internet, social representations suffer transformations as well. The traditional roles of men, women and love relationships can be deconstructed. The subtlest limits of the virtual space shake the limits traditionally established in social life, unveiling spaces that perhaps would never be opened in reality. That is how Beatriz and Áquila meet each other and have a relationship.

The attraction exerted by virtual relationships is also due to the facility with which they can be connected and disconnected. In adolescence, when coming closer to the other is more disturbing and threatening, the virtual environment works as a protection screen that keeps the other distant, but, at the same time, enables approaches and favors the relationship due to this protection. We can think that, in this sense, the internet may help adolescents in their sexual-affective relationships without, oftentimes, requiring them to take a stand before them, but to learn about, experiment, test them and then live them effectively in the future.

Final Considerations

Adolescents, during the awakening of sexuality, search for their love partners. A particularity of contemporaneity is that this search takes place in the cyberspace too. The greater facility to meet people in this space is one of the reasons that explain its fascination (Lima, 2014). According to Bauman (2004), the facility to engage and to leave virtual relationships seduces people, and alliances tend to be fluctuating, fragile and flexible.

However, the internet allows the access to the other and interdicts it at the same time, because, in the absence of a face-to-face encounter, the adolescent postpones this encounter. Sexual fantasies occupy a primary place in adolescence (Freud, 1905). Thus, by postponing a meeting with a partner, sexual desire can be fulfilled by means of fantasies. The cyberspace boosts the fantasy world, offering multiple options for the satisfaction of a variety of sexual appetites, being even able to cause the subject to lose interest in the external world.

The virtual space is the very space of paradoxes, configured as a place where meetings happen or fail, allowing the adolescent to have many relationships without leaving home and without meeting partners in person. "It is possible to get closer to an unknown person on the other side of the world by sharing with him or her the most intimate secrets, without personal contact and without the guarantee that the exchanged information is true" (Lima, 2014, p. 234).

The absence of bodies in online meetings marks the prevalence of imagery in virtual relationships, favoring the Narcissist expansion with all of its consequences, such as increased rivalry and aggressiveness. Anonymity on the internet can cause the subject to think he or she is exempt from responsibility, feeling free to say anything without having to face the consequences of his or her actions and words on the web. The subjects can find a refuge within the virtual space as a way for them to evade castration, avoiding the discomfort and misfit that the presence of the body imposes to social relations.

If some people use the internet to avoid a face-to-face meeting, some others, however seem to use this space to live in constant experimentation, becoming closer to multiple partners they meet online and enjoying freedom to live the most different experiences, in a multiplicity that seems inexhaustible (Lima, 2014).

As the internet reaches all dimensions of the human life the inter-relation between the virtual and the real becomes increasingly intense. The internet is a product of culture and, at the same time, produces effects on this culture, changing it. Virtuality reaches all domains of the human life interfering with subjectivities and with social ties.

The internet has been another mechanism used for a person to meet new people and to seek relationships, bringing possibilities that once used to be, if not impossible, much harder. The case illustrated in this article is an example, as the changes of a relationship between geographically distant people who also had a significant age difference were very small. Thus, we cannot deny the new horizons of affection that the internet provides, but we should not forget that this opening may introduce problems, especially for a subject that is going through a development phase.

With an even smaller number of studies and researches about love relationships and the internet, we should seek to learn better about this reality standing before us, not only when it comes to adolescents but to society as a whole. It is with the advance of said knowledge that many of all concerns and doubts will be clarified.

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