FROM BIDIRECTIONALITY TO VICTIMIZATION: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO OFFLINE AND ONLINE VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIPS

(De la bidireccionalidad a la victimización: aproximación teórica a la violencia offline y online en las relaciones de pareja adolescente)

María Muñiz-Rivas
Profesora de Antropología Social
Universidad de Sevilla

Amapola Povedano-Díaz
Profesora de Psicología Social
Universidad Pablo de Olavide

Gonzalo Musitu Ochoa
Catedrático de Psicología Social de la Familia
Universidad Pablo de Olavide

Abstract

In the early stages of adolescence, the type of violence that is detected most often in couple relationships are bidirectional. Violence is used as a way to resolve conflicts in the relationship or as a result of controlling and jealous behaviors that occur regardless of the adolescents' sex. However, as this vital stage progresses, violent behaviors change, and significant differences are found between boys and girls, with girls being more likely to be the victims. The main objective of this study is to carry out a theoretical approach to dating violence in offline and online contexts, summarizing the main conceptual considerations that revolve around the investigation of this type of violence and deepening its description, characteristics, and typology to offer a contextual and comprehensive explanation of the evolution of this problem.

Keywords: Adolescence, Violence, Couple, Bidirectionality, Victimization

Resumen

En las primeras etapas de la adolescencia en general, el tipo de violencia que se detecta con más frecuencia en las relaciones de pareja es de tipo bidireccional. Se usa la violencia como forma para resolver conflictos en la relación o como consecuencia de comportamientos de control y celos que se presentan independientemente del sexo de los adolescentes. Sin embargo, a medida que avanza esta etapa vital, los comportamientos violentos se modifican y se encuentran diferencias significativas entre chicos y chicas, siendo ellas mas propensas a ser víctimas de los mismos. El objetivo principal del presente estudio es realizar una aproximación teórica a la violencia en las relaciones de pareja en el contexto offline y online, resumiendo las principales

consideraciones conceptuales que giran en torno a la investigación de este tipo de violencia y profundizando en su descripción, características y tipología para intentar ofrecer una explicación contextual e integral de la evolución de esta problemática.

Palabras clave: Adolescencia, Violencia, Pareja, Bidireccionalidad, Victimización

1. INTRODUCTION

Couple relationships in adolescence are an essential source of social learning and of new forms of relationship, but their emergence together with enculturation in traditional gender schemas and the lack of adolescents' previous experience can lead them to risky situations (Carrascosa, Cava, & Buelga, 2016; Viejo, 2014). In the stage of adolescence, violence in relationships is a problem with certain characteristics to be studied because the first signs of violence can be detected when initiating the period of affective socialization (Dosil, Jaureguizar, Bernaras, & Sbicigo, 2020; Samaniego-García, 2010). Intimate partner violence in adolescence can be considered as the abusive behavior that is repeatedly exercised against the person with whom one maintains or has maintained a romantic relationship to exercise control and dominance (power) over the partner and the relationship (Povedano, 2014). This obviously has consequences both for the victim, who is in a stage of vital importance for identity and self-esteem consolidation, and for their immediate environment (Parker, Johnson, Debnam, Milam, & Bradshaw, 2017; Carrascosa et al., 2016).

Romantic relationships in adolescence have specific characteristics that differentiate them from loving relationships established at any other stage of life (Flores-Hernández et al., 2021). They are usually defined as not very long-lasting exploratory behaviors in which the partners do not live together. Teenage boys and girls often perceive romantic relationships as a social status factor (Gómez-López, Viejo, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019). In this way, they become significant life experiences (Gracia-Leiva, Puente-Martínez, Ubillos-Landa & Páez-Rovira, 2019). These relationships contribute to the process of consolidating adolescents' autonomy and gender identity, allowing them to develop a self-concept in the field of couple relationships and favoring the development of sexuality, an important evolutionary task at this stage (Martínez-Ferrer, 2013). In addition, adolescence is a period of transformation, exploration, self-analysis, and self-evaluation that ends with the creation of a coherent and integrated sense of self (Valdivia & González, 2014).

For adolescents, in recent decades, communication has changed enormously, and mobile phones and the internet are essential elements of their interpersonal relationships (Baker & Carreno, 2016; Mosley & Lancaster, 2019). While information and communication technologies (ICTs) are frequently used positively by adolescents, they can also be used as a way to exercise violence in relationships (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Fernet, Lapierre, Hebert, & Cousineau, 2019). Therefore, this type of violence occurs in a phase in which the first longed-for and, in many cases, dreamed of romantic relationships begin to become a reality, in which several interaction patterns, either in the offline or online context, can open the door to abuse in present and future relationships (Garrido-Antón, Arribas, de Miguel, & García-Collantesc, 2020).

The results of research in recent years in different countries show the high prevalence of violence in adolescent relationships (Carrascosa et al., 2016; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary & González, 2009). For example, it has been found that between 68 and 90% of adolescents, regardless of sex, admit having exercised verbal violence against their partner (Cortés-Ayala et al., 2014; Dosil et al., 2020). For online violence, this percentage is 33% for adolescents aged 14 to 18 years (Smith et al., 2018).

The causes of violence in adolescent couples have been under constant debate. Specifically, the debate on the perpetrator's gender, rather than shedding light through its constructs, affects the theory and scientific research, given the diversity and contradictions in its interpretations (Rojas-Solís, 2013). In fact, some research has shown that the predominant violence in relationships at this vital stage is bidirectional (Garrido-Antón et al., 2020; Palmetto, Davidson, Breitbart, & Rickert, 2013; Taylor & Sullivan, 2021). Considering the three typical types of violence of this phenomenon (physical, verbal-emotional, and sexual), studies show that both boys and girls are involved in violence in both roles, as victims and aggressors (Palmetto et al., 2013; Viejo, 2014). Studies also indicate that verbal-emotional violence is the most frequent subtype among couples regardless of sex (Carrascosa, Cava, & Buelga, 2018; Pazos, Oliva, & Gómez, 2014). On another hand, it has been shown that, as the severity of violence increases, bidirectionality decreases, with girls more frequently being the victims (Cava, Buelga, Carrascosa, & Ortega-Barón, 2020; Rubio-Garay, López-González, Saúl, & Sánchez-Elvira, 2012). That is, hostile behaviors are more reciprocal than severe aggressions in the early stages of adolescence.

Taking into account this new context in which young adolescents are socialized, the present work aims to review the state of the art about relationships in adolescence, as well as the violent behaviors that occur within them. We intend to provide theoretical elements to understand and characterize violent behaviors, as well as the perpetration and victimization of such behaviors depending on the subject's sex and the context of the relationship (online/offline). Therefore, the structure of this study is based on deductive reasoning with a general framework of reference on relationships in adolescence in different contexts of socialization. The bidirectionality of violence is contemplated as a factor to be taken into account in adolescence, until reaching the different types of online violence and its consequences.

2.   FROM THE OFFLINE TO THE ONLINE CONTEXT IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENCE

A good initial question is how have these violent practices moved from the traditional socialization space to the online realm? It is clear that, in recent decades, there has been a transformation from unilateral, audiovisual culture to a more interactive, bilateral, and active culture. The tendency to use ICTs occurs at practically all ages but, in adolescence, a greater increase is observed because adolescents have incorporated ICTs regularly into their lives, using them as tools for interaction, information, communication, and knowledge (Berríos & Buxarrais, 2005; Stornaiuolo, 2017). Adolescent boys and girls are the great users of the online context, becoming autonomous individuals trained from childhood to manage ICTs (Megías & Rodríguez,

2014). Several studies have pointed out that personal and close online relationships usually lead to the same kind of offline interactions, although the frequency of online interactions may be more flexible and briefer (Muñiz, Cuesta, Monreal, & Povedano, 2015; Stornaiuolo, 2017). The online context is perceived by youngsters as positive because it allows them to communicate with their idols, chat, send public or private messages, or post photos and videos immediately (Del Prete & Redon, 2020). Online communication can be established with interlocutors such as family, peers, or the partner but it is especially in these more intimate relationships where there are both positive and satisfactory interactions and also conflictive episodes, communicative misunderstandings, and violent situations, as also occurs in the offline context in these same relationships (Carrascosa et al., 2018; Muñiz et al., 2015).

The violence that occurs in the online context, like any type of violent behavior, among which is that aimed at harming friends or acquaintances, may be punctual or repetitive and is exercised, in this case, through an electronic device (mobile phone or smartphone, PC, tablet, etc.) with an internet connection (Muñiz, 2017). It should also be taken into account that online violence can include different actions such as, for example, harassing, ignoring, insulting, humiliating, intimidating, emotionally abusing, etc. (Gámez-Guadix, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2018). These types of violent behaviors are undoubtedly produced by force but not necessarily by physical force (Aróstegui, 2004). In addition, violence is an integral and, in some sense, normalized part of online social relations, but also offline relations.

If traditional (offline) violence is defined as the intentional behavior through which harm is caused (Álvarez-García, Rodríguez, González-Castro, Núñez, & Álvarez, 2010; Álvarez-García et al., 2011) online violence can be understood as the intentional behavior that causes harm and which involves both a direct confrontation with the victim—through online threats or insults— and an indirect confrontation, by harming their circle of friends or their membership within the group through the public dissemination of rumors or ridicule with comments or images on the network (Muñiz et al., 2015). It should also be borne in mind that online violence has some particular specifics compared to offline violence, making it an object of study, such as, for example, the facilitation of the aggressor's anonymity (Álvarez-García et al., 2011). This can encourage aggressors to behave as they would not in other circumstances and makes it difficult for their behavior to be persecuted and, therefore, punished (Arnaiz, Cerezo, Giménez, & Maquilónz, 2016). Also, violence may be exercised or suffered at any time, so that the aggressors do not perceive the consequences of their actions, which doubtless makes it difficult for them to put themselves in the place of the victim and cease to perform this kind of behavior.

Especially in the case of adolescence, online violence, either aggression or victimization, can occur outside of the parents' and teachers' knowledge, which would limit adult control and help when faced with these actions (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Villanueva-Blasco, & Serrano-Bernal, 2019). Online violence, characterized precisely by dispensing with material objects that foment aggression (e.g., weapons) and spatial links (it can be local or global), is more likely to appear than offline violence, as its performance implies a lower expenditure of economic and physical resources (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018). It is therefore important to know what characterizes offline dating violence to understand that elements of traditional gender socialization are also influencing the intimate partner

violence produced in the online environment.

So, what do we know so far about the socialization of boys and girls through the internet? It has been corroborated those adolescents interact in cyberspace by transmitting their beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and values in a similar way to what occurs in the offline context (Estebáñez, 2012; Muñiz et al., 2015; Garmendia, Jiménez, Casado, & Mascheroni, 2016). This means that socialization is a reflection of the context where boys and girls live and interact. Consequently, if their socio-cultural burden is based on inequality between men and women—the result of the historical and traditional conception of gender roles—then, in the online space, youngsters will communicate by transferring this inequality (Estebáñez, 2012). In this way, the set of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors derived from these attitudes, as in the offline context, can lead to situations of intimate partner violence (Arnaiz et al., 2016). In this sense, violence in online adolescent relationships has been projected and enhanced through the reproduction of the elements of control, isolation, domination, submission, and imposition that have characterized violence over the years (Torres, Robles, & Marco, 2014; Sebastián et al., 2010). Learning and assuming the elements of power and inequality occur through gender socialization as of childhood. In fact, technology-mediated violence in adolescent couples can frequently be considered a precursor to physical violence in subsequent affective relationships (Arnaiz et al., 2016).

Therefore, violence in adolescent relationships should be considered a type of dynamic violence, in constant evolution and adaptation, and socio-culturally supported by gender inequality (Gómez, Delgado, & Gómez, 2014; Hernández, 2014). In this sense, cyberspace becomes a social context where adolescent boys and girls represent stereotyped gender social constructs in different ways (Cañete-Lairla, & Díaz-Sánchez, 2019; Del Prete & Redon, 2020). This inequality is learned mainly in primary socialization contexts such as the family and subsequently the school, with their characteristics, values, ideas, and practices (Woods & Hammersley, 1993, 1995). In addition, these gender practices are legitimized, produced, and reproduced in peer relationships, which are also alien to the family environment (López, Moral, Díaz-Loving, & Cienfuegos, 2013).

Thus, there is feedback between the different areas of online/offline relationships, including adolescent boys' and girls' predilection for cyberspace in which to live, feel, and communicate their personal affective relationships (Muñiz, 2017). They socialize and at the same time blur the line between the public and the private, often fomenting problems previously experienced only through traditional intimate partner violence (Muñiz et al., 2015). That is, the ability to control through an online practice that offers the possibility of knowing with a click where, how, or with whom my partner or ex-partner is can favor practices of dominance, harassment, or public humiliation (Estébanez, 2012). Its characteristics and the different ways it presents or its typologies constitute online violence in general and online partner violence in particular, such as expressions of symbolic violence that can produce the same consequences in the victim as traditional violence.

3. CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPOLOGIES OF ONLINE INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

After knowing what online intimate partner violence consists of and how it is linked to the offline relationship context, it is important to point out the different classifications and typologies of this problem. One of the first classifications was made by Willard (2007), who classified the different violent behaviors that till then could occur through the ICTs (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Initial classification of online violent behaviors

Type of behavior	Description
Harassment	Repeated sending of offensive or humiliating messages to the victim.
Denigration	Spreading rumors or false information about the victim to damage their reputation or circle of friends.
Violation of privacy	Dissemination of secrets, information, or compromising images of the victim.
Social exclusion	Deliberate and cruel marginalization of the victim by online groups.
Identity theft	Sending malicious messages posing as the victim to spoil their reputation or to get them into trouble.

Source: Own elaboration from Willard (2007).

Subsequently, cyberaggression or happy slapping (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2010) was added. This type of aggression consists of recording on the mobile a violent act such as kicking, pushing, or even beating up a person, without prior notice, to disseminate it later on the Internet. Following Varela (2012) and Gámez-Guadix et al., (2018), the most frequent online violence among boys and girls consists of: 1) posting on the Internet compromising images (real or manipulated by photomontages), sensitive data or information that may harm or embarrass the victim and disseminating them in their relationship environment; 2) creating a false profile or space in the victim's name on social networks or in forums, where confessions are written in the first person (e.g., certain personal events or explicit demands for sexual contacts). 3) impersonating the victim, leaving offensive comments in forums or chats so that others' reactions are directed at the victim of the identity theft; 4) registering the victim's email address on certain sites so that they are subsequently a victim of spam or contacts with strangers; 5) usurping and changing the victim's email password so the aggressor can read the victim's messages and prevent their access to their email account; 6) spreading rumors about the victim, attributing to them a reprehensible, offensive, or unfair behavior, so that, without questioning what they read, third parties will exercise their own forms of retaliation or harassment; 7) sending threatening messages by e-mail, Whatsapp, SMS,

or private messages in virtual social networks, persecuting and stalking the victim in the internet places that they habitually access, producing a feeling of anxiety and strong uneasiness.

When a person is being victimized through the internet, not all the aspects described above occur always. Online violence, and specifically that related to the partner or former partner, can take various forms depending on the type of aggression, the aggressor's interest, or the victim's characteristics (Arnaiz et al., 2016; Carrillo-Izquierdo, 2018). Different typologies have been described depending on the intentions (Rodríguez, Burgos, & Becilla, 2020), on who is the aggressor, or on the procedure used (Patton et al., 2014). Among the most prominent are cyberbullying, which refers to a type of online peer violence that is repeated frequently over time, in which the aggressor or aggressors use ICTs and the internet to psychologically harass the victims, who cannot easily defend themselves (Chiza-Lozano, Vásquez-Mendoza, & Vega, 2021; Garaigordobil, 2011). Cyberbullyng has a series of characteristics that differentiate it from traditional bullying because it produces greater insecurity in the victim, as aggression can happen at any time and anywhere (Martínez-Ferrer, León-Moreno, Suárez-Relinque, Del Moral-Arroyo, & Musitu-Ochoa, 2021). In addition, as it is produced in the online context, it can be observed by a large number of viewers and for an indefinite number of times (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2017). To this fact, we must add that most of the victims will never meet their aggressors due to the anonymity that characterizes this type of action (Sabater-Fernández, & López-Hernáez, 2015). The impact of this new form of violence on the victims is remarkable, especially in people with difficulties in their interpersonal relationships and social anxiety (Carbonell et al., 2012; Chóliz & Marco, 2011; Sabater-Fernández & López-Hernáez, 2015).

Cyber-mobbing or harassment in the work setting, although it mainly affects adults, is increasing in young people (Kintonova, Vasyaev, & Shestak, 2021). Mobbers present false information through the network to damage the victim's professional and personal image (Torres et al., 2014). In this type of online mobbing, the victims suffer the same psychological consequences present in other types of harassment such as depression, anxiety, stress, and even panic (Gómez-Rodríguez, 2015). Sexting, on another hand, is one of the best-known practices among adolescent boys and girls and consists of sending private material, such as photos or videos of sexual content of oneself or other people to partners or ex-partners, mainly through the mobile phone (Gil-Llario, Morell-Mengual, García, & Ballester-Arnal, 2020). In a sexting situation, the protagonist of the images presents in an erotic or sexual pose. Some of the risks associated with this activity are blackmailing, pressure, and social ridicule that the victim suffers for fear that their images will be forwarded to third parties without their consent (Gil-Llario et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2014). This can cause significant psychological damage that, in some cases, even leads to fatal consequences such as suicide (Varela-Garay, Gálvez-Pichardo, Callejas-Jeronimo, & Musitu-Ochoa, 2018).

Sexting often leads to sexual cyberbullying (Quesada, Fernández-González, & Calvete, 2018). In addition, it has been found that girls are more vulnerable to this type of harassment, sending through ICTs more nude and semi-nude images than boys, who are considered fundamentally, the recipients of such content (Velázquez & Reyes, 2020). This practice has become a generalized phenomenon, whose prevalence among

young people is between 8.4 and 15.6% (Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018; Velázquez & Reyes, 2020). Sex-casting could also be included within the practices related to sexting, a term referring to the recording of sexual content by webcam and its dissemination by e-mail or social networks without the consent of the person who is the protagonist of the recording and who may be extorted or threatened with its publication through sextortion (Madigan et al., 2018). This last element refers precisely to the sexual extortion through which a person is blackmailed with publishing on the Internet an image or video of themselves naked or performing sexual acts. Generally, this audiovisual content had been shared through sexting or sex-casting with a person with whom the victim had or had had a personal and/or loving bond (partner/ex-partner) (Madigan et al., 2018; Molla-Esparza, López-González, & Losilla, 2021). The victim is coerced, intimidated, and threatened into having sex with someone, delivering more erotic or pornographic images, or even giving money in exchange for the material, under the threat of disseminating the original images if they do not accept the aggressor's demands (Molla-Esparza et al., 2021).

In this line is included cyberstalking, which, like traditional harassment, is a type of online violence in which the aggressor exercises dominance over the victim or victims by intruding into their intimate life. This intrusion is repetitive, disruptive, and carried out against the victim's will (Rodríguez-Castro, Martínez-Román, Alonso-Ruido, Adá-Lameiras, & Carrera-Fernández, 2021). The first episodes of cyberstalking occur between the ages of 12 and 17 and can include false accusations, surveillance, threats, identity theft, insulting messages, etc., that generate fear in the victims (Torres et al., 2014; Marcum & Higgins, 2019). Cyberstalking is considered a form of intimate partner violence among youth because it encompasses online behaviors that are linked to dominance, discrimination and, ultimately, abuse of power, where the aggressor has or has had some emotional or sexual bond with the victim (Rodríguez-Castro et al.,2021; Strawhun, Adams, & Huss, 2013). In fact, studies that have focused on cyberstalking in adolescents indicate that the most common behaviors are usually control, surveillance, and online pursuit (Strawhun, Adams, & Huss, 2013).

The last type of online violence that we discuss is grooming, which refers to the deliberate actions by an adult (groomer) to establish bonds of friendship with an underage boy or a girl on the internet (Calvete et al., 2021). The main objective of grooming is to obtain sexual satisfaction through erotic or pornographic images of the minor or even as preparation for an offline sexual encounter (Torres et al., 2014). When considering this phenomenon as harassment, the term cyberbullying of minors has generally been used, sometimes including the qualifier of "sexual," as the case may be. Along with these denominations, other terms have been proposed, which include expressions such as "access to children for sexual purposes through ICTs" (Villacampa, 2014). Grooming is a process that, due to its characteristics, can last weeks and even months, with the time varying according to how the victim reacts and which also usually goes through different phases, more or less quickly depending on the circumstances (Calvete et al., 2021; Schoeps, Peris-Hernández, Garaigordobil, & Montoya-Castilla, 2020).

The following phases have been described: 1) The groomer begins to build bonds of friendship (emotional) with the child pretending, in most cases, to be a person of the same age; 2) They collect as much information from the child as possible by tracking

their social media profiles or through subtle, direct questions; 3) Through different tactics, such as seduction, provocation, comparison, or showing images of progressively more pornographic content, they get the child to undress, touch, or masturbate in front of the webcam or to photograph themselves and send these images; 4) If blackmail has not been initiated in the previous phase, harassment begins in this phase, threatening the victim with publishing such images or informing their parents, in order to obtain more pornographic material or to achieve a physical encounter with the boy or girl victim of grooming (Craven, Brown, & Gilchrist, 2006; Torres et al., 2014). The groomer, by winning the victim's friendship and creating an emotional bond with them, decreases their inhibitions, thus facilitating a progressive approach, promoting sexual abuse outside the online context (Schoeps et al., 2020). (See Table 2).

Table 2.

Summary of the typologies and characteristics of online violence in adolescence.

What?	Who?	To whom?	How?
Cyberbullying	Peer violence, boys and girls.	Towards boys or girls from the same environment (school, community)	Insults, mockery, threats, ridicule, or extortion mainly through social networks on an ongoing basis
Cyber-mobbing	Colleagues in the workplace	Toward colleagues with some type of work relationship	Workplace mobbing, humiliation, and threats related to work to incite the victim to quit work or to prevent their future access or promotion.
Sexting (Sexcasting and Sextortion)	Partners or ex-partners	Usually toward girls with whom the aggressor has had some kind of loving bond	Sending images or videos (sexcasting) of erotic or sexual content to people with some type of emotional bond is or was previously maintained. The recipient threatens and extorts (sextortion) with publishing or disseminating the content to third parties.
Cyberstalking	Between peers and/or partners or ex-partners	Toward boys or girls from the same environment with some kind of bond, either loving, school, or community	Using the Internet and/or email to repeatedly harass another person to control, coerce, intimidate, annoy, or threaten them.

Grooming	Adults toward minors	Minors, children/adolescents.	Through a false identity, the adult seduces the minor to obtain erotic or sexual material and subsequently threatens them with its publication unless he receives sexual favors.

Source: Own elaboration from Muñiz (2016).

Different studies have shown that the violence occurring in adolescent relationships are mostly bidirectional (Cienfuegos & Díaz-Loving, 2010; Garrido-Antón et al., 2020; Palmetto et al., 2013). It is also indicated that, regardless of sex, verbal-emotional violence is the most frequent subtype of aggression among couples (Pazos, Oliva, & Gómez, 2014). Other studies suggest that boys are more violent than girls and that they justify violence more (Garaigordobil, Aliri, Martínez-Valderrey, 2015; Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Bornstein, Putnick, & Bradley, 2014). But some research also points out that girls use more elements of control through the Internet as a way to exercise violence (Muñiz-Rivas, Callejas-Jerónimo, & Povedano-Díaz, 2020). In fact, the debate on the gender of aggressors and victims in adolescent violence, especially that which occurs within relationships, has given rise to many misconceptions, ideologies, and politicization (Garrido-Antón et al., 2020). These issues, rather than shedding light through their constructs, seem to produce more alarm and confusion, such that they affect theory and scientific research, given the diversity and contradictions in their interpretations (Rojas-Solís, 2013).

4. BIDIRECTIONALITY AS A STARTING POINT IN INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENCE

However, to understand not only the problem of violence in adolescent couples, either in the online or offline contexts, but also its bidirectionality, it is important to consider the following: as romantic relationships during this stage can be a fundamental source of social learning and learning relational patterns, can their incipient nature and the adolescents' lack of previous experiences lead adolescents to risky situations?

In this sense, following Ortega & Sánchez, (2011) is important to underline that the communicative process that promotes the initiation and establishment of couple relationships in adolescence is perfectly recognizable by those involved. Consequently, both the strategies and the ways of carrying out this process of approach and the significance that each adolescent attributes to the other's signals can be the key to understanding the reciprocity of behaviors at this stage. These authors refer to the observational studies of Pellegrini (2001) to point out that, in the first period of adolescence, boys and girls can use different forms to approach the other sex that can be confusing or misinterpreted by the adults in their environment (Ortega & Sánchez, 2011), such as, for example, pushing, grabbing, etc., mainly used by boys, and insults or ironic jokes, which are used especially by girls (Castillo & Pacheco, 2008; Pellegrini, 2001). Both forms are usually understood as a manifestation of interest in the other person. However, although it may seem like a game of mutually aggressive practices and there is some difficulty in differentiating between clumsy courtship and violence, if

the adolescent is interested in the person who performs them, they are usually well received and valued positively, considering them as a demonstration of attachment and attraction (Gómez, & Almanzor, 2020; Ortega & Sánchez, 2011).

The adolescents' perception of the limits of these controversial practices turns into the border between flirting and violence: discriminating between a push as an aggressive behavior or as an attempt at approach and seduction (Viejo, Ortega-Rivera, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016). The interests, emotions, and personal feelings will mark its meaning (Lacasse, Purdy & Mendelson, 2003; Viejo, 2014). At the same time, the incipient cognitive maturity in the early stages of adolescence is a key factor in explaining and demonstrating complex feelings such as attraction to the other person (Urgiles, Fernández, & Illescas, 2020). Thus, patterns of behaviors already acquired, for example, through children's play, are used to try to adapt to new experiences through accommodation (Ortega-Rivera et al., 2010). It is in this process of discovery and agreements about interests and interpretation of the attitudes, behaviors, and desires of others where ambiguity is a key piece and courtship runs the risk of becoming an annoying, negative, or even violent event (Gómez, & Almanzor, 2020; Ortega-Rivera et al., 2010; Viejo, 2014). This ambivalent process of flirting and, at the same time, violent or aggressive attitudes towards the other that occurs at the beginning of affective relationships between adolescent boys and girls has been called (using the Anglo-Saxon term) "dirty dating" (Ortega & Sánchez, 2011; Urgiles et al., 2020). That is, certain objectively unpleasant or uncomfortable behaviors, interpreted—albeit not always—as aggressive behaviors but as attempts of approach and signs of interest, may be underlying the socialization established in the first couple relationships (Gómez, & Almanzor, 2020).

Being chosen and loved, as well as feeling the other person's attraction, produces gratification and raises self-esteem, especially during adolescence and youth, causing positive practices to be valued differently as they would in any other context (Ortega-Rivera et al., 2010; Viejo, 2014). At the same time, it should be considered that the beliefs and images held about love and affective bonding, a reflection of what has been learned in gender socialization, will affect the quality of these romantic relationships and the possibility of becoming violent or not (Povedano, 2013, 2014). That is, although adolescent boys and girls feel enthusiastic about the first romance, the lack of previous experiences and of social models about love and what love relationships should be can favor unequal relationships and, therefore, prevent adolescents from understanding what a symmetrical and healthy couple relationship is (Cava et al., 2020). This can frequently lead teenagers to conflictive or violent relationships (Borrajo, Gámez-Guadix, & Calvete, 2015; Cava et al., 2020).

So, from the analysis of the characteristics of adolescent couple relationships, in addition to the fact that adolescents may have an erroneous idea about love relationships, to some extent, we observe bidirectionality in the violence exercised in this context (Cienfuegos & Díaz-Loving, 2010; Palmetto et al., 2013; Garrido-Antón et al., 2020). That is, in these incipient couples, girls also act out of jealousy and maintain other unhealthy attitudes. In fact, in research such as the one carried out by Muñoz and Echeburúa (2016) in which beliefs and attitudes about gender roles in young people were analyzed, it was found that girls presented more sexist attitudes related to the

social context, whereas, in boys, the results were nonsignificant (Muñoz & Echeburúa 2016). Despite this, most of the studies developed on violence in adolescent couples do not consider bidirectionality as an object of study. However, a growing line of scientific literature indicates that a large part of the violence in adolescents' relationships is reciprocal (Aizpitarte, 2014; Garrido-Antón et al., 2020; Palmetto et al., 2013).

We underline that violence in adolescence is, in fact, very subtle, and frequently, the key lies in adolescents' perception of it (Aizpitarte, 2014). Most youths believe that intimate partner violence is a matter of adults, mainly only identifying physical violence (Riesgo-González et al., 2019). Adolescent boys and girls tend to explain and justify it as a temporary lack of control and do not identify it as coercive and controlling behavior (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez & Martín, 2014; Viejo 2014). In this way, they are not usually aware of being victims of abuse, especially if the abuse is psychological or relational, nor of the consequences that this will have on their mental health and their future (López-Cepero, Rodríguez, Rodríguez, & Bringas, 2014; Sebastián et al., 2010).

In principle, this cross-violence is considered as violence used by both members of the couple. However, to take bidirectionality into account, it is doubtless necessary for there to be symmetry in the attacks and equality of physical and psychological strength in both members of the couple, elements that are very seldom found (Azpitarte, 2014; Cienfuegos & Díaz-Loving, 2010). In this sense, factors such as the control exercised, especially in the online context, may somehow incorporate the girl as a possible aggressor in the relationships because there are no physical or strength differences that unbalance their way of relating to their partner (Azpitarte, 2014; Muñiz-Rivas et al., 2020). In this regard, various investigations indicate that boys perceive practically the same violence from their partners as girls do (Rodriguez, 2015). Initially, these data differ from the gender perspective (Dutton, 2010) in which women are considered as victims and men as aggressors (Moral & López, 2013). However, the equivalent levels of violence between young people of both sexes cannot be ignored (Cienfuegos & Díaz-Loving; 2010; López-Cepero, et al., 2014; Garrido-Antón et al., 2020). To understand this behavior, it is important to note that the feelings of infatuation and the non-coexistence could play a key role in this type of result.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, in general, both online and offline intimate partner violence in adolescence is a problem that generates social alarm due to its association with gender violence and, more worrisome, partner homicides. That is why this work should not only be considered a mere approximation to the phenomenon of violence in adolescent relationships. It also aims to arouse enough interest to continue in the line of its study to better understand the patterns, risk factors, and key elements that allow designing intervention strategies to reduce and even eradicate it. But, above all, in these stages where the first love relationships and gender stereotypes occur, it is necessary to prevent the use of violence to resolve conflicts, as well as to impede the myths of romantic love that still persist.

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