“One way or another I need to learn this stuff!” Adolescents, sexual information, and the Internet’s role between family, school, and peer groups

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64 adolescents, male and female, aged 16-18

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# Abstract

The Internet is an important part of everyday life and many people also use it for activities connected to intimacy and sexuality. This essay describes the bricolage that adolescents collect every day from family, school, peer groups, and the Internet when searching for information connected to the sexual sphere. Nowadays a new socialization process, amplified by digital media, is present in adolescents’ life. This is a sort of auto-socialization process that allows them to construct knowledge through diverse, non-traditional sources of information.
This paper describes the dialogues between social spaces that permit an adolescent to search for an understanding of what sex and sexuality are in contexts that often respond to their question with silence.

# Outcome

Findings are organized in different areas to explore how adolescents make sense of sexuality by interacting with family, school, peer groups, and the internet.
Family: "it is difficult to have dialogues within the family regarding discourses connected to sex and sexuality. We must make a distinction with regards to both gender and relations with different members of the family. Regarding the first aspect girls seem more inclined than boys to speak about sexuality with parents. This occurs by finding in the mother a fundamental referee in respect to matters related to the health: menstruation, prevention and therapy against vaginal infection, physical changes, etc. [...] It’s different for boys. They speak very little about sexuality with their parents because they see them as distant entities that cannot understand intimacy matters. The mother could be a referee concerning sexual health of the young man. The father could be a referee regarding other questions connected to the intimate sphere, but frequently young men want to demonstrate to the fathers their compliance with heterosexual expectations". (Scarcelli, 2014, pp. 43-44).

School: According to the interviewees the school offers largely superficial health information related to the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and a little more, leaving the broad range of young people’s experiences absent. Frequently the participation of adolescents is not expected and the school does not give much space to the adolescents’ experience and to their stories. Sometimes this interaction is present but it is inhibited by the presence of the teacher in the classroom, a figure that still plays an institutional role making it more difficult for youth to talk about intimacy. (Scarcelli, 2014, p. 45)

Peer groups: "In the adolescents’ opinion the peer group is the favourite interlocutor to discuss intimacy. In their peer group adolescents speak mainly about topics which find no space for discussion in the family or in school and which are connected to practices and concrete sexual experiences or, in general, topics belonging to the sphere of desire.
Talking about sex takes on certain different modes according to the group to which the adolescent belongs. In comparison with young men, it is easier for girls to speak with other girls about sex and their own experiences". (Scarcelli, 2014, p. 46)

The internet: "The empirical work showed that the majority of the interviewed adolescents, through different ways and different sources, use the web to find different kinds of information connected to intimacy and sex.
In general I could assert that, with the proper analytical distinction, the Internet is an important source of information related to sex and sexuality for adolescents, but not an exhaustive resource. Adolescents create a continuous bricolage, attempting to cope with their insecurities from failure and with the anxiety deriving from all “first times” they have to face." (Scarcelli, 2014, p. 47).