

Sexual and sexist cyber-harassment towards young girls. New online versions of patriarchal oppression of female sexuality and corporality

El ciberacoso sexual y/o sexista contra las adolescentes. Nuevas versiones online de la opresión patriarcal de las sexualidades y corporalidades femeninas



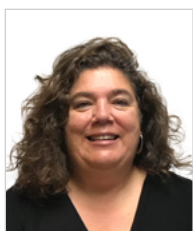
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Abstract:

This paper, which derives from the PhD thesis "The Macho-driven digital Iceberg", uses a qualitative methodology and gender and (cyber) feminist theory to explore sexual and sexist cyberbullying of female adolescents in the Basque Country. To confront this reality, 9 discussion groups were formed: 3 male, 3 female and 3 mixed, with students from stages equivalent to GCSE and FE (4th year compulsory secondary education and 1st year further education) (Spanish ESO and Bachiller), as well as 2 online forums. This qualitative methodology has allowed us to analyse the different types of bullying suffered by teenage girls, and study in depth the sexist and macho/patriarchal structures underlying these forms of cyberviolence.

Amongst the most relevant results, of most significance is that, just as in *offline* reality, the social media produce schematic and asymmetric gender relationships and, consequently, gender violence. On social media specific forms of cyber violence are aimed at girls, who receive more insults about their physical appearance, are sexually intimidated and receive more sexist comments than boys.

Keywords:

Sexual/sexist cyber-harassment; cyber feminism; adolescents; gender.

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Resumen:

El presente artículo parte de los datos obtenidos en la tesis doctoral "El Iceberg Digital Machista" y utiliza una metodología cualitativa para adentrarse desde una lectura de género y (ciber)feminista en el Ciberacoso sexual y/o sexista que sufren las chicas de la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco (CAPV). Para abordar esta realidad, se han realizado 9 grupos de discusión con el alumnado de 4º de la ESO y 1º de Bachiller de la CAPV (3 de chicas, 3 de chicos y 3 mixtos), así como 2 foros telemáticos. Este engranaje metodológico cualitativo ha permitido analizar las distintas formas de acoso que sufren las chicas, y profundizar en las estructuras patriarcales/machistas y sexistas que subyacen a estas formas de ciberviolencia.

Entre los resultados más relevantes cabe destacar que, al igual que sucede en la realidad offline, en las redes sociales se reproducen esquemas de género y relaciones asimétricas, y, por ende, violencias machistas. Concretamente, en las redes sociales se dan formas específicas de ciberviolencia contra las chicas, que son más insultadas por su físico, intimidadas sexualmente, y reciben más comentarios sexistas que los chicos.

Palabras clave:

Adolescentes, género, ciberacoso sexual y/o sexista, ciberfeminismo.

1. Introduction and contextualization

In order to understand human relationships in today's Information Society requires a decoding and analysis of the interactions that converge in digital spaces (Castells, 2005). Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which include relationships (henceforth referred to as ICTR), inevitably impact on being, acting and doing, and therefore information, communication and ways of relating to each other have become "hooked" on these technological instruments (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008; Zafra, 2010).

Undoubtedly, ICTR have brought about convenience, possibilities and technological, social and political progress. They have enabled the management of a virtual world full of opportunities for both individual and community development. However, this technological, social and cultural progress has also resulted in digital risks marked by traditional conditioning from the *offline* world, as is the case of the patriarchal system and macho culture (Zafra, 2005a, 2010; Wajcman, 2004; García & Nuñez, 2008). In this sense, the gender frameworks found in ICTR have become the centre of attention and the object of study in a variety of sources (Turkle 1997; Alcañiz, 2001; Boix, Fraga & Sedón, 2001; Castaño & Caprile, 2010; Castaño, 2005, 2008; Zafra, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Díaz, 2001; Wajcman, 2004; Instituto de la Mujer, 2008; Haraway, 1991).

Paradoxically, virtual life is submerged in constant ambivalence derived from the co-existence of extremely subversive spaces for breaking up gender frameworks and exploring non-normative identities¹ (Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1998; Turkle, 1997; Zafra, 2005b); with others marked by one of the most effective patriarchal mechanisms for sustaining male domination: violence towards women (Lagarde, 1990). In the interest of demonstrating how certain types of patriarchal domination are reproduced in the virtual world, several emerging studies are focusing on the cyber violence that women are suffering ((Gobierno Vasco, 2013; Megias & Ballesteros, 2014; EIGE, 2018; UNESCO, 2017; Lenhart 2009; Powell & Henry, 2014; Strassberg, *et al.* 2012; Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014; Navarro, 2016; EIGE, 2018).

Some of this research shows that the percentage of girls who suffer harassment via ICTR is higher than that in boys – 9% *versus* 6% respectively, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2018); and 12% *versus* 8% according to UNESCO (2017). However, the empirical evidence shows that the problem is more structural and qualitative than quantitative, given the gender differences that exist in the object of harassment and the forms this takes. In this sense, girls are the object of various types of sexual and/or sexist cyberbullying, which creates intimidating spaces against their bodies and their sexuality (Lenhart 2009; Powell & Henry, 2014; Strassberg *et al.*, 2012; Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014; Navarro, 2016; EIGE, 2018).

Our proposal is to explore these forms of assault in one of the most crucial stages of building an identity: adolescence (Jiménez-Albiar *et al.*, 2012; Vázquez, Estébanez & Herbón, 2013; Tubert, 2008; Pineda & Aliño, 1999; Rovira, 2001; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002: 67; Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005; Renold, 2002, 2007; Egan & Hawkes, 2012). In particular this paper aims to study sexual and/or sexist cyberbullying suffered by girls in the Basque Region from a qualitative, gender and (cyber) feminist perspective. To do so, in line with the results from the research consulted, we start with two main hypotheses: 1) that girls suffer specific forms of cyberbullying, like sexual and sexist; and 2) these forms of cyberbullying are based on a patriarchal and macho legacy².

From these premises, the paper first looks at some of the previous research on forms of violence towards women that are being produced on Internet among adolescents, and reviews the conceptual framework used in this field, opting for a suitable term for a cyber-feminist perspective understood as a reflexive strategy of varied critiques and politics which seeks empowerment for women in the digital world, and at the same time the subversion and transgression of traditional conditioning (Zafra, 2005b; Wajcman, 2004; Haraway, 1991; Turkle, 1991; Paasonen, 2011). This first bibliographic analysis supports the empirical part, which involves the discussions with 15-17 year-old adolescents, from stages equivalent to GCSE and FE in 9 different secondary schools in the Basque Region. These discussions enabled us to analyse the different types of harassment suffered by girls and examine the patriarchal/macho structures which underlie these kinds of cyberbullying and discover their consequences.

With these concerns, this paper is not written with a generalizing proposal so much as an exploratory one; an attempt to generate a space for analysis and debate which delves into and draws attention to the patriarchal mechanisms taking

1 People with non-normative identities subvert the patriarchal norm (hetero), either because their behaviour breaks the gender mandate or because their sexual orientation does not fit into the heterosexual frameworks (Valdes, 2013).

2 This paper stems from the most relevant results obtained in the PhD thesis *The Macho Digital Iceberg*.

place on the Internet. It is, then, a subversive proposal which aims to enquire into the reproduction of inequality in a world which was predicted would be infinite for seeking identities and legitimising horizontal relationships.

2. (Cyber)violence among adolescents

Violence carried out by peers finds new stage settings such as Internet. This is how several sources centre their efforts to understand and analyse what for some time now has been referred to as cyberbullying (Bartrina, 2014; Buelga & Pons, 2011:92; Buelga, Cava & Musitu, 2010; Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014:25-26; Del Rey, Felipe y Ortega-Ruiz, 2012: 17; Mitchell *et al.*, 2016). This exercise in violence is produced particularly among school children, and although there are similarities with harassment and traditional bullying –especially with regard to its origins and causes– it displays features which increase the assault even more, if that's possible, both that received and that perceived. The nature of these can be summarised in three main strands: 1) the anonymity of the abuser, which permits greater impunity and, of course, more damage and a higher level of defencelessness; 2) the attacks or insults can take place permanently, very quickly and can be made by many people at the same time and instantaneously, and 3) the abuse has a large “audience” and spreads far and wide.

Among the studies on cyberbullying there are those which claim that there are no relevant differences relating to gender (although they do not include an in-depth analysis from this perspective) (Buelga & Pons, 2011:92; Buelga, Cava & Musitu, 2010; Del Rey, Felipe & Ortega-Ruiz, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2016). There are also those which conclude that while both girls and boys suffer cyberbullying, the former are subject to specific forms of domination, related to attacks on their corporality and sexuality (Bartrina, 2014; Gobierno Vasco, 2013; Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014; Lenhart, 2009; Powell & Henry, 2014; Strassberg *et al.*, 2012; UNESCO, 2017; Navarro, 2016; EIGE, 2018).

Given the features of cyberbullying, different studies started to investigate, analyse and use a new term to refer to the sending of pictures and videos with sexual and erotic content: sexting (Lenhart 2009; Strassberg *et al.*, 2012; Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014; Powell & Henry, 2014). However, while for some sources sexting refers to the action of sending erotic messages which contain photos and /or videos – an erotic game; for others the term refers to sending photos and/or videos of a girl with the intention of domination or extortion. This divergence of terms generates a conceptual and legal problem and makes it difficult to decide whether abuse has taken place or not.

As a result, Powell & Henry (2014) propose a conceptual distinction between this type of act, between abuse or assault (a criminal act with intention to intimidate), which they call sextortion, and experimentation (a sexual game between different people), which they call sexting. This differentiation helps to pin down the meaning of sexting, which would be the authorised sending of pictures and /or photos.

In spite of these efforts to define these forms of attack, and of the empirical data that proves it is the girls who suffer disproportionately, the studies mentioned do not go into a qualitative and in-depth analysis of the structures and mechanisms underlying this reality. To understand it, the gender perspective needs to be mainstreamed, for, as claimed by different sources (Egan & Hawkes, 2012; Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005: 99; Renold, 2002, 2007; Ringrose & Renold, 2010),

gender frameworks establish relationships of power and asymmetrical positions which place “hegemonic masculinity”³ at the peak of the “social order”, such that anyone who breaks away from or escapes from the norm is stigmatised (from boys who are sensitive, studious or homosexual, to girls who question the mandates of gender such as displaying their sexuality). This asymmetry, legitimised and normalised –as Lagarde (1990)⁴ and De Beauvoir (1945) explain– upholds specific mechanisms of power and oppression against women, such as symbolic and explicit violence, or the oppression of female sexuality as a mechanism for social control.

These theories constitute the relevant theoretical bases for understanding these types of violence and their intersubjective causes, which allow the avoidance of blaming discourses and terms which do not account for the true nature of the phenomenon studied. For these reasons, what follows is the development and defence of a terminology which introduces a mainstream gender perspective and (cyber) feminist reading at its centre.

3. “If it doesn’t have a name, it doesn’t exist”. The search for a terminology that raises awareness of the origin of the (cyber)violence suffered by young girls

In the first instance, from the bibliography consulted on the conceptualization of violence within the cybernetic framework (Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014; Buelga, Cava & Musitu, 2010; Buelga & Pons, 2011; Del Rey, Felipe & Ortega-Ruiz, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2016; Bartrina, 2014; Lenhart 2009; Strassberg, *et al.*, 2012; Powell & Henry, 2014), we propose the term cyberharassment, given that it is a global concept (not Anglo-Saxon), and that it refers to behaviour in this field which gives rise to an asymmetrical relationship where one person is in a dominant position and forces the other person into a submissive role (Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014).

Secondly, when addressing a specific terminology on assaults suffered by young girls (which include the aforementioned types), one of the few proposed terms found is that established by the Government Delegation for Gender Violence (2014). This defines cyberharassment in gender violence as:

Such behaviour that by the use of ICT aims to dominate, discriminate and, in short, abuse a position of power, where the male stalker has either been in a relationship with the victim or is her partner. Also, the assault must be repetitive, non-consensual, imply an invasion into the private life of the victim, and the motivation for the harassment must be connected in some way to an affective relationship that exists or has existed between the abuser and the victim (Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género, 2014:27).

3 These explanations are structured from Connell’s theory (1995) which maintains that gender constructs are not monolithic entities but should be understood in their sociocultural and economic context, which gives rise to different interpretations depending on the prevailing culture. Nevertheless, western culture prescribes a “hegemonic masculinity” – linked to a white, heterosexual, authoritarian, physically strong and sexually active man – who occupies a leading position in the gender order. This dominates over other, subordinate masculinities which break these norms and over any femininity.

4 Lagarde (1990) and De Beauvoir (1945) understand that the female construct has been socially oppressed and harmed by an imposed structural violence using very diverse means such as the subordination of women’s sexuality, the objectification of their bodies, the ideology of intensive maternity, physical violence, etc. At the same time, the patriarchal system has conferred specific attributes on femininity such as dependence on the gaze (especially the male gaze), which underlies feminine rivalry, and the dichotomy between “good” – or emphasised femininity as defined by Connell (1995) – and “bad” women, which establishes a difference between the female archetypes closest to the patriarchal norm, and those furthest away, who are stigmatised and socially condemned.

The approach and awareness-raising that the Government Delegation for Gender Violence carries out in the study into specific types of cyberviolence towards women is particularly interesting. However, there is disagreement as to whether cyber harassment or cyber violence is only produced within the framework of a couple or an affective-sexual relationship. For this reason, taking into account the various studies on sexual violence (Crouh, 2001; Mora, 2004; Osborne, 2001, 2009; Weeks, 1993) and considering the advantage of using a term of everyday language, a conceptual approach to sexual abuse (in its traditional form) has been chosen in order to be able to analyse whether this term corresponds to this study's interest.

In the definition and boundary of "sexual harassment" we encounter both challenges and limitations. There is no terminological consensus; disparate notions are used like "harassment on the basis of sex", "sexual harassment", or "sexist harassment". Current studies and laws which attend to the definition and /or punishment of this behaviour are not without this confusion of terms. The Organic Law (Ley Orgánica) 3/2007, 22nd March for the effective equality for men and women describes in article 7 what it understands by sexual harassment and/or on the basis of sex and equates both terms. Likewise, the Basque Government (Gobierno Vasco) (2011:3), Osborne (2001, 2009), Weeks (1993), Renold (2002), Mora (2004) and Crouh (2001) understand harassment as a regulating element of behaviour which obliges women to contain their sexuality and become invisible, while legitimising and normalising male sexual domination.

Nevertheless, in the analysis of the previously cited texts we should establish a conceptual distinction between the terms mentioned. Sexist harassment refers to messages and attitudes towards a woman: what she hears, reads, notes, feels etc., based on her gender (on which is conferred a range of features that are inferior to those of a man). Sexual harassment, on the other hand, is defined as any insulting behaviour, verbal or physical, with sexual intentions. What is more, both types of harassment can occur in any everyday situation, not only in the workplace (as some laws have enshrined), and they constitute specific acts which permit an imbalance or asymmetry of power and the discrimination by gender in any context, upholding "the social order".

In short, both sexist and sexual harassment are ways to refer to sexism and sexual politics in which men and women occupy asymmetrical positions. They do not, therefore, correspond to a single form of violence or one specific type of assault, and they require a holistic viewpoint that enables them to be understood as multiple behaviours which can potentially take place in any context of social interaction between genders (Mora, 2004:3; Osborne, 2001, 2009; Weeks, 1993).

Taking into account the conceptual input reviewed, this paper proposes the terms sexist cyber harassment and sexual cyber harassment as terms of reference to cover the reality of this study. The first will cover attitudes, verbalisations or behaviour produced in ICTR and which upholds gender stereotypes; for example assaults aimed at the body image, insults, comments or pictures which reproduce gender stereotypes (such as sexist pictures that are posted on social media and which vilify women, just for being female).

The second term used in this research, sexual cyber harassment, encompasses all those attitudes, verbalisations and behaviour of a sexual nature produced in ICTR and whose effect is to threaten a girl's dignity, particularly when it produces an intimidating, insulting or offensive environment; for example, sending and circulating photos and /or videos of an intimate nature without her consent.

However, as indicated by the studies carried out by the Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género (2014) and Ruiz (2014), it is difficult to create a definitive list of harassments and assaults, due to multiple factors, among which are: the different ways of expression and use of technology; the technological dynamism itself by which new strategies for harassment and abuse are developed; and the fact that the teenagers do not detect the assaults and they are normalised, without being reported. Therefore, empirical research is one way in which we can recognise these and/or other types of assault, which so far have maybe gone undetected in other studies, and add valuable information to the state of the matter. Bear in mind that this paper has no intention of extrapolation and is bound within the context of the Spanish Basque Region.

4. Methodology used to obtain the digital voices of the local girls and boys.

As mentioned previously, this paper aims to use a gender and (cyber) feminist perspective to delve into the sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment suffered by girls in the Basque Region, starting with the following hypotheses:

- **H1-** Girls suffer specific types of cyberviolence, like sexual and /or sexist (cyber) harassment through social media.
- **H2-** These types of cyberviolence are entrenched in a patriarchal and macho legacy.

To do so, a qualitative methodology is used, for as indicated by Taylor & Bogdan (2000:19) and Ruiz Olabuénaga (2012: 44), this allows us to study the subjective dimension, delve into the words, beliefs and opinions, and know the essence of the intersubjective meanings of the fact being studied. From this perspective the following objectives are formed:

1. To analyse the different forms of harassment suffered by girls through talks with the participating adolescents.
2. To examine in depth the patriarchal/macho and sexist structures underlying these types of sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment.
3. To discover the consequences that these types of cyber harassment lead to.

To approach these objectives we opted for the techniques of group discussion and online forums. Both provide feedback, and from the intrasubjectivity of the adolescents taking part it is possible to explore the proposed interests in a rich and complementary way. In particular, the first technique helps to create a space for dialogue and interrelation (Ibañez, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2008). This enables understanding of the cultural imaginary of the participating teenagers, and of the reasons and ideologies that sustain the situations of sexual and/or sexist harassment.

The second technique, the online forum, was chosen for being a computer tool which allows for the exploration of the collective discourse within Internet and is similar to what the teenagers live, write, read and share (Hooley, Marriott & Wellens, 2013; Chriss & Stewart, 2000). Nevertheless, it is taken on as a technique which complements and enriches the discussion group, and which permits the generation of discussions and fluid dialogue, flexible and without constraint, through the use of photos, commentaries, videos etc.

In order to organise participation in both processes, firstly contact was made with 9 different secondary schools⁵ in the Basque Regional Community (3 from each historic territory)⁶, and three main principles were outlined: 1) that the group be formed by between 7 and 12 members per school; 2) that the students would be in the school years corresponding to GCSE and FE (in other words between 15 and 17 years old); and 3) that in each historic territory there would be at least one group of girls, one of boys and one mixed⁷.

When the discussion groups were completed, the participants were encouraged to take part in the online forums. Of the 83 who took part in the qualitative research (42 girls and 41 boys), 17 girls and 17 boys went on to join the two online forums (one for girls and one for boys). The number in the forums is reduced because, as explained by Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011), as an interpretative technique its aim is to take a close look at experiences and does not need such a broad sample. The groups were all organised by the schools.

5. The sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment suffered through digital talks by adolescents from the Basque Regional Community.

The following pages take us into the discourse and the hypertext produced by the adolescents who participated in the research. First of all the main results of the discussion groups are presented, and then some of the particularly relevant elements from the online forums are displayed. The results from the discussion groups bring us closer to the common features of sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment that the girls suffer, to their perception and experience and also to the cyberviolence exerted upon people who do not conform to hetero norms. The online forums complement and reinforce the results of the discussion groups, going deeper into some of the key elements of the types of cyberviolence exerted on the girls who participated.

5.1. Common features and the process of sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment.

According to those who took part in the groups, situations of sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment are happening with a high frequency in their local context. In fact, in 8 or the 9 groups there were one or more cases of these types of harassment. Let us see some specific examples:

5 As previously indicated, this paper stems from the PhD thesis "The Macho Digital Iceberg", whose methodological mechanism is more complex and which begins with a first phase of sealed questionnaires which give rise to these discussion groups. For that, in the first phase, students are invited to take part and sign up, which produces a total of 190 girls and 147 boys. The participants of the groups were then selected from these according to the criteria described.

6 In order to guarantee the ethical criteria of the research different processes were carried out, like sending a "model letter" which informed them of the study, and then a letter of authorisation for the teenagers taking part signed by their parent or legal guardian. The school took on the responsibility of sending out the letters of authorisation, and providing a classroom and a place for the groups to carry out the study.

7 This third criterion was proposed given the importance that identity acquires at this stage, as maintained by Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman (2002). The division of these spaces also provides us with elements for the analysis of gender patterns. It is worth mentioning that, with the intention of maintaining anonymity, each group was coded with a number and each participant given an alphanumeric code depending on the group he/she belonged to.

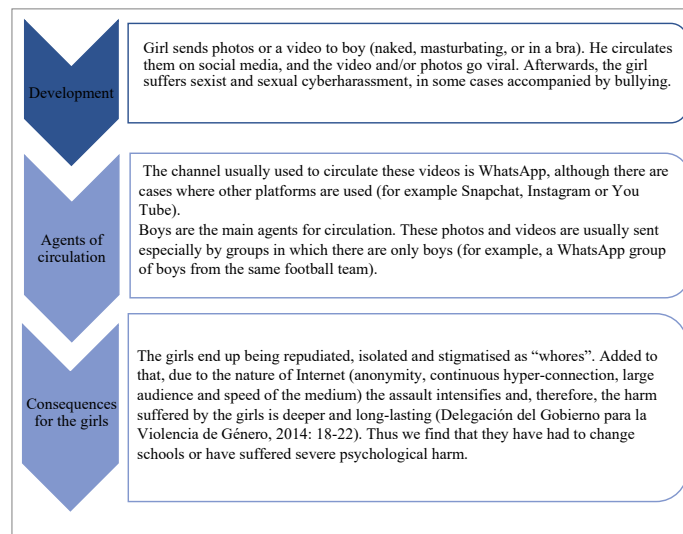
D10 (girl, 16 years old) - Not only did she send photos to one person but to several others, some of whom were her friends. One sends to another, who sends it on to another, and so on...

H9 (boy, 16 years old) - One boy had a photo and he uploaded it to his Instagram without meaning to, but it was the photo of the naked girl and very soon everybody had seen it The girl told him, he removed it ... (...) He felt really bad ... The first days you saw five emails at school and in the five emails the same photo. And you saw the girl on her own in the playground ... Because you knew what was going on ...

Likewise, through talking with the teenagers we can confirm that sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment also happens in non-heterosexual partners, and in sporadic or one-off relationships (such as one-night stands, those arranged on Internet etc.).

The analysis of the teenagers' accounts help us to conclude that both types of assault interact and present common features which are embodied in reproducing the same path. These findings are brought together in the illustration that follows.

Illustration 1. Common features and process identified in the cases of sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment



Source: Author's own production.

5.2. Sexual and/or sexist cyber harassment, normalised practices of masculinity

As can be appreciated in the previous illustration, the discussion groups reveal that the boys are the main agents in circulating this type of content. In fact, especially in the groups of boys only, it was observed that these acts are considered

more frequently to be normal. In this sense, the boys talked naturally about the videos and photos that are sent of naked girls they do not know or which have pornographic content. Here are some examples of this:

H1 (boy, 16) – Because they sell more easily. Send a girl a photo of a naked boy to a girl and I don't think they tend to pass it on or send it ... She'll see it and that's it, but a boy is like, "wow, look what they've sent me!" ... And he passes it on to one person, it gets passed on to another ... and he doesn't care...

B10 (boy, 16) – I suppose that lots of blokes would think: "wow, she's sending photos!", so they're all talking to her.

The girls also say that it's the boys who are the main agents for spreading and also for the assaults. In reference to this, we highlight following example as quoted:

D10 (Girl, 16) – And they don't say it, like ... I've heard some boys like "whoa, what a slut!", that's what I've mostly heard them say, What a slut! ...

B10 (Boy, 16) – Well, that's why basically, 'cause they say "whoa, she's real dirty, I'll talk to her and tomorrow I'll go out with her". And that's it.

The habitual viewing of pornographic content, heterodirected to the satisfaction of masculine desires of objectification and eroticisation of the female body (videogames, adverts, heterodirected pornography etc), and education in codes of sexual freedom and in the acquired need for displaying "grandeur", encourage boys to adopt these postures (Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Zafra, 2005a; Gil, 2008; Vázquez, Estébanez & Herbón, 2013). The increased consumption of this content undermines active criticism and sustains and normalises the acts we have described (Zafra, 2005a). Thus, as pointed out by Vázquez, Estébanez & Herbón (2013), all these differences and inequalities are maintained because of this normalisation and invisibility that is produced thanks to the continuous absorption in this sexist and chauvinistic information.

5.3. Gender normativity in forms of cyber harassment

The people who took part in the discussion groups indicate how in the previously described situations a massive audience becomes judge purely from the action of one young girl. Even in those cases in which the sex act has been filmed between a girl and boy, it is the girl who is stigmatised and condemned, while the boy is seen as a hero and is praised for his "great deed". This is how it is described by the teenagers:

F6 (girl, 16) – A boy is treated like a hero, and a girl is treated like a

B3 (boy, 17) – That's right, lots of people, even, instead of insulting the bloke, they, like encourage him; on the other hand, the girl is a slut.

B10 (boy, 17) – The chick is a slut because she's fucking with a bloke in the street. In the end we all think she's a bit loose....

All this demonstrates that female sexuality is defined by coercive parameters of submission and apathy, and if they are broken, the construction of "bad woman" hangs over them, for they are no longer seen as "women", and not even as people (De Beauvoir, 1949; Lagarde, 1990; Megias & Ballesteros, 2014).

Due to the construct of “bad woman”, girls and boys – but especially the girls – only blame the girls in these cases and they do not empathise with them. In fact, in various groups one of the first words mentioned in a case of cyber harassment is “stupid”. Here are some of examples of this:

D4 (girl, 15) – She was a bit stupid (for sending the photo).

A6 (girl, 15) – I think the girl was stupid for sending the photo, because if you want someone to see you naked then go to their house and take your clothes off, end of story.

F4 (girl, 16) – First off, the girl should not have done it. Stupid for having done it and trusted... The thing is, you might think he’s your boyfriend and you want to get married and stuff, but no Your private things and, especially your photos, not with anyone.

They understand the problem from an individualistic point of view, but not from a holistic or collective one. In fact, only one girl (I7) poses the possibility that there may exist a collective responsibility in saying that it is only the girls who suffer these insults for the simple fact of being a girl, thus being aware of the macho construct which underlies these acts. This perspective allows her to empathise with a girl who finds herself in this type of situation, shown by her comments: “She has a responsibility, but if she trusts him ... It’s like if I’m with my partner, and I don’t think for one moment that he could send it (the photo) to someone else” (I7, girl, 15).

Likewise, we find clear examples of attitudes of passivity and restraint over their own sexuality, which contribute to their considering this type of situation as a private act. In several groups they point out that if they want to “show” something, it must be in person or in private; and some girls maintain that the girls who send these videos or photos are trying to get attention, as the following comments show:

F4 (girl, 16) – I think she was looking for it ... Let’s see, they’re like photos in an advert, and, after all, you take them if you want others to see you ...

F3 (girl, 16) – Come on, what she wanted more than anything was to get attention.

H1 (boy, 16) – And I think that girls, when they think you love them, are more naïve, while I think that boys reach a point where they’re always more cautious, I think they have limits ... But the girl, I’m not so sure.

The girls see themselves as victims and as sexually passive (Beauvoir, 1949:467), and require other girls to obey this mandate. The assumption of their objectification makes it impossible for them to empathise with other girls, and even makes them want to distance themselves from them, rejecting and stigmatising them (Egan & Hawkes, 2012; Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005:99; Renold, 2002, 2007). They mark a clear difference between “the good ones” –who would never circulate a photo – and the others, “the bad ones”; as one of the girls said: “I think that one of the serious problems is also that we say it amongst ourselves” (F7). What follows are some of the statements that exemplify this:

D10 (girl, 16) – She’s been a bit of a slut

A3 (girl, 16) – I don’t know, I think it’s disgusting

A5 (girl, 15) – She just wanted to get attention!

F5 (girl, 16) – The thing is, you know what? They think that people are always talking about them, and it’s not like that ...

On the other hand, some of the girls and boys (A8, B10, B3, H1, H3), in trying to argue why this type of cyber harassment has occurred, refer to one of the stereotypes attached to femininity: “weakness”. Thus, they indicate that these girls are more easily “manipulated”, “more naïve” or “trust very quickly”. Once again, we observe that a problem whose origin is markedly social is attributed to the individual.

5.4. *Teenage girls' bodies as territories for patriarchal domination*

The girls' bodies also become territories for domination. In the boys' and girls' discussions we have found other examples of sexist and sexual cyber harassment through the media of internet. As gathered by the Basque Government's study (Gobierno Vasco) (2013), the girls, simply for being girls, receive more disrespectful signals about their physical appearance and more personal and sexual comments through social media, as exemplified in the following comments:

A1 (girl, 15) – Then there are things, that I didn't know about, questions that other people shouldn't know about, nor There are questions on whether I've had sex with someone, or things that others don't need to know.

F2 (girl, 16) – The thing is, is that... they go, for example: “Suck my dick!”, or, whatever so then you go and answer with something stupid ... but really, in the end, they are showing a complete lack of respect for you ...

F4 (girl, 16) – And they ask you really private things ...

These specific signals are being produced through a channel which has up to now not been named: Ask⁸. By way of example, we find a “ranking” of girls who are mentioned in the different groups and forums, where the name of a girl is added and a group of anonymous people award marks to her, and sometimes include sexist comments about her.

Just as can be detected in the groups, this objectification of young girls, to which is added the value that they confer on their own body when defining their self-concept, generates more suffering in girls than in boys. In general, for the girls who were consulted, this site has become a tedious and damaging place, and as they explain, they find it “disgusting”. The girls in group 6 expressed it thus:

F4 (girl, 16) – You award marks from 0 to 10, so that's what for me seems humiliating, and on the other hand you feel that some people are above others, I think that's awful, the thing is there are girls who can get really hurt by it.

F7 (girl, 16) – Yes, me, for example, when I saw my mark, and I was, like, thinking: “I'm a 6?” And you think, like, well maybe you're a 6, but then you think about it and you say “he's a 6”. The thing is I'm not a number; I'm much more than a number ... Don't give me a number

5.5. *Cyberviolence towards people who subvert hetero norms.*

As indicated by Philips (2013) and Ringrose & Renold (2010), it is important to raise awareness of attitudes towards LGBTBI phobia which is also emerging on Internet. This macho culture which shapes gender positions and norms also creates social condemnation for those, male or female, who transgress the hetero-norm mandate. These forms of violence are

8 This site acts as a clinic (or forum) for questions, in which either anonymously or not – each person can decide – questions are sent, and others who are connected should answer.

also usually found in the live connections when playing online, reproducing “normative cruelty” (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). In the words of two girls:

I5 (girl, 15) – There’s a boy on YouTube who does a bit of everything, and everyone asks him if he’s gay and stuff ... Just because ... Not because he is or anything, he just talks about things, how can I say it, normal things ... And everyone thinks he’s gay.

E3 – I know a girl, but before, she was a boy, and now she’s a girl, and she was bullied at school, but also on social media. She played in a professional football team and everyone had a go at her, I mean, on all the chats and things like that they always said bad things, and just because she’s a girl and she’s changed sex.

As these accounts reflect, Internet becomes an unequal and asymmetrical space which sets up hierarchical postures, and the patriarchal hetero-norm acts as a backdrop where the participating young girls and boys develop an interaction. This is why it is deemed essential to further study this type of assault in subsequent research.

The analysis of the conversations obtained in the discussion groups, covered in the preceding sections, is complemented by the hypertext used by the adolescents who took part in the online forums. We now present the most significant results of these forums.

5.6. Cyberviolence towards girls as an exercise in domination

As is the case with the discussion groups, the forums demonstrate that on internet there are specific types of violence towards women and that their corporality becomes the object of assault. In these spaces, as Bourdieu (1949), Osborne (2001, 2009), Weeks (1993) and Lagarde (1990) claim, violence towards women constitutes a mechanism for control and for maintaining the “social order”.

In this sense, people who take part in the forums state that violence is widespread and that it includes practices which both famous and anonymous women have suffered, whose consequences coincide in both cases: stigmatisation and sexist and sexual cyber harassment towards women. In addition, it shows that the boys especially are those who receive videos and photos of girls almost on a weekly basis, mainly through WhatsApp groups composed solely of boys. In the words of two boys who have taken part in the forums:

By The Mannis Thurs 13th Oct 2016 – 23:03

We’ve all received photos, videos ... Of girls, of naked people or, haven’t we? You only have to look at what happened to the Eibar footballers ... We all got that video within a day, we were all talking about it

By MIRTXI Wed 28th Sept 2016 – 23:52

Just an example of what happened in my school ... We all took part, we sent them and we laughed about it. It makes you horny and all that stuff, then what I thought was bad is that just for being a chick, well, we have to go and insult her, when it’s not her fault at all.

By [jaretaldea9](#) Mon 10th Oct 2016 – 16:25

The one at the uni I did hear about ... it got really out of hand. I think this kind of thing is happening more and more, for example at my school a girl sent photos of herself naked to her boyfriend and then he sent them on ... quite honestly the girl suffered quite badly because, typical, isn't it? They called her a fucking whore and a slut, and I suppose that in those cases it's more or less the same

In both the groups and the forums what is notable is the presence and importance of female sexuality and sexualisation. In this way, the sexual videos and photos are elements that are circulating on a daily basis, especially among all-boys' WhatsApp groups, as some of those we consulted tell us:

By [axi10](#) Thurs 13th Oct 2016 – 00:19

Yes, it's very common that we receive this style of videos ... and photos ... When you open the team's WhatsApp group there's always one ...

By [pelilloscarmesi](#) Thurs 29th Sep 2016 – 0:08

We all know similar cases, and in my school it happened to a girl. In the end the poor thing had to change schools and everything, because everyone insulted her in the corridors and stuff, and it was embarrassing, you could see that we were all watching the video ... In this case, they videoed themselves having sex (like the Eibar footballers) and he sent it around. She ended up as the slut, and he wasn't from my school but they said that he went round very proudly showing the video.

Sending and receiving this type of photos becomes a practice of reaffirmation of masculinity, for they show a sexual power which is seen as one of the main elements of this identity (Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2005: 99; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Laughing and talking about these videos online gives way to new scenarios of legitimisation of hegemonic masculinity, exaltation of male sexuality and denigration of femininity, which maintains the asymmetry of power.

5.7. Blame and re-victimisation of the girls who suffer cyber harassment

An excess of female responsibility with regard to their sexuality and their body can be found here. As can be seen in the following extracts, the girls understand that their sexuality is constructed by unequal parameters and they perceive that they may be "constant victims" (Megias & Ballesteros, 2014; De Beauvoir, 1949). This assumption means they take responsibility for avoiding this type of situation, and understand that those who don't "are asking for it" or "have been stupid". The following extracts illustrate this clearly:

By [JGarrigo](#) Wed 12th Oct 2016 – 12:56

I see that sending photos is quite usual ... if you don't want them to send on photos of you, don't send them, and then you avoid loads of problems ... because, it's like, otherwise, the only other explanation is that you're asking for it ...

By Opino como todos de todo Fri 14th Oct 2016 – 00:23

I also think it's more to do with being careful about what you send ... I think that lots of times these things happen because the girl has been really stupid, for trusting in someone who doesn't deserve that trust, we should be more careful and protect ourselves more

Therefore, the teenage girls who are (Cyber) harassed whether by girls or by boys, are punished socially and suffer re-victimisation. Thus, as Lagarde (1990) would say, the body comes into the public domain, an erotic body, and normative processes of the patriarchal system are reproduced which condemn and oppress female sexuality and sexual experiences.

6. Objectivisation of female corporality

As shown in the discussion groups, the female corporality of the girls consulted becomes highly relevant in the definition of their self-concept, at the same time they are portrayed as spaces of male domination. In this sense, it is considered important to draw attention to the sexist assaults suffered by those who took part in the forums. These girls express an experience of expropriation of their bodies, fed by the external gaze and fearful of judgement. In their words both suffering and distress can be detected:

By Hellokitty Sat 1st Oct 2016 - 13:16

Of course we think it's important although we don't want to, because it keeps going round in your head ... and you go crazy thinking about it, in my case the worst insult was against my appearance, and it was a big deal,

By 1327 Sat 30th Apr 2016 - 12:49

On Ask, they send you comments like: show me your tits, or what size bra do you use? Or they want to go out with you ... or worse things ... Especially when they start teasing you about your body, and they start giving you marks out of 10, it's disgusting ... And, yes, you go through a hard time, because in the end you think you are only worth that number and that there's something wrong with your body, and you can't stop looking at yourself and feeling bad about yourself ... It's better to take no notice, but in the end you do

The boys, for their part, confirm the existence of these assaults, of which they have been witness to or actively involved. Some of them indicate that on the international portals which discuss videogames, the girls are insulted more and vilified for their physical appearance, and receive sexist comments. Others tell of having confirmed these facts by pretending to be girls on some international chats, as one young boy says:

By The Mannis Thurs 27th Oct 2016 – 10:33

Let's see, you watch it and you laugh and joke with your mates and sometimes you pretend to be a chick because there are loads of degenerates.

By [axi10](#) Thurs 27th Oct 2016 – 10:40

I've messed with some mates a couple of times but always just for a laugh ... We've also pretended to be chicks because there's always someone who'll talk to you ... and you make fun of him thinking you're a girl and then you show him everyone's faces.

By [ianu](#) Sun 2nd Oct 2016 - 18:38

For example on twitch, which is like a tele but on internet, people re-run the games they play on videogames, the more of us who go and the better you are the more followers you get, but in the case of women, the bigger their breasts are and the more cleavage they show the more people watch it.

In other words, the girls go into this world from an inferior position and with the risk of being insulted and reviled (Gobierno Vasco, 2013; INJUVE, 2011). Their body and sexuality become elements of slavery and oppression (De Beauvoir, 1949). Life *online* and *offline* are worlds that interconnect and exchange structures, mutually reflecting each other, increasing, generating others ...

In short, Internet becomes an unequal and asymmetrical space which sets up hierarchized postures. While heterosexual boys occupy the top of the pyramid –occupying higher positions the more they brag about their virility and sexual power– on the margins we find those stressed femininities (Connell, 1995) wary of their sexuality. Lower down we would find the homosexual masculinities, and on an even lower step down would be “the others”, those who have broken their pact with sexual secrecy. In this way, the position itself is maintained by the rejection of those, both male and female, who are on the lower steps, and especially of those girls who occupy the lowest positions, in order to maintain the gender order.

7. Conclusions

This paper brings together the main results obtained from discussion groups and online forums with adolescents, aimed at analysing the different forms of sexual and sexist abuse carried out on social media and ICTR. Its intention was to study the persistence of the macho and sexist patriarchal structures in the online world, which are increasingly a reflection of the offline world, and discover some of the consequences of cyberviolence towards girls and towards teenagers who do fit into the hetero norms. This is an exploratory piece of research and does not acknowledge generalisations, but the results obtained can offer the following as trends: a greater number of sexual and sexist assaults on social media towards women and a parallelism between forms of macho violence and cyberviolence. In these types of violence can be found power relationships, asymmetrical positioning, hegemonic masculinity and hetero norms from which certain behaviour and violence is legitimised and considered normal.

In order to bring awareness to and dismantle these forms of online assault it is important to carry out an analysis from a gender perspective which addresses and identifies the different types of gender violence and enables an understanding of the rationale and origin of the types of assault, and thereby be able to see the inherent risks as found in this research, which are presented as follows:

- The results of the study take us to an unequal panorama in which the girls consulted feel, and perceive themselves to be, like prisoners and captives of male chauvinism, and the boys encourage these situations as “fun”. The girls enter

this space from a position of inferiority (imposed) and with the risk of being insulted and reviled (Gobierno Vasco, 2013; INJUVE, 2011). The results show the existence of a symbolic-cultural imprisonment of female sexuality; the teenage girls consulted feel they are made slaves of their own sexuality. Responsibility is placed on the individual victim (private area) without realising it is a social problem (public area).

- Certain hetero-directed pornographic content is seen to be normalised, especially by the boys, as auto-didactic tools and as a referent for evaluating and projecting their own sexuality.
- It confirms that free sexuality displayed by girls results in their being depersonalised and commodified as an erotic object (De Beauvoir, 1949; Lagarde, 1990; Megías & Ballesteros, 2014). In the display of sexual relations between a heterosexual couple, the group only penalise and stigmatise the girl via accusations, reproaches and judgements that spread into types of abuse in the offline world. The girls' bodies become territories for domination and the cyberviolence towards them represents an exercise in control and maintenance of the social order of gender. This objectification of female corporality, assessed and treated without regard to their humanity, has an effect on the girls' own appraisal and on their levels of confidence.
- There is cyberviolence towards people who subvert the hetero norms. Other types of cyberharassment have been found which non-normative identities suffer and which require attention and analysis, so it is necessary to talk about macho (cyber) violence, and be able to bring together the different types of assault that women and people who break with the norm both suffer.

The research has allowed us to bring into awareness and analyse how adolescent girls and boys use social media, what their response is to the cases of macho cyberviolence and how they interpret them. We do not want to end this final reflection without mentioning that there is research which recognises that social media is also being used to generate assertive and extremely powerful areas for social transformation and identity (Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1998; Turkle, 1997; Zafra, 2005b). Social media and ICTR should not only be understood as harmful elements for reproducing traditional frameworks, but also as strategic tools for confronting these types of cyberviolence.

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