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# Control, Passion and Possession: Love as a Space of Violence in Adolescence

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**Abstract:** Adolescence is a time of elation and sublime emotions which are also reflected in partner relationships, within a context characterised by materialism and social structures in which gender relations are affected by the domination/subordination model. This paper analyses the affective-sexual relationships of adolescents as a place of violence, power relations, domination and submission. It also studies the importance of social networks in their way of interacting and learning. The methodology used was, on the one hand, the review of bibliographic material regarding romance, partner relationships, gender violence and using of networks, and, on the other hand, the analysis of the results obtained from two studies carried out by the University of Granada, with quantitative and qualitative information on adolescents in Andalusia. The results of this research indicate that relationships are permeated by the idealisation of romantic love and by stereotypes leading to practices of control and possession.

**Keywords:** romantic love; teenagers; violence; power and social networks

## 1. Introduction

Sociological research has long recognised the importance of intimate relationships in young people's lives. Relationship patterns during the adolescent years are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. Social networks, excessive consumerism (even of love relationships themselves) and role models lead young people to live their lives in an egotistical world, seeking perfection, immediacy and intensity. Consequently, their reality is fraught with frustration and lack of commitment.

In this paper the aim is to explore the issue of sexual and romantic relationships in adolescents, the violence in their attitudes and aptitudes towards love and relationships and the use of social networks as a key environment for control and domination, all of these from a gender perspective. Two approaches have been used, one bibliographic and the other first-hand observation., the latter through two studies developed by the University of Granada, in which the authors participated: (1) Trajectories of Success/Dropout in Secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET) from the Analysis of Youth Romance in the Current Digital Andalusian Society (TraSPASA); and (2) The Black Box of School Failure: Analysis of School Success/Failure Trajectories in Compulsory Secondary Education from the Perspective of Adolescent Affective-Sexual Relationships in Today's Digital Andalusian Society (ROMANCE SUCC-ED).

Both studies include a wealth of information on the practices and meanings that family, friendship groups, education, love, sexuality, cultural references and social networks have for adolescent students in Andalusia. The first one took place in Vocational Education and Training, and the second one in Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE).

The objectives of this paper are the following: (1) to know the meaning of affective-sexual relationships for the adolescent population and (2) to know the practices of mistreatment and violence, emphasising those which are produced through social networks. Emphasis has been placed on social networks because they are the main support for relationships in the population at large, and for adolescents in particular.



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To this end, this paper begins with a theoretical framework containing topics related to romantic love, social networks and violence, which will be later developed in the results of this research. In this first section, a review of some authors who have worked on topics related to love, romance, couples, power relations, violence and the importance of the consumer society, as well as data from different statistical sources, is made. An extensive search for data and information on the general context has been performed in order to construct a theoretical framework which accounts for the problem.

This part has been divided into four sections: (1) romantic love culture, a model that leads to unrealistic expectations and contributes to unleashing forms of control and jealousy. (2) Men and women, victims of an idealised social construction, which explores the construction of male and female models and how these models place women in a vulnerable situation. (3) Gender-based violence (symbolic violence vs. structural violence) providing data on violence against women and its relationship with power structures and patriarchy. (4) The digital universe: the social networks, a fundamental space for understanding love and relationships of control in the youngest populations.

Subsequently, the data obtained of the aforementioned studies are analysed. The following has been analysed: (1) how the teenagers feel and the importance they give to the traditional family model; (2) their ideas about love and the couple, through the myths of romantic love, pointing out the differences between girls and boys; (3) sex in relationships and gender differences; (4) the violence that occurs in their relationships, including that which occurs through the Internet. This section concludes by identifying stereotypes, toxic practices and violence. All of this leads to the conclusion that we are facing a social and gender problem, and that young people are trapped in feelings of emotional dependency, selfishness and toxicity, in line with the individualist and materialist model which is conveyed through the cultural material they consume.

In relation to the stated objectives, the following can be concluded that: (1) the adolescent population holds an idealised, romanticised and erroneous concept of love and sex, with gender biases; (2) in their desire to attain the desired object, they often exhibit possessive and jealous behaviours, which primarily affect women, in accordance with imposed structures of gender inequality; and (3) the internet has emerged as a prominent space where these violent practices are consolidated.

Considering the methodological limitations of a subject which apparently is as interesting as it is complex, this work opens up promising avenues for sociological research.

### *1.1. Romantic Love Culture*

Romantic love refers to an idealised model of love in the context of relationships. It is based on the belief that there is someone who complements us, a soul mate, who represents a perfect, unconditional and eternal love. This is 'a collective emotional utopia' (Herrera Gómez 2020), where love, happiness and self-realisation come together in a space of egocentric individualities.

The myths of romantic love are present in different narrative constructions that give rise to a series of beliefs: true love can do anything; love is blind; there is someone preordained for each person somewhere; intense passion in the early days of a relationship should last forever; if you really love, you are always faithful to your partner or jealousy is a proof of love.

Its pervasiveness is cultural in nature (Karandashev 2015). The main source of support for this ideal image comes from cinema, literature, music and other cultural fields, where characters who experience extreme passion are seen, thus encouraging the idea that only this powerful experience is true love. Romantic consumption becomes, therefore, a learning process on how to feel which encourages inequality between men and women (Sánchez-Sicilia and Serra 2018).

The physical and emotional attraction felt by the individual in love is passionate and is associated with inflamed displays of attention and affection, such as gifts, love letters and the exchange of exalted fluids, which could encourage a model based on imagery drawn

from pornography. Indeed, the passion present in romantic love leads people to accept behaviours that they would not otherwise tolerate (Bragado Vicent 2017).

Certainly, romantic love leads to unrealistic expectations but also to disappointment when reality does not match those expectations (Yela 2003).

In the pursuit of this egocentric ideal, anything is allowed. Control and jealousy become consensual behaviours, suggesting that the partner really feels love, and where suffering is also an element of the game.

The acceptance of possessive or jealous behaviours is worrying. Jealousy is seen as natural, even as something good, 'healthy'. This is a prominent issue, which is part of inherited beliefs. In traditional Spanish sayings one can find examples of this: 'anger of lovers, doubled love', 'love and jealousy, twin brothers' and 'he who has no jealousy, has no true love'. There is, therefore, a way of approaching relationships which reflects that, without this jealousy, there is no love or interest in your partner. This prejudice leaves the door open to practices of control and violence.

### *1.2. Men and Women, Victims of an Idealised Social Construction*

While this idea of romantic love, in isolation, does not explain gender-based violence, the stereotypes assigned to each gender, within a binary model, lead to women's greater exposure to gender-based violence.

The influence that culture has on the construction of identities is certainly outstanding. The social imaginary spreads a representation in which women are hypersexualised—in the sense of sexual objects—from a very young age and are portrayed as passionate and dependent. Meanwhile, men are hypersexualised—in the sense of subjects who desire—also from a very young age and are depicted as rational and independent.

Romantic love remains an integral part of the development of teenage girls and boys. Girls place a greater importance on self-giving and the need to rebuild after a break-up, while boys focus more on the pleasurable as well as the painful aspects of the experience and need recognition from the other (Leal 2007, pp. 65–66).

In this way, women invest more energy in their love life and are able to tolerate situations of intimate violence (De Miguel 2015). They place romantic relationships at the core of their social life (Gilmartin 2005, 2006); they dream of love and the idea of protection and live in an emotional dependence, in contrast to masculinities (Gilmartin 2007). Male dependence manifests itself in physical terms, based on the fallacy of the 'hypersexualised' male (Aragón García 2018).

Certainly, the advance of feminism is challenging traditional gender roles (Gabarró Berbegal 2010; Díaz-Aguado 2002) and the false notions of romantic love (Ferrer et al. 2010; Chóliz Montañés and Iñiguez 2002; Collins 2003; Collins et al. 2009). However, we are still stuck in an asymmetrical model of affective–sexual relationships.

### *1.3. Gender-Based Violence (Symbolic Violence vs. Structural Violence)*

Gender-based violence is structural in nature and is one of the major problems facing all societies. In fact, violence against women is one of the leading causes of death among women aged 15–44 worldwide. The intimate partner context is the environment with the higher incidence, as more than one third of all homicides of women are committed by their intimate partners (UNODC 2019). The tragedy starts at a very young age, so that almost one in four women aged between 15 and 19 who have ever been in a relationship have been victims of violent behaviour by an intimate partner (OMS 2021).

But beyond these data, there are more subtle forms of violence. These are forms which are accepted and not always recognised by the subjects who suffer it. Bourdieu refers to this acceptance as symbolic violence, which is 'a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling' (Bourdieu 2001, pp. 1–2). He describes forms in which there is not physical force,

but where the dominant individual imposes cognitive categories that are accepted by the victim, who is unaware of the power relations that the other conceals.

An example of symbolic violence is the acceptance of sexual submission and the objectification of female bodies. Girls are displaying eroticised and sexualised behaviours at an increasingly younger age ([The Family Watch 2018](#)); clothes and make-up and ways of being and looking (gestures and poses) are imposed by the fashion industry and the media, especially on the Internet, the favourite medium of teenagers. They post highly erotic visual content on social networks, and their tools of seduction and acquiescence also move along these lines, accepting their partners' requests.

Indeed, we are dealing with power structures. [Kemper \(2006\)](#) points out the importance of power and status in social relations and more specifically in love relationships. In a Weberian sense, love implies the ability to impose one's will, even against the interests of the beloved, who is not always aware of this and, therefore, does not always resist. For [Foucault \(1988\)](#), exercising power means 'conduct of conducts', that is, the possibility of extending or restricting the field of action of others, whom Foucault considers to be individuals capable of acting and, above all, capable of responding. In this sense, it can be stated that we are not dealing with repressive forms such as those that might come from the State, but that they affect both those who exercise dominion and those who are dominated.

There is no doubt that power relations in the context of couples are based on an asymmetrical game, mediated by a differentiated socialisation which responds to the domination/subordination dynamics stemming from patriarchal society. Romantic love and gender violence constitute a binomial that feeds back on each other. This has been documented in various studies from different disciplines ([Bosch et al. 2013](#); [González and Santana 2001](#); [Blanco Ruiz 2014](#); [Bonilla Algovia et al. 2017](#)).

#### 1.4. *The Digital Universe: The Social Networks*

The forms of violence that can be found in relationships pervade different physical and virtual spaces; although, in tune with the new times, the virtual space is taking on an increasingly relevant role. Indeed, the widespread use of the Internet and mobile devices has changed the way people relate to each other and facilitates new forms of violence.

Networks are occupying the social space of the population, especially the younger population. According to data provided by the [INE \(2022\)](#), 92.6% of the Spanish population between 16 and 24 years old are social network users. It is a symbolic space of relationships where the different positions of the actors are defined ([Bourdieu 1988](#)). Younger people build their differential value through the consumption of cultural material based on certain symbols, signs, ideas and values which identify them.

The term cultural material is embedded in what we know as mass culture, where social networks are its most evolved link. Mass culture is a production created by industry and aimed at the market. Its objectives are not so much cultural as they are economic, commercial, political or ideological. They are based on passive entertainment and social prestige and lead to a form of submission to the established order ([Adorno and Horkheimer 1998](#)).

Idealised experiences are consumed in social networks. Among others, love is internalised as the consumption of an object which is acquired to feed sublime sensations. Happiness in the consumer model manifests itself in the constant yearning to wish and possess immediately, but without ties, which allows the experience to be repeated without deception ([Bauman 1999](#)).

A contradiction arises. On one hand, there is an expectation of freedom and the desire for continuous change; on the other, the submission of the other according to the dictates of monogamous partnership and true love.

The virtual world makes things easier in this respect. It produces the appearance of proximity while helping to maintain distances. In 'liquid love', [Bauman \(2006\)](#) shows the wish and need to create bonds, but notes that these bonds are easy to break, are weak, because of the fear of being rejected and losing the freedom to repeat the experience.

The idea of loving goes hand in hand with pleasure, with sex. Pornography has a privileged place in the learning of sexuality, and the networks are its main support. Anyone can create, upload and share pornographic content (Klaassen and Peter 2015).

But pornography and gender-based violence go together. Despite the ambiguity in categorising what constitutes violent content and what does not, studies such as Bridges et al. (2010) indicate high levels of aggression in pornography, both verbal and physical. In 88.2% of the scenes analysed, there was some kind of physical aggression (whipping, gagging and slapping, mainly), while 48.7% of the scenes contained verbal aggression. The aggressors were usually men, and the victims were mostly women, who, moreover, seemed to enjoy it.

The huge supply of content on love and sexuality, as well as the ease of access to any of these sites, is a concern which is difficult to solve. In a digital world, everyone is connected through their own device, and adult control is often out of reach. Data show that 86.4% of the population aged 15–19 have access to a smartphone (Gómez Miguel and Gómez 2022). Minors also enjoy an increasing availability of mobile phones; in fact, possession of mobile computers has reached 70.6%, seven points higher than a decade ago (INE data from 2022). In the case of Andalusia, availability is even higher, reaching 74.1%.

In this new context, the Internet and social networks are the tools in which violence takes its new shape. Among the most common formulas for control and violence against partners through social networks and the Internet, Pantallas amigas (2020) lists the following:

- Stalking via mobile phone;
- Spying on the partner's mobile phone;
- Monitoring what they do on social media;
- Censoring their relationships and the audio–visual material they upload;
- Demanding proofs of their location through geolocation tracker;
- Forcing them to send intimate pictures;
- Demanding personal passwords;
- Forcing to show a chat with another person;
- Show anger at not always having an immediate online response.

Wishing to contribute to an issue which seems to us to be of great transcendence, the following are the findings obtained in the research carried out in the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This topic has been approached through different methodological tools drawn from the social sciences.

The empirical section uses the database from the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects, which aimed to analyse the relationship between school culture and the culture of romance in adolescence. From this database, the relevant variables have been selected for this study.

For the analysis of the data, we relied on methodological pluralism. The main benefit of the combined use of methodologies is an increase in the validity of the results, while reducing the biases and limitations of each method (Blaikie 1991; Vasilachis de Gialdino 1992). The strategy followed was triangulation, which involves the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to address the same aspect of reality. Although each tool is applied independently, there is a convergence in the results.

The quantitative section was based on a 69-item questionnaire carried out on 963 boys and girls between the ages of 13 and 20 (see Table 1) who are students in CSE and VET at different secondary schools in Andalusia. The full database has the responses of 1052 participants, but students above the age of 20 were excluded. The questionnaires were conducted in the classrooms of the schools, in an online format, under the supervision of one researcher per group.

**Table 1.** Distribution of respondents by age and sex.

Age	Women	Men	Others	Total	%Women	%Men	%Others	%Total
13	23	21	0	44	4.3	5.0	0.0	4.6
14	37	43	1	81	7.0	10.2	9.1	8.4
15	111	90	2	203	21.0	21.3	18.2	21.1
16	153	128	4	285	28.9	30.3	36.4	29.6
17	114	89	3	206	21.6	21.0	27.3	21.4
18	46	34	0	80	8.7	8.0	0.0	8.3
19	27	11	0	38	5.1	2.6	0.0	3.9
20	18	7	1	26	3.4	1.7	9.1	2.7
Total	529	423	11	963	100	100	100	100

Distribution of respondents by age and sex (total and percentage). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

Regarding the variables used in the analysis, those that provide information on the topic of this article—myths of romantic love, love and relationships, sexuality and social networks—have been extracted. Variables related to future aspirations, education and school and family have been excluded.

The model used in most of the questions has been the Likert scale. In the case of some questions about sexuality, respondents had to choose one of the possible answers.

To analyse the results, the total data were dumped into an Excel and SPSS spreadsheet. Work was accomplished using SPSS, and dynamic tables in Excel were used. A descriptive analysis has been carried out, with the aim of collecting and ordering the information by means of graphs and extracting the most representative characteristics of each set of data. This information has been putting them in relation with the generated discourses.

The qualitative section used ethnographic techniques and in-depth interviews with about 400 people aged between 12 and 25, belonging to the same schools. Although, only the discourses of the younger population were taken into account. Interviews were held individually, in order to avoid any contamination of responses. Participants and their families gave informed consent and authorised their registration. For confidentiality, the original names were not shown in the transcripts. Interviews lasted approximately forty minutes and were transcribed and subsequently coded.

The interviews were analysed using the NVIVO application, selecting questions and key words (love, sex, toxic, jealousy, control. . .) and analysing the discourse.

From the total sample, 30 verbatim excerpts from 25 different individuals were used (see Table 2). The selected excerpts are sufficient to support a deeper understanding of the quantitative data.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the selected individuals.

Interview	Sex	Type of Education	Place of Residence	Excerpts
S1	Woman	CSE	Almería	2
S2	Man	CSE	Almería	2
S3	Woman	CSE	Almería	1
S4	Woman	CSE	Jaén	1
S5	Man	CSE	Jaén	1
S6	Man	VET	Almería	1
S7	Woman	VET	Almería	2
S8	Woman	VET	Almería	2

Table 2. Cont.

Interview	Sex	Type of Education	Place of Residence	Excerpts
S9	Woman	VET	Almería	2
S10	Woman	CSE	Granada	1
S11	Man	CSE	Almería	1
S12	Woman	CSE	Cádiz	1
S13	Woman	CSE	Córdoba	1
S14	Woman	CSE	Jaén	1
S15	Woman	CSE	Jaén	1
S16	Man	VET	Granada	1
S17	Woman	CSE	Córdoba	1
S18	Woman	CSE	Málaga	1
S19	Woman	CSE	Granada	1
S20	Woman	VET	Jaén	1
S21	Woman	CSE	Granada	1
S22	Woman	CSE	Málaga	1
S23	Woman	VET	Granada	1
S24	Woman	VET	Granada	1
S25	Woman	VET	Cádiz	1

VET: Vocational Education and Training. CSE: Compulsory Secondary Education. Source: created by the authors.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This section shows the results obtained from the analysis of the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

The results are presented in four areas: (1) feelings they harbour; (2) ideas about love and partners; (3) sexuality, which includes information on the use and perception of pornography and (4) behaviours, which reflect covert attitudes of violence among partners and specific violence through social networks.

The results obtained in the interview and the survey are combined. In the case of the survey, a scale of 1 to 5 is used most of the time, with 1 being 'strongly disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'neither agree nor disagree', 4 'agree' and 5 'strongly agree'. In the group analysed, there were students who did not identify themselves as either male or female ('Other'); however, as this was a small number, they were not taken into consideration when calculating the percentages differentiated by gender. The blank answers or those in the 'Don't know/No answer' section were also not taken into account.

#### 3.1. Feelings They Harbour

It would be useful to begin by emphasising the feeling of loneliness and helplessness that these teenagers express. They want to be loved, listened to and cared for. On the other hand, in general, they say they feel happy; the average happiness measured between 0 and 10 is 7.

Family is central to their lives. In the interviews, the majority expect to start a family in the future, and in the survey, they attach a huge importance to it, above peers or having a partner; although, family and partner are related.

'For me, in the future, I would like to have a stable partner, with my children, my own house, I don't know, very basic Spanish style, but yes.' (S1, Woman)

### 3.2. Ideas About Love and Partners

They see in the romantic partnership a way of receiving the affection they need and idealise a model of a partner who is exclusive, lured by the fallacy of romantic love. They wish to find that special person who brings them happiness.

‘... I have been very much in love, and to me love seems ... I’m super detail-oriented, I love things like that, like passionate. I enjoy love films and I like the concept of love ... they portray it very beautifully ... in the films and all that stuff ...’ (S2, Man)

‘... when I find my life’s love.’ (S3, Woman)

They conceive love as something big, an overwhelming emotional state.

‘I think falling in love is a very big thing, because to fall in love with someone is to realise that you might want to spend your whole life with them.’ (S4, Woman)

‘It is not that you like a person, but that, when you are with that person, you say “it’s like electricity”, with a positive pole, with a negative pole, a connection.’ (S5, Man)

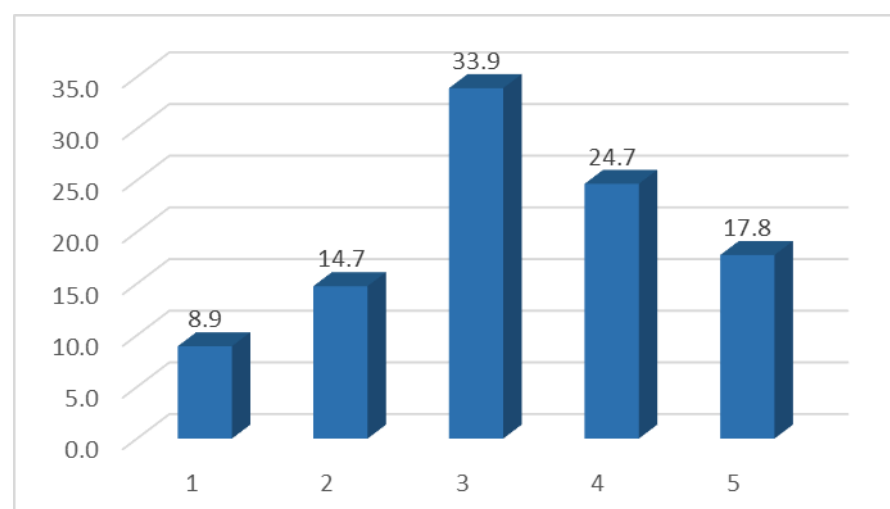
At the same time, in line with stereotypes, they identify love with pain. Lovelessness is experienced as a tragedy.

‘What I felt the most, above all, was pain, because love hurts a lot.’ (S6, Man)

‘When you see that you can’t be with that person, because you broke up or whatever, it’s very bad. I almost thought about going to a psychologist. It was really bad.’ (S1, Woman)

The surveys also reflect this view of love. When asked the question ‘How much do you agree with the following statements?’, with 1 strongly disagreeing and 5 strongly agreeing, respondents answered in the direction of the false notions constructed.

Opinions regarding the importance of love as an antidote in the face of problems are rather favourable (Figure 1). More people rated it 4 and 5 than those who gave it the minimum score of 1 and 2. Men were more likely to agree, 48%, compared to 38% of women.

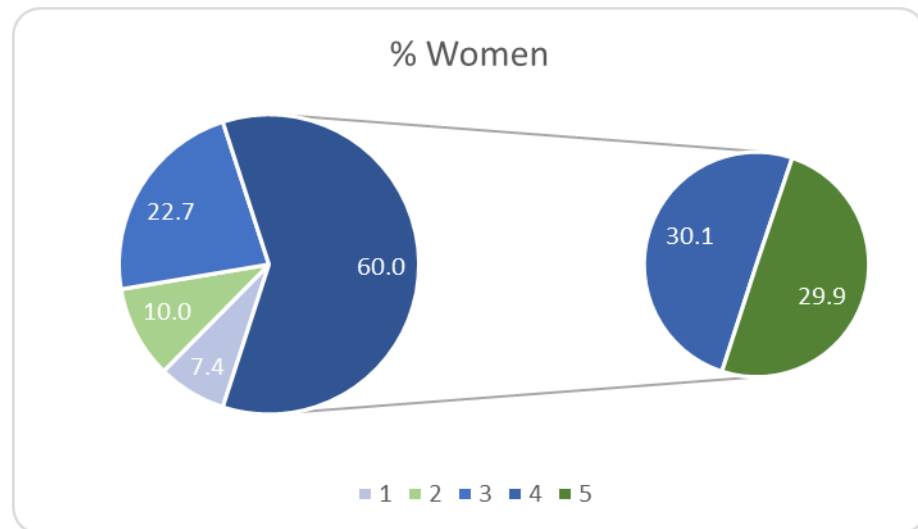


**Figure 1.** Percentage of respondents by degree of agreement with the statement ‘True love can do anything’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

Also, love is irrational, since 51% consider love to be blind (value 4 + 5). A large number of girls think that love is blind, 60% (Figure 2), compared to 39% of boys. We can

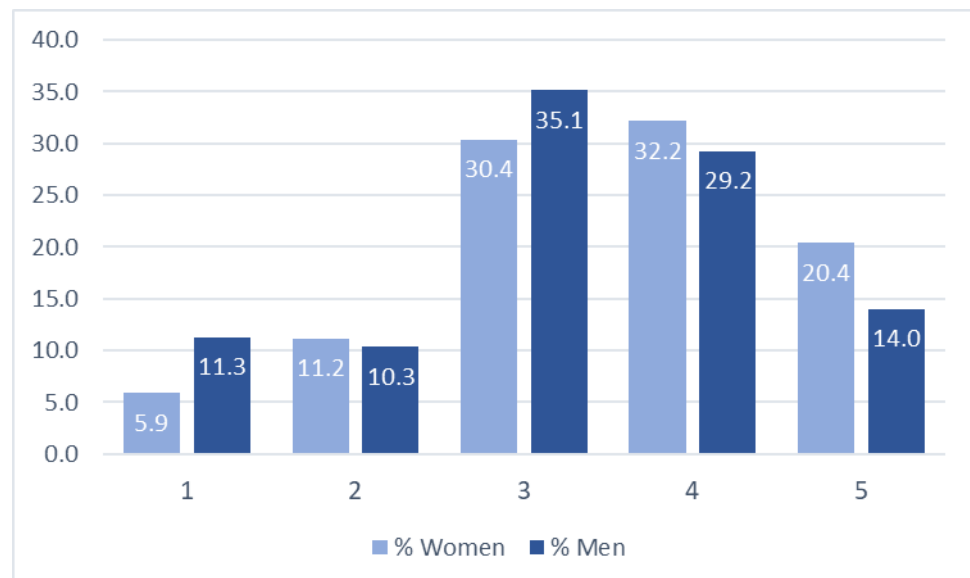


perceive in this blindness that anyone is capable of anything for love, because they do not perceive what is happening, which makes them a fragile individual, easily susceptible to harmful practices without acknowledging them as such.



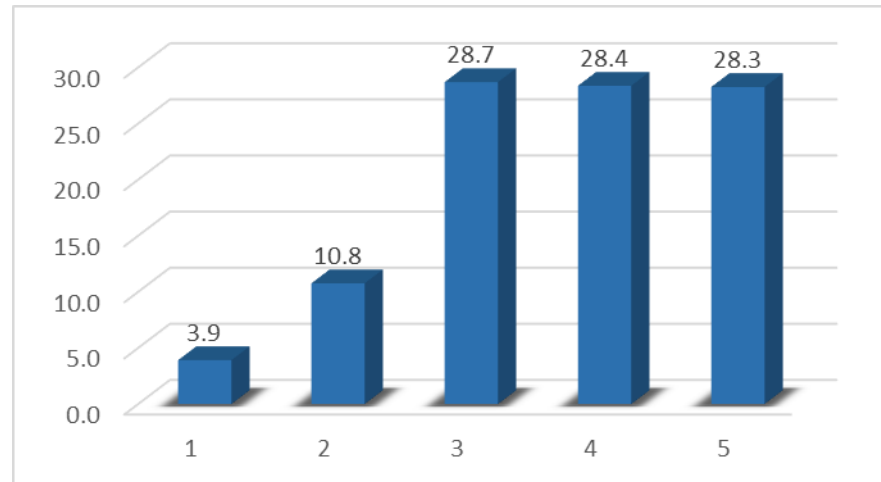
**Figure 2.** Percentage of respondents by degree of agreement with the statement ‘Love is blind’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). On the right values 4 (blue) and 5 (green). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

Regarding the fallacy of the soul mate, there is a high degree of agreement (Figure 3). The idea that there is someone out there waiting is prevalent, with 31% rating it 4 and 17.5% rating it 5. Again, the degree of agreement is higher for women, with more than 50% of respondents agreeing with a rating of 4 or higher.



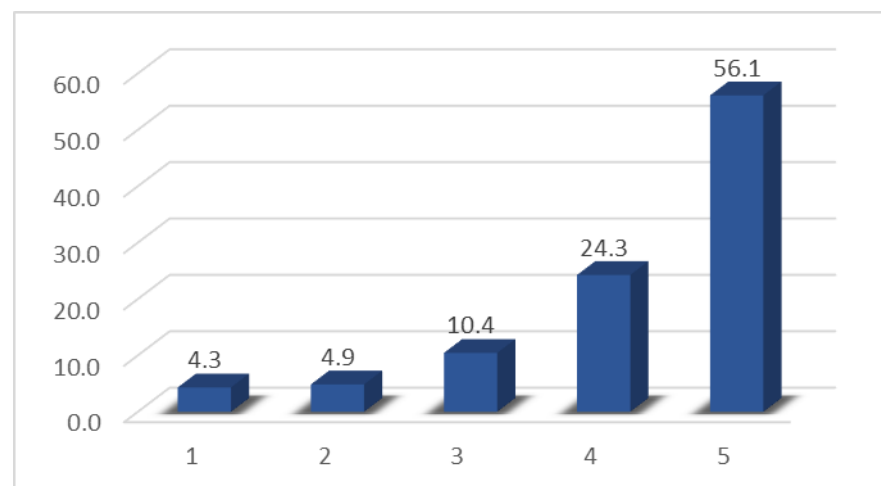
**Figure 3.** Percentage of respondents (by gender) depending on the degree of agreement with the statement ‘There is someone preordained for each person somewhere’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Women (light blue) and men (dark blue). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

Passion is also perceived as something desirable (Figure 4). The overwhelming sensations, characteristic of the early stage of falling in love, a consequence of the exploding hormones which come into play (oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine. . .), represent the ideal in a relationship.



**Figure 4.** Percentage of respondents by degree of agreement with the statement ‘Intense passion in the early days of a relationship should last forever’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

But the most important thing, undoubtedly, is fidelity, not so much loyalty as the issue of cheating. Value 5 is the majority, 56.1% (Figure 5). By gender, women outnumbered men: 60% girls vs. 51% boys consider that true love involves fidelity.



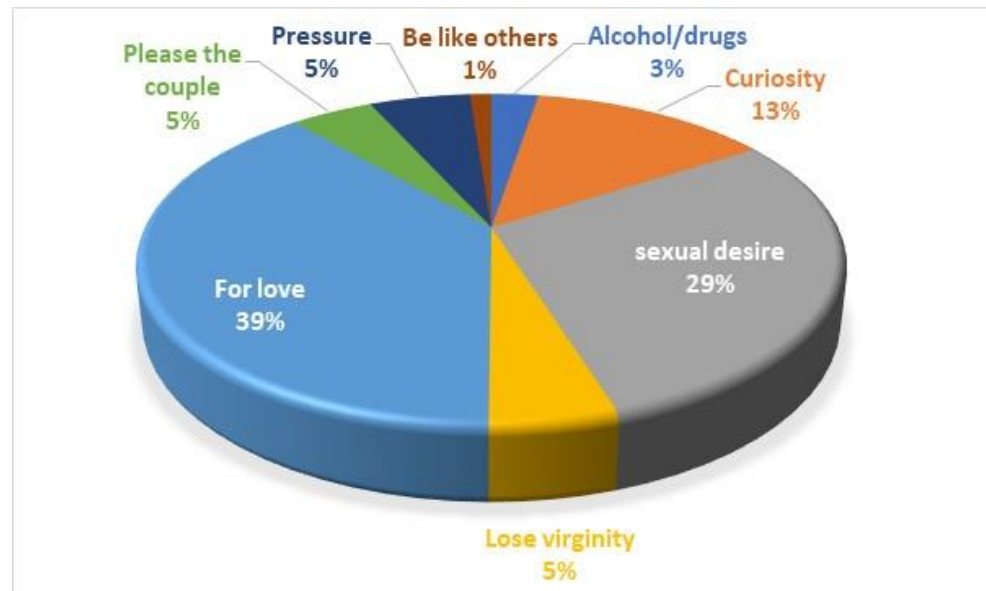
**Figure 5.** Percentage of respondents by degree of agreement with the statement ‘If you really love, you are always faithful to your partner’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

### 3.3. Sexuality

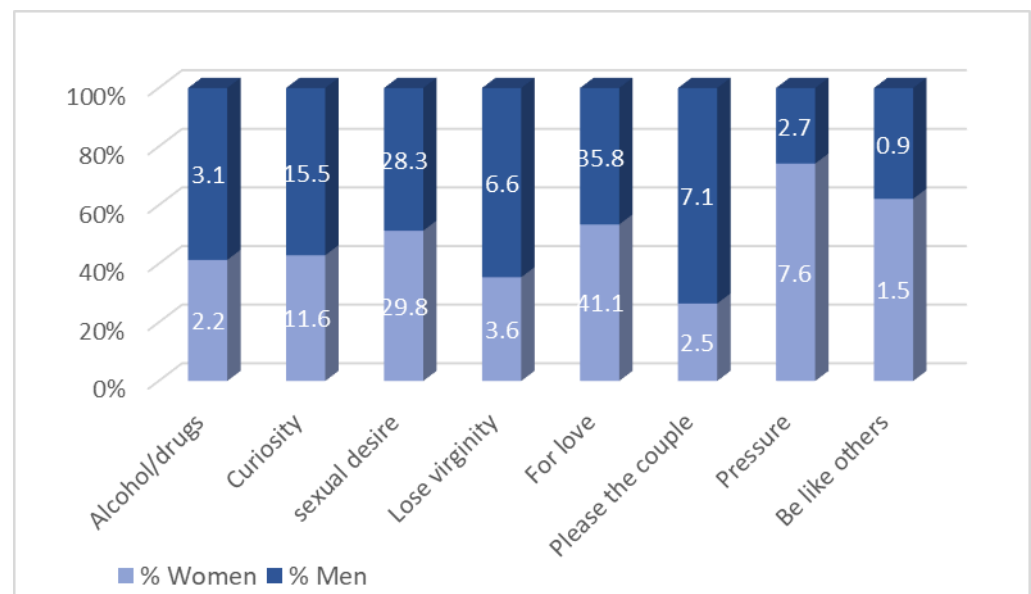
Sex is a key aspect in relationships. The main reasons given in surveys for the first time they had sex are the following: love or sexual desire (Figure 6).

However, even when the weights of other variables are lower, there are differences to be considered in a gender analysis such as the one proposed here. Thus, the issue of pressure to have sex is a reason reported to a greater extent by girls, while the importance

of losing one’s virginity or pleasing one’s partner is a reason reported to a greater extent by boys (Figure 7). This confirms the idea that boys attach more importance to external recognition, to the idea that they are active and that women enjoy their qualities. In the interviews, the boys used the term ‘boquerón’ (anchovy) to refer to boys who have never even kissed.

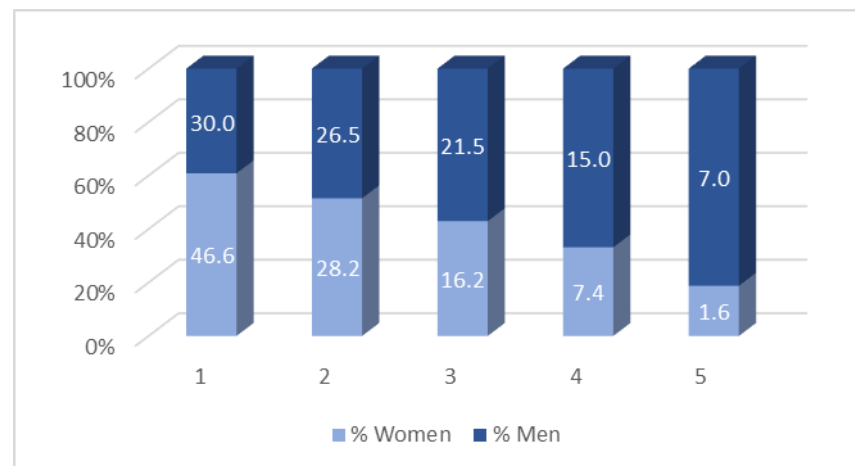


**Figure 6.** Distribution of reasons for first sexual intercourse, according to respondents. Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.



**Figure 7.** Percentage of respondents, by gender, according to the reason they had their first sexual intercourse. Women (light blue) and men (dark blue). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

Also interesting is the fact that 22% of boys find it difficult to stop when they are aroused (value 4 + 5). It can be seen that the percentage reverses for women and men as the degree of agreement with the statement increases (Figure 8), pointing to the greater hypersexualisation attributed to men as subjects of desire.



**Figure 8.** Percentage of respondents, by gender, according to the degree of agreement with the statement ‘When I am very sexually aroused, it is very difficult for me to stop, even if the other person tells me to stop’. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Women (light blue) and men (dark blue). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

The interviews elaborate further on this issue, which becomes a matter of concern, as the culture of harassment and rape by partners is evident in the relationships of many of these girls.

‘... because I was very much in love with that person, but that person was not in love with me. And for me, whatever he did was right. I mean, even though I knew it was wrong, for me everything he did was right, and I forgave him everything, and allowed him to do whatever he wanted with me, because I was so in love... And there were many things that I felt uncomfortable and I said “I don’t want to do that”. But he insisted... he insisted on that...’ (S7, Woman)

‘I didn’t feel like doing anything, let alone that... it made me very uncomfortable, because he wanted to... he didn’t force me, but he tried. He would try to touch me and I would say no, and when I said no, and I had already said no a thousand times after groping me, he would get angry.’ (S23, Woman)

‘Well, I’ve been cheated on a lot, but I’ve never felt raped, for example. I’ve felt bad because he touched me when I didn’t want him to, or because he put his hand on my leg, or locked me up because he wanted to fuck me... That’s true. But feeling raped, that I have been forced, no.’ (E24, Woman)

‘There are differences depending on the case... A friend of mine had a very bad time, because she met a guy at a party, she went to do him and the guy beat her up... He was high. And she had a terrible time. She has the feeling of having been raped.’ (S8, Woman)

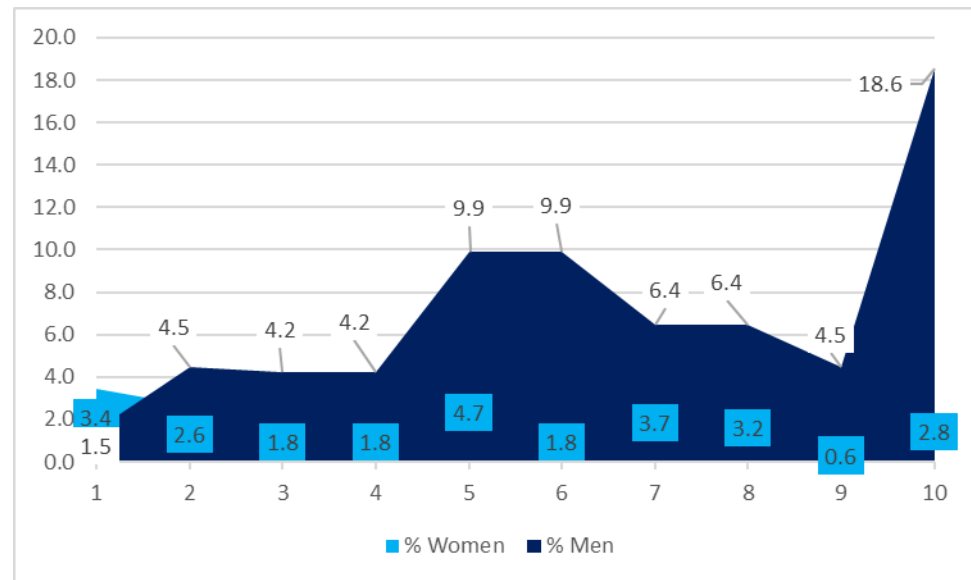
‘In the first intercourse I had... I didn’t enjoy it. I said: “Why do people like to do this?” I didn’t understand it; I was a child.’ (S9, Woman)

Pornography is a part of their sexual education. Most of the people interviewed said that they first accessed pornographic content when they were very young, between ten and fourteen years old. They consider pornography to be realistic and egalitarian.

‘Yes, because it is, after all, a sexual act. A thing that is super similar because you are doing it, whether you do it or someone else does it...’ (S2, Man)

The Internet is the main platform which provides them with this kind of content. Through this means, they learn behaviours that they then put into practice. In this case, there is a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all and 10 means a lot. The percentage

of boys who have used pornography to learn about sexuality is remarkable. Some 46% indicate a value equal to or higher than 6, compared to 12% of girls (Figure 9), who mark zero in 73% of the cases. In other words, girls have not learned anything from pornography, which again leads us to the hypersexualisation of boys.



**Figure 9.** Percentage of respondents, by gender, according to the degree of agreement with the statement ‘What you know about sex, have you learned from porn?’ Values from 1 to 10 (from not at all to very much). Women (light blue) and men (dark blue). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

In this regard, some girls show their disgust at the way they have been used in porn mode during their sexual relationships.

‘I had a hard time... I could see he was grabbing me by the throat and it’s like... No, I don’t like it, you know? No!’ (S7, Woman)

### 3.4. Behaviours in the Context of Partners

Violence is a naturalised part of relationships. The beliefs that accompany romanticised love constitute ‘fallacies’ which feed oppression when it comes to understanding relationships, as in the case of jealousy.

In the surveys, more than 20% of the total respondents say they agree or strongly agree with the idea that jealousy is a proof of love. This is in line with the importance we saw they attached to fidelity. The acceptance of jealousy as a proof is higher for boys, almost 30% (Figure 10).

Jealousy triggers possessive, controlling and manipulative attitudes. The interviews show that violence is present in many of the relationships reported. Vulnerability is mainly found on the women’s side. They suffer violence in sexual terms, but also when it comes to seeing or talking to other people or because of the way they dress.

‘When I... I... started dating my first boyfriend, we had arguments every day because of his jealousy, I couldn’t get close to other boys, it wasn’t normal. I couldn’t have male friends. Sometimes he even forbade me to go out with my own female friends because he said I was doing things I shouldn’t do.’ (S10, Woman)

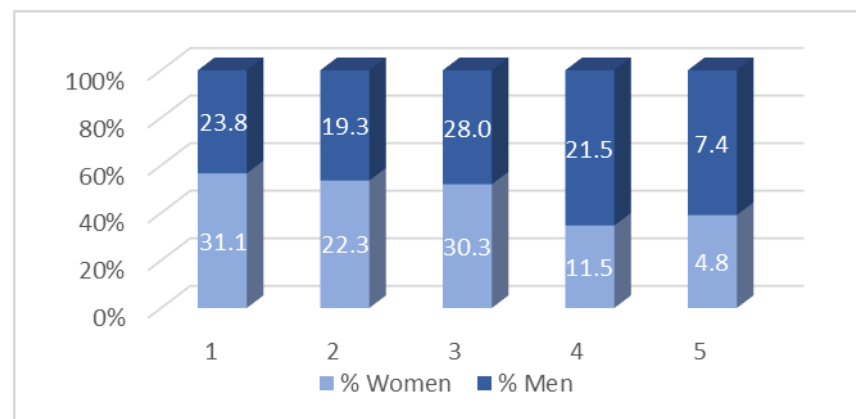
‘... now I am a bit more affected by the way she dresses. Because a person, for example, this last one, is a person who has their own weapons, so to speak. So whether she dresses in one way or another may bother me more or less. But well, now... in the end, we have changed everything, and she changes her clothes a lot of times, always...’ (S11, Man)

'I might wear a dress, and he'd say, "You're making my friends to think about you!"' (S25, Woman)

'He is very jealous, too jealous. He doesn't let me be, for example, next to other boys. He won't let me go to, for example, discos. He won't let me go to a party. He won't let me go to a birthday party if there are boys. . . that sort of things.' (S12, Woman)

'He was very toxic and I couldn't hang out with my friends. . . But then he's changed. (. . .) He's not so toxic anymore. . . for example, he calls me just once when I'm with my friends, but he says "What are you doing?" . . . I don't know what. . . because he's bored. . . But that's it, he's not. . . he's changed.' (S13, Woman)

'A toxic relationship, jealousy, trying to manipulate me and so on. And I realised it a month after I'd been with him and I said "Enough is enough" and I've never spoken to him again. . . That's normal, isn't it? But for him to tell you all the time "Don't hang out with boys", "Only with people I know", like that . . . toxic. . . Come on! He won't let you meet boys, only girls.' (S14, Woman)



**Figure 10.** Percentage of respondents, by sex, according to the degree of agreement with the statement 'Jealousy is a proof of love'. Values from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Women (light blue) and men (dark blue). Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

The qualification of jealousy as good and bad jealousy, thus normalising some kind of control, is noteworthy. Moreover, some of the girls wanted their partners to be jealous.

'Let's see, I want that they're nice people, that they're not very jealous. . . I mean, jealousy is sometimes good, but not very toxic, not "You can't talk to this person", "You can't do this", "You can't do that", "You have to be with me all the time" . . . Not that.' (S15, Woman)

'Well, I'm jealous, but I'm jealous in a healthy way.' (S16, Man)

'Their personality is that. . . well, that they are good to me, that they are warm and loving, I also like that they are jealous.' (S17, Woman)

'We were both jealous, yes.' (S8, Woman)

The following interviewee is noteworthy. She currently enjoys a relationship without jealousy and her speech shows how she has internalised the idea that love and jealousy go together, that love without jealousy is not natural, and it is difficult to get rid of this idea.

'I'm not used to being in a relationship. At times, I ask myself: "Why doesn't he fight for me? Why not?" . . . Those things that, later, you stop to think about and say, "But this is normal! What is not normal is what I think".' (S9, Woman)

In the surveys, more than 40% admit to using social networks to see what the person they like, or their partner, is doing. Women are more likely to monitor their partners' activities on social networks (Table 3).

**Table 3.** You use the networks to see what your likes or partners are doing (%).

	% Women	% Men	% Total
No	54.3	59.6	56.6
Yes	45.7	40.4	43.4
Total	100	100	100

Percentage of respondents, by gender and total, according to whether or not they use social networks to find out what their partner is doing. Source: created by the authors based on data from the survey carried out for the TraSPASA and ROMANCE SUCC-ED projects.

The work carried out by Blanco Ruiz (2014) indicates that the main reason leading the study population (young people aged 13 to 18) to exert control over their partner's online life is jealousy.

From the discourses they offer in the interviews, we can see the forms of violence through social networks. Although the control–spying behaviour is greater among girls, domination is mainly among boys. The aforementioned idea of power is apparent in the discourses. The forms of submission have, in general, a female profile. They provide their passwords and accounts, and they do it out of love.

'He controlled absolutely everything in my life. "Where you go, what you do, send me a picture of who you are with, let me see your WhatsApp conversations, your Instagram conversations, give me your password". (...) We lasted nine months. (...) Well, even so, I was... I don't know... I was fine. (...) My mother was the one who saved me from that, to be honest. Otherwise, he would still be telling me that he's going to beat me up.' (S19, Woman)

'Once, I put... because I didn't have a mobile phone until recently... I put my account on his mobile and he got into my account and he left me five female friends, I counted them, and he had taken away all my male followers from my account, he had deleted the photos and everything.' (S20, Woman)

'He was super, super, super possessive. He had all my Instagram accounts. I would upload a post and... "I've deleted it because I don't like it". In other words, he would go into my account and delete the post I had just uploaded because he didn't like it!' (S18, Woman)

'I literally couldn't have male friends, not even my cousins. I... I said I was going to a communion with my cousins, I couldn't. I had to stay away. I couldn't wear a skirt; I couldn't wear a... a dress. He was super toxic; he wouldn't let me go out. He took me off Instagram.' (S22, Woman)

'... but it doesn't bother me, because I have nothing to hide. I don't mind giving him my mobile phone. Another thing is if he takes it out of my hands like that, then I feel annoyed.' (S21, Woman)

#### 4. Conclusions

Love as a construct in the consumer society involves the idea of happiness, pleasure, immediacy and exclusivity. Influenced by cultural references, especially those stemming from the virtual sphere, teenagers want to live sublime experiences, and relationships do not escape this purpose. Furthermore, taking into account the disaffection they feel, they wish to receive affection and love. The results show that they harbour feelings of loneliness and a desire for affection. There is a longing for love and attention, as well as for the family to value them significantly.

The degree of agreement with the different fallacies of romantic love is noteworthy. Love is perceived as a transcendent emotional state and is related to passion and emotional

intensity. At the same time, a connection between love and pain can be identified, reflecting a view of love in terms of tragedy. Love, passion and pain seem to be taken from a soap opera. It is girls who are more prone to romanticised love. With the exception of the fallacy of 'love can do anything', they are the ones who show the highest degree of agreement. This places them in a situation of vulnerability in the power relations involved in any social relationship.

The idea of romantic love guarantees them attention and high feelings. However, this idealisation can lead to unrealistic expectations about relationships and may contribute to their tolerance of pain and violence, as it has been revealed in this paper.

Sex is conceived as an integral part of affective relationships, and emotional reasons and desire are highlighted as motivations for having sex; although, the interviews also point to situations of domination by males. Pornography plays a relevant role in their sexual education and is accessed from an early age. Early exposure to pornography and their perception of it as realistic and egalitarian may influence adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Indeed, violent behaviour can be observed, as well as a normalisation of such violence, especially in the form of jealousy. Jealousy is seen as a proof of love. In addition, forms of control and manipulation in relationships are detected.

Finally, it would be useful to highlight the importance of the Internet and social networks. The time spent on the Internet on mobile phones is really high. They live in a virtual world and use the mobile device, both girls and boys, as a privileged support to exercise control and surveillance actions.

In short, this research reflects the need to address the culture of machismo and promote relationships based on respect and gender equality. The way forward is to promote comprehensive sexual education which encourages critical thinking and sexual responsibility through education and information. It is crucial to recognise that relationships can be based on other aspects, such as trust, communication and mutual respect, as well as the fact that we do not need anyone in order to be a whole person.

Role models of independent and confident women are necessary, but not in a masculinised sense, not in the sense of generalising attitudes and skills of domination. In addition, male role models who move away from hegemonic masculinities are also necessary. The problem is that these references are provided by the market through networks and the Internet, where everything is posturing, where everything is fiction and where the behaviours and interests of influential figures reproduce traditional gender stereotypes.

Finally, we would like to point out one of the weaknesses that we found and that would be enriching for further research. It is about investigating more in depth about the violence suffered in the case of boys. Could it be that boys do not like to verbalise these things? Could it be that they do not identify some practices as violence? Could it be that they are ashamed of having been preyed upon by women? We encourage the continuation of this line of research towards the development of more targeted work.

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