

# Urban youth and risk. The case of the young inhabitants of the City of Buenos Aires (A diachronic analysis)

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## Abstract

This research paper looks into the interrelations within the contextual changes taken place during the last decades in the Western world, in Latin America and specifically in Argentina and the city of Buenos Aires and focuses on the tensions resulting from the processes towards the constitution of juvenile identities.

Transformations in the concepts of youth and the risk in the Western metropolis will be analysed and the differences explored between the relative foreseeability granted to the biographies by their links to institutions in salaried societies and the situation urban youngsters currently face in the so called risk societies in which, as never before, they are driven to individualize.

Risk among young inhabitants in the city of Buenos Aires is studied through time, focusing on their ideas, attitudes and behavior under tension when measured against the society where they live.

**Key terms:** Youth, Risk, City, Buenos Aires

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## Introduction

We seek to analyze the interrelations between the contextual changes taken place in the last few decades in the western world and specifically in Buenos Aires, Argentina and the tensions this has unleashed in the constitutive processes of the young subjectivities.

We carry out a dynamic and plural conceptualization regarding youths by placing specific emphasis on their diverse components, especially those of a socio-cultural nature. It is precisely the historical conditions, the socio-economic situation and the cultural and gender

guidelines which shed light into the complexity that calls for a thorough analysis of youth.

We focus on middle-class youngsters which entails admitting a segmentation of the young population when developing the analysis both from the theoretical point of view as from the empirical. The issue of risk, as personal behavior but also from the social standpoint, is studied based on the comparison between two historical instances: one that refers to salaried societies in which institutions granted their subjects a relative foreseeability and one which relates to current societies called risk societies in which individualism and uncertainty reign and which in risk practices undertaken by youngsters can be seen as a consequence.

We also deal with the different risk concepts which in their inception carried a negative value but which in the more contemporary notion incorporates the opportunity of also experimenting positive, even pleasurable, feelings.

Finally, we analyze some risk practices among youngsters in the city of Buenos Aires through a dialogue and may be placing them on a tension stage with those pertaining to the society where they live. At the same time, we incorporate the gender perspective in the analysis developed in the research paper which allows us to unveil from the asymmetric point of view the differential aspects related to the perceptions, attitudes and actions among young men and women.

## **1. Urban youth/s and their transformation/s in society**

The construction of knowledge regarding youth has a history which results from the inter relation of a number of epistemological, social, cultural and political components, among others. To talk about youth implies going beyond the act of appealing to a natural condition, but rather a social construction which supports psycho-biological elements and carries complex meanings. The historical conditions, the socio-economic situation and the cultural and gender guidelines define the when and the how of this blurry and diverse time of life (Margulis, 1996; Mendes Dizet al., 2004).

Nowadays, we are in the presence of the exaltation of what is young, unlike other times when what was valued was what was old while the young were undervalued. Notwithstanding, youth as it is understood nowadays is only a couple of centuries old. It was only during the first

decades of the 20th century when this term began to consolidate in speeches. More specifically, following the Second World War, countries regarded as developed began to distinguish more clearly a new vital stage between adolescence and adulthood. Key to that were phenomena such as economic prosperity, the lengthening of school years along with greater time under family dependence and the increase in educational demand on the part of an industrial and technological society that was increasingly striving. It should be noted that we are focused on middle-class youngsters, which implies acknowledging a segmentation of the youth population which is indeed much bigger.

For some, youth is "a post-war invention" (Reguillo, 2000): the winners had access to never before seen standards of living and imposed their values and styles. In any case, society defended the existence of youngsters specifically as consumption subjects. The post war years generated a powerful cultural industry which offered, for the first time, exclusive goods for youngsters. The idea that only youngsters can create a new society is expressed while war was "a mistake made by the old" who sacrificed the young to it (Criado, 1998).

In Argentina, more precisely in Buenos Aires, Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset was a precursor when talking about youth. When he travelled to the country in the period between the two world wars, he interviewed the youngsters in the city of Buenos Aires. Having said this, his youngster model, imported by the European youth, referred to a middle class youngster who could enjoy a social moratorium sheltered in their parents' homes with no work urgencies. This kind of youngsters was the pattern that existed during the 20th century when referring to youth, without making any distinction on any kind of diversity and characterized to a great extent by their hedonism and irresponsibility.

There have been many transformations regarding ideas about youngsters and their relationship in the last decades. In this sense, we see that youngsters are, to a great extent, a reflection of the society they live in, their most honest environment to express themselves symbolically and culturally, so that cultures and juvenile practices can be thought of as metaphors which, much like a mirror, give back images in which society can reflect itself. (Mendes Diz, 2001).

This entails imagining youngsters as a symbolic expression of the transition processes or the social and cultural changes of contemporary society (Mendes Diz, 2001; Fernández Poncela, 2003). In effect, youngsters

as social actors make up a discontinued and changing social universe in that their features are the result of a sort of negotiation - tension between the socio-cultural category assigned by the specific society and the subjective updating that specific persons carry out following a differentiated understanding of the current cultural schemes (A.M. Fernández Poncela, 2003). This is an image which reflects, on the one hand, how youngsters view themselves and, on the other hand, what their identities look like, mediatized by the look of adults and, specially, from the point of view of media which not only reflects reality but contributes to building it (Santout, 2005). When doing so, they emphasize the social practices of those more visible youngsters who are not necessarily a majority and then spread them to the rest when constituting a homogeneous collective group.

Having said this, in Latin America and of course in Argentina, we find youngsters from the 60s and 70s who are part of counter cultural movements which questioned the current social institutions. It is in this country and context that youngsters have been key players in the history of the 20th century. Viewed as students, they emerged as social actors by pointing out the unresolved conflicts in our societies. These were alternative groups which occupied the public world by being part of social, political and artistic movements striving towards a separation from the adults' values. The new musical genres, also in Argentina, such as rock and roll and twist set the tone for a type of dance, even of clothing and appearance which displayed more sexuality in the face of traditional conventions.

While they joined the guerrilla movements in many of our countries, no doubt influenced by the movement of May'68 in France, youngsters were considered responsible for urban violence. After the State-organized terrorism in Latin America in general and specifically in Argentina, came a political defeat that rendered youngsters invisible in the political arena, retreating and focusing their rebellion on their subjectivity. This is the generation that witnessed the decline of the great utopias. Thus, since the mid-80s, the story of uninterested youngsters has been continued, with some authors describing them as devoted to unplanned, eternal and apathetic leisure (Santout, 2005:18), a label the military dictatorships had already given them once they had been militarily beaten.

The 90s in Argentina - more precisely following the inauguration of President Carlos Menem- saw the appearance of the consumption

society, to which youngsters had to show adherence, thus turning them in the eyes of society into individualists focused on personal success. Naturally, those who left that path were regarded as delinquents and violent, with drugs acting as a good manipulation agent in this sense.

The 20th century youngsters would achieve a new leading role with specific features they created: virtual relationships. These ways of building "the youngsters" have not been different in central countries (Reguillo Cruz, 2000; Mendes Diz, 2001).

Lately, with the greater importance of youth and all its diversity, we see the inception and transformation of specific and differentiated leisure spaces for youngsters in cities, this being the logical thinking of a consumption society that tends to deepen and where risky behavior has become an ordinary thing (Mendes Diz y Schwarz, 2012). The city of Buenos Aires has not been an exception to this process. At the same time youngsters were kept busy with products, they became increasingly more visible in their conflict with the status quo, in the context of a universalization of a cultural environment where human rights were not discussed and were preserved at all costs: authoritarian fascism had ended.

## **2. From an order society to a risk society**

The brief historical review we will carry out, takes us back, not without certain nostalgia, to the time when in Argentina social policies were structured around the relation with salary and the worker held his work identity high with pride, this identity sometimes being of a craft nature.

People had the right and the obligation to achieve by their own merits a social position and such position had to be acknowledged and approved by society: work constituted the main tool to face the construction of a social identity. Thus this could be built once and for all by going through clearly defined stages as the professional career had to be. Personal identity parallel to work identity was totally complementary. We are talking about times of a great deal less uncertainty which we could somehow equal to craft cultures. These are cultures where time is repetitive and social change slow, which represent a cyclical /circular vision of the vital cycle based on the wheel of generations that eternally repeated the behavior of those before them. Children learnt from parents, grandparents... and repeated in a post figurative fashion the vital phases,

the rights of passage and the biographical conditions previous generations had gone through (Feixas, 2003).

The risk society represented a substantial change: the choice of a regular, long lasting and continuous profession was no longer available or expected for everybody. Only in very few cases was a permanent identity defined based on work: the latter has stopped being permanent as the identity of the subjects had been fragmented.

We are then placed in the context of the recent transformations of the so called "second normality" in which the tensions in the constitution of youth identities are deepened, a phenomenon that was more visible in a metropolis such as Buenos Aires.

In this new cultural configuration, adults can learn from their children who constitute a new reference for authority, especially in the use of new information technologies and communication whose emergence dates to mid-20th century (Castells, 1999). The phases and biographical conditions which define the vital cycles are dislocated and the rights of passage that divide them disappear. Authority structures collapse and the ages become changing symbolic references (Schwarz y Mendes Diz, 2013).

Unlike the relative foreseeability that biographies were granted by their links to institutions in salaried and even craft societies, in the current "risk societies" youngsters find themselves, as never before, "made to individualize" (Beck y Beck-Gernsheim, 2003; Castel, 1997) and as Rossana Regillo (2000) would say, continuing with the classic mandate, incorporate to modern institutions any way.

Based on this deep metamorphosis of the social issue - consolidated in Argentina since the 1990s as a result of the loss of collective regulations -, "an individualism resulting from the lack of frameworks and not due to excess of subjective interests has spread (Castel, 1997: 472), typical of the risk society.

Where individualism rules, autonomous persons are shaped, individual interests take precedence over collective ones, freedom as a value is imposed over many other interests. Self-esteem, self-realization, personal initiative and achievement values are culturally desirable values. In an environment of such characteristics, uncertainty becomes routine and the adoption of risk behaviors is only a step away; may be as an escape mechanism to the anxiety brought about by uncertainty which, when expressed as risk, ceases to be a source of anxiety. Societies with a lesser control of uncertainty generate greater comfort in the face of ambiguous

situations, greater tolerance to social practices which steer away from standards and are, therefore, societies where a social climate appears, more included towards the adoption of risk behaviors (Hofstede 1999). The commotion experienced when taking up a risk depends precisely on the intentional exposure to uncertainty that allows for the practice in questions to stand out from everyday routines (Giddens, 1994).

Mary Douglas (1985), renown for her anthropological work on risk and culture, maintains that the notion of risk was introduced in the 17th century in the context of game, where it referred to the probability of an event occurring and it was combined with the magnitude of losses and gains. The concept still had a neutral value.

For Anthony Giddens (1994), the notion of risk appears in European thinking around the 19th century and began being used in the field of insurance. According to this author, we currently live in a risk society although he dismisses that these have increased: what actually happens is that thinking in terms of risks has become an everyday routine.

Another author who regards the current times as typical of a risk society is Ulrich Beck, who coined the concept of "risk society" in his book of the same name (1992). He focuses on the process of "individualization" that takes place among the inhabitants of the risk society which goes beyond the freeing of religious or transcendental certainties resulting from modernity in the context of the industrial society. Now such liberation takes place in a turbulent context whereby everything is subjected to the most varied types of risk of global and, naturally, personal scope. This means "the liberalization of individual people from the "encapsulation" of institutions, thus allowing the emergence of concepts such as action, subjectivity, knowledge, criticism, creativity. It is the return of uncertainty" (Beck, 1999).

Finally, Niklas Luhmann (1992) makes a distinction between risk and danger: while risk is undertaken, danger is received or perceived from the atmosphere and it is not attributable to decisions. Danger exists when the individual lacks sufficient information and is therefore unable to act on the factors that produce it with the resulting reduction /increase of the contingency (Mendes Diz, 2001). From this point of view, all social practices imply an opportunity to experiment positive/pleasant factors and risks/dangers of suffering the negative/ undesired effects (Pere-Oró& Sánchez Antelo, 2010). Notwithstanding, the difference is not always so clear; it therefore depends on the decision instance in question as well as

on the temporal fixation. This means that the risks can become dangers and dangers in risks.

Risk is therefore a social changing construction through time (García Jiménez, 2010, Mendes Diz, 2001). We believe that the decision making process, adoption and acceptance of the contingency are regulated by sense, norms and socially shared values which affect the protagonist of the decision. Based on this definition of risk, we steer away from the perspectives used by epidemiology and we go closer to a broader scenario which highlights socio cultural aspects. It is vital to include from this standpoint, the benefit –pleasure- that is assessed as attainable through risk decision taking (Faurai Cantarell, Sánchez Antelo et al., 2007).

### **3. Risk practices among the young inhabitants of Buenos Aires in the last decades: drugs, sexual practices and uses of the Internet.**

In a risk society as the one analyzed in the previous paragraph, it could be stated that risky behavior carried out by youngsters are a consequence of the above. In this section, we shall analyze risk practices related to the consumption of substances, sexual practices, participation in violent situations and uses of the Internet, undertaken by young men and women in the city of Buenos Aires through time. Risk practices refer to those behaviors that can cause harm on their own or other people's health.

The information presented in the tables below, in which continuities and transformations are expressed, has been obtained based on the work carried out by our team during the last decades<sup>11</sup>. The analysis of only these practices does not mean they are the only risk behaviors undertaken in the past and in the present by youngsters but they are the ones we have been able to observe with continuity during the time our research took place.

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<sup>11</sup> These research papers have been carried out by a research team coordinated by the author of this document at the Gino Germani Research Institute, within the School of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires.



**Table 1: Youngsters and drug consumption in Argentina**

| Substance                                      | Date of Research | Women                               | Men                                 |
|--|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Illegal drug                                   | 1989             | Non existent                        | “the others”                        |
| Proximity Access<br>LSD, cocaine,<br>marijuana | 1993             | 25% were<br>offered 12%<br>tried it | 54% were<br>offered 23%<br>tried it |
| Marijuana<br>consumption                       | 2009             | 8% took it                          | 18% took it                         |
| Tobacco<br>consumption                         | 1993             | 37%                                 | 48%                                 |
|  | 2005             | 43%                                 | 38%                                 |
|  | 2009             | 45%                                 | 38%                                 |
| Alcohol<br>consumption                         | 2005             | 42%<br>occasionally                 | 36%<br>occasionally                 |
| Loss of control last<br>month                  | 2005             | 17% once<br><br>10% 2/3 times       | 16% once<br><br>10% 2/3 times       |
| Alcohol<br>consumption                         | 2009             | 45%                                 | 36%                                 |

Source: our own elaboration, Gino Germani Research Institute. University of Buenos Aires

As shown in Table 1, in the research work carried out in 1989 (Kornblit, Mendes Diz et al., 1989), “drug appeared as an unexplainable phenomenon”, distant, almost nonexistent in the city of Buenos Aires, “it is something related to others”. No direct cases are met: there is not presence of drugs in everyday life. There were contradictory and ambivalent versions typical of the lack of knowledge on this subject, the motivations towards consumptions of others were attributed to conflictive social situations, loneliness or lack of family support. These "others" were only male and pleasure as reason behind the consumption was completely absent. We are referring to illegal drugs, not to social drugs –alcohol and tobacco-, which were already established, though on a smaller scale than nowadays, among secondary school students in the city of Buenos Aires

with preventive ends and we found ourselves having to adapt materials imported from Spain that made reference to illegal drugs (Kornblit, Mendes Diz y Bylik, 1992). We worked on the prevention against alcohol and tobacco.

In a research carried out in 1993 along with Deutsche Bank (1993), unlike what had been observed in the research work we conducted six years before, already almost half of the youngsters in the research were aware of the existence of drugs such as LSD (lysergic acid), cocaine or marijuana. 54% of male subjects admitted to have been offered drugs at one point and this percentage decreased to half in the case of women. At the same time, 23% of the men admitted to having experimented with some illegal drug and once again the percentage was down to half in the case of women who admitted to having incurred in this behavior.

Although in the case of illegal drugs the percentages for males double those for women, it is already possible to see in this paper that the consumption of tobacco, which is not illegal, is beginning to increase among women, drawing close to the percentage for men.

As regards the consumption of tobacco, in the research we conducted in 2005 (Kornblit, Mendes Diz et al., 2005) we observed that women who smoked daily already outnumbered men by seven points; they even took up smoking at a younger age than men. In the 2009 research instance (Mendes Diz et al, 2009) we also confirmed that tobacco and alcohol continued to increase on the part of women and that an 8% for marijuana was also added, though male figures still doubled this consumption

As regards alcohol consumption, the 2005 research paper (Kornblit, Mendes Diz et al., 2005) showed that 42% of women engaged in this occasionally and outnumbered men by six points. When we looked at their admittance of having lost control after having consumed alcohol in the last month, we observed similar proportions in men and women, both for those who admitted to having lost it once and those who admitted to having lost control 2 and 3 times in a month.

Although there are more women than men who consume tobacco and alcohol, it should be noted that men continue to consume greater quantities of daily cigarettes compared to women and that they drink more alcohol. As pertains the consumption of illegal drugs, this remains the only substance consumption where men outnumber women. If we applied the gender perspective, we could observe that women who

consume illegal drugs are more stigmatized and rejected than men since they break away from the standards demanded for her gender which regard women as more obedient and law abiding. On a world scale, women consume psychoactive substances in a lower proportion than men; the epidemiological data reveals that they use more legal drugs than men while the latter consume more illegal drugs than women (Romo, 2004).

**Table 2: Sexual practices by youngsters in Argentina**

| Practice   | Date of Research | Women | Men |
|--|------------------|-------|-----|
| Younger than 15 years old at the time of sexual initiation | 1994             | 10%   | 40% |
|  | 2005             | 24%   | 39% |
| Did not use a condom                                       | 2005             | 27%   | 15% |
|  | 2009             | 31%   | 19% |

Source: our own elaboration, Gino Germani Research Institute. University of Buenos Aires

As regards sexual practices, the research work carried out in 1994 (Kornblit y Mendes Diz, 1994), showed that the sexual issue appeared as taboo in the relations between youngsters and adults, which resulted in a high level of ignorance on the part of the former about safe sex and the prevention of pregnancies. Fifteen years would go by before the City of Buenos Aires Legislature passed in October, 2006 Law 2.110/06 on Comprehensive Sexual Education, which was unheard of at the time.

As shown in Table 2, sexual initiation in women came later than in men, with only 10% starting before they were 15 while the figure trebled for men.

Almost all the women considered that "there is a relationship between affective commitment and sexual intercourse", while only a third of men was of the same opinion. This has been, to present date, an argument to justify the differential use of condoms: with partners regarded as stable, it is not usually used.

It also shows that according to data from the research work we carried out in 2005 (Kornblit, Mendes Diz et al., 2005), 27% of women do

not use a condom during intercourse while this percentage decreased to almost half for men. At the same time, we observed that sexual initiation in women before the age of 15 more than doubled in the last eleven years.

The research work carried out in 2009 (Mendes Diz et al, 2009) shows a decrease in the use of condoms both in men and women. Sexuality has ceased to be an issue and even a taboo practice, sexual freedom is a fact as is an increasingly early sexual initiation date. Notwithstanding, these transformations have come about along with a carelessness that jeopardizes both men and women at a younger age.

**Table 3: Violent situations among youngsters in Argentina**

| Kind of participation in violent situations | Date of Research | Women | Men |
|---|------------------|-------|-----|
| Undertook violent practices                 | 2008             | 6%    | 12% |
|   | 2009             | 10%   | 25% |
| Was a victim of violent practices           | 2008             | 7%    | 18% |
|   | 2009             | 14%   | 21% |

Source: our own elaboration, Gino Germani Research Institute. University of Buenos Aires

Finally, we will refer to violent situations involving young men and women in Argentina. We could say that the diverse senses and / or dimensions of violence could be looked at as multiple expressions of a crisis in social ties and precariousness in discursive and symbolic mediations of the individuals to recognize themselves in their relation to others, thus reflecting a primary need to attest their own identities in opposition to others.

As observed in Table 3 which shows the date resulting from the research work, there is a clear increase in violent situations both among young men and women in just one year. At the same time, it is men who acknowledge in a greater proportion having been involved in violent situations with other youngsters, both as victimizers and as victims. It should be noted that in cultures that record high levels of *androcentricity*, males are socialized to be aggressive and competitive while women are taught the opposite and are even sometimes prepared to passively accept male violence (Vance, 1992).

In the research paper we prepared in 2008 (Kornblit y Adaszko, 2008) 6% of women admit having undertaken violent practices with their peers, a percentage that doubles in the case of men. In other research instance we carried out one year later (Mendes Diz et al, 2009), we observed that both percentages notoriously increased, particularly that pertaining to young males: a quarter of the men interviewed admitted to having engaged in violent practices with their peers.

As for recognizing themselves as victims of violent practices, the 2008 paper (Kornblit y Adaszko, 2008) shows 7% of women admit to having been victims of violent practices while this situation more than doubles for men. In only one year (Mendes Diz et al, 2009) the percentage of women who feel they are victims doubled while in the case of men, it only increased 3 points and although it is greater than the figure for women, it is only by 7 points.

As with other risk behaviors analyzed (substance consumption and risky sexual practices), these practices have also increased with time but it should be noted that the percentages which have increased the most when looking at violence among youngsters are those referring to the victimization of women: these are cases reported and continuously shown in mass media.

In one of the latest research papers we undertook, we observed that youngsters themselves are aware of these changes between men and women in the last ten years, especially in the field of sexual practices, of consumption of legal and illegal substances and in violent situations. The transformations observed refer to two inter-dependent dimensions: that related to their own subjective experience and that related to the social context (Mendes Diz y Schwarz, 2012). Individuals make history when making themselves. These youngsters express in terms of "generation" which implies referring to social practices as generational characteristics. Although this concept refers to a common chronological age, it is necessary a more flexible criterion since these youngsters perceive themselves as belonging to a wider set which shares beliefs and social practices. This notion of generation, at the crossroads of biological time and historical time, makes it possible to link internal time with that occurring in interaction environments. It is feeling accompanied in the process through a certain membership shared by youngsters through standardized codes.

In this research study, youngsters talk about the changes in their recreational practices in relation to the time they began going out at night, making a difference between the first outings and current ones, within the timeframe going between 14/15 and 22/24 years of age. As regards their first approximation to going out at night at 14/ 15 years of age, many youngsters make reference to the search for experiences, mentioning an absence of reflection which is present when they go out now. When bringing together work, study and a stable relationship, there is an increase in practices that make it possible to maintain these levels of demand in older youngsters, which without a doubt goes against the time devoted to fun:

*"It goes with age and the maturity you achieve. I don't go dancing anymore, I get together with friends at a pub, to have a drink quietly... We are older, it is not the same anymore: this thing of 'let's go dancing, jumping, drinking all night till we drop' is a no go anymore. Now we seek to talk or sit in the first corner you find, a stool, meet with friends you don't see during the week... and at about 2, 3 am we leave"* (Sabrina, 21 years old).

These youngsters, at the same time, attribute the present time an ethos of great permissiveness and tolerance to new risk practices.

*"If I told my mom that I drink or that I smoke weed, she would freeze; now she is more open"* (María Sol, 24 years old).

The challenge the individual needs to face in Late Modernity is processing their actions amidst the uncertainty and intensity that comes with increasing degrees of freedom. As Beck states (1999: 227): *"We suffer, then, from freedom, not from a crisis; from the involuntary consequences and the forms of expression derived from a plus of freedom that has become an everyday thing. When talking about the downfall of values, we find fear to freedom, the fear of the children of freedom"*.

As regards sexuality, youngsters observe a greater leading role of women in this case:

*"There is a lot more exhibitionism. As a matter of fact, yesterday it happened that I was having a beer with this guy who is 30 years old and this 15 year-old girl sends him very racy text messages, sexual innuendo and everything"* (Carolina, 23 years old).

Another change specially pointed out by men is the issue of violence followed by discrimination. It is a form of violence attributed to "the other one", "that who is different", "who comes from abroad". This is

not a kind of violence acknowledged as their own in spite of occasional acts of discrimination on the part of the youngsters interviewed.

*"It depends on where you go. If you go to those nightclubs where they play 'cumbia', where other kind of people go, yes, there is violence. But in the nightclubs where we go, a more university-like atmosphere, there is no violence..."* (Omar, 23 years old).

Finally, it should be noted that youngsters also emphasize on the increase of several risk practices on the part of women:

*"Nowadays you see girls sprawled anyone, drunk, it is a common thing"* (María Sol, 24 years old).

*"Nowadays, girls will leave a nightclub with just anyone and many times it is them who make the move"* (Juan, 18 years old).

*"Girls, we see this at school all the time, smoke more than boys"* (Ezequiel, 19 years old).

*"If a girl's ex is going out with somebody else, they will pull each other's hair and sometimes physically attack each other"* (Pablo, 20 years old)

Another research we carried out in 2010 reflects the emergence of new risks following practices in the virtual world (Schwarz y Mendes Diz, 2013). New information technologies and communication are gaining increasing importance and they are part of different dynamics which make up the social reality, thus forever transforming our day to day life, especially in the case of the younger generations. From the moment they were created, there have emerged different ways to relate to ourselves and to others. Interactions in the virtual world are part of a complex framework that builds the senses and in which youngsters currently define themselves and are defined.

The conditions in cyberspace reinforce the feeling of control over what happens there, thus resulting in a feeling of security that extends to face to face encounters, hiding and redefining the possibilities and conditions of the exposure to risks.

The virtual experience involves a history novelty that lies mainly in the possibility of simulation, of fictionalizing one's own identity, of ties and the interactions conditions; this is the cosmovision that lines the great metropolis and which opens the door to potential risks.

In this research paper, youngsters acknowledged as risks in the use of the Internet grooming (adults passing themselves off as minors) and cyber-bullying (online bullying):

*"The sexual threat, in the case of girls. A 10 year- old girl who lied saying she was 14 suggests meeting and then a 30 year-old guy who is a pedophile, grabs her, takes her and could end up killing her or getting her pregnant... that is one of the risks I see"* (Fernando, 19 years old).

*"In online games they come and say "Ok, I killed you, that is it" but then they actually want to murder in real life"* (Juan, 18 years old)

As regards who they consider most vulnerable to the Internet risks they mention under-aged youngsters, especially girls:

*"I think that youngsters are most at risk. There are many girls who want to date boys, they like hearing they are pretty and will take any situation to see the world... It is not a coincidence that there are cases of 15 year-old girls who disappear and that is terrible..."* (Ema, 20 years old)

Boys, according to the traditional andocentric regulation within which the adoption of risks is a desirable male feature, show an attitude of less vulnerability in the face of the possible risks resulting from the use of the Internet:

*"It could happen but I don't think I would be so dumb as to try a relationship over Facebook, over the chat that can get you in trouble, but I am not afraid"* (Juan, 16 years old).

Finally, we should mention that the possibility of risks in the use of the Internet is made invisible; you are only a click away from walking away from an unsatisfactory situation:

*"It was a person I had added and who always made negative comments: One day I eliminated that person but I continued to get messages until I decided to block her and that was it, end of the problem"* (María Sol, 20 years old)

It is interesting to wonder if youngsters can look at themselves as the main drivers in the information society as they become its largest group of users and even the content creators in this media. On the other hand, could it be a case of being regarded as immature subjects, susceptible of being affected by a diversity of dangers and potential risks that adults associate to the Internet and social networks.

## **Final comments**

In an attempt to understand the changes observed in the social practices among young women in connection to young men, allow me to go back to the perspective of the social metaphor as a symbolic expression of the socio cultural change processes taken place within the society where



they live. A society which, as expressed in the research work, has incorporated risk to its everyday life, in which phases and biological conditions that define the vital cycle are dislocated and rites of passage are suppressed. A society which is undergoing cracks in its traditional institutions, at least in their old format.

It is precisely these institutions - family, school, church- that have become the chosen scenarios by more women than men to seek shelter, thus representing the reproduction of the gender norm, something which has been observed in the studies carried out by the health team at the Gino Germani Research Institute at Universidad de Buenos Aires (already quoted in this paper). Boys, on the other hand, usually appear to be more unintegrated to these institutions and more anchored along with their peers, compared to women, to the public space that allows them more autonomy.

This is, then, the framework that lines the findings from the studies on youngsters in medium level we have carried out during the last decades. There we can see a progressive increase in risk practices on the part of women who, among other examples, consume increasingly more substances –tobacco, alcohol and ever illegal drugs-, use less protection during sexual intercourse and take more initiative in the sexual stage - a role that men represented without a doubt for decades- and who get involved in violent situations with their peers.

These findings have surprised us given that historically women have shown a clear alliance to an attitude towards looking after themselves and their surrounding, only affected by mayor problems. Boys, on the other hand, have been and are much more bound to take on risks deliberately; in a way, risk has been and is to them a constitutive aspect of their subjectivity; we could even suggest that one of their methods of integration is through the inclusion in risk groups (Mendes Diz, 2001).

The perception of a greater exposure to risk situations places women in greater public visibility. This carries a reconfiguration of gender relations, as well as a flexibilization of the stereotypes and gender norms. It is possible to observe symptoms of these change in the naturalness attributed to these transformations in their speech, as shown in the research paper.

These findings, rather than closing issues, bring about questions that call for reflection. Is it that young women, orphans of their traditional core find themselves in search of strategies that make them feel integrated

again? Could this increase in risk practices imply a turn towards the masculinization (in the traditional sense of what is masculine) of women to reach spaces still banned to them? Or is it simply - or not so simply- yet another result of the new cosmovision presented by Late Modernity?

This still incipient transformation of gender pattern comes under a paradigm of intelligibility and construction of experiences whose code it is necessary to continue to analyze in order to understand more thoroughly and in all its complexity the pluri-dimensionality of the youngsters' experiences. As stated by E. del Acebo Ibáñez (2012: 211), post modernity operates on the "radical historicity of the subject [...] atemporalizing or (imperatively) crystallizing certain age groups, especially youngsters, in a sort of vainglory in which desires of immortality, eternal youth and delighting sensuality are observed. [...] Deified youth that [...] still goes through its own via crucis, represented by the escape to the future pressed upon them by the adult world, future of *homo faber et onsumens*".

To conclude, we consider that if we "problematize" the issue of youngsters and their risk behaviors, we might find - as we have discovered during the course of our research work- youth behavior patterns which try to overcome the social harassment and post modernity, thus safekeeping their subjectivities, through the search of spaces and risks environments outside the (apparent) security of a consumption society that sings their praises or criticizes them according to needs not necessarily theirs.

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