



“Once upon a time... the sexuality: adolescents and sexual risk”

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About adolescence: psychodynamic background

- ✓ Biological-based body transformations, psychic reshuffles (Freud, 1905; Laufer, 1984), developmental challenges (Blos, 1979)
 - ✓ Period of transition and Crisis (Erikson, 1968; Winnicott, 1961)
 - ✓ Identity construction and process of subjectivation (Cahn, 1998).
- The integration of a new sexed body and the use of sexuality as narcissistic confirmation are involved in the construction of gender identity (Nunziante Cesàro 2014; Boursier & De Rosa, 2006).

Sexual behaviours and gender differences (Simonelli et al., 2008):

- ♂ fulfillment of *sexual desire*, achievement of *pleasure*, partner's *satisfaction*, conquest and relief of *tension*
- ♀ Sex associated with *love*, desire for satisfy the *beloved* person's *wishes* rather than a personal choice meeting their own needs and desires.



At risk behaviours in adolescence

At risk behaviours = actions that may endanger the physical, psychological and social well-being of the adolescent (Argentero, 2006)

In adolescence the desire to risk occurs more strongly (Jesso, 1998, Bonino e Cattellino, 2000), as a developmental phenomenon useful to define adolescent's own limits (Giannotta et al., 2007; Silbereisen and Noack, 1988)

Gender differences in risk perception (Boursier, Margherita, Gargiulo & Manna, 2013)

- Psychosocial risk** (Bonino et al, 2003) due to:
- Inexperience in evaluating the consequences and effects of their own actions
 - Sensation seeking and unrealistic optimism (Cicognani e Zani, 1999)
 - Dependence on strong sensations (RaCalbuto, 2004)
- ↓
unwanted pregnancies and STDs (Silvaggi et al., 2005)

- ✓ **Acting out** = unmentalised motor «discharge» (Laufer e Laufer, 1988)
 - ✓ **Acting out** → omnipotent and narcissistic aspects, based on denial mechanisms (Ferruzza et al., 2007).
 - ✓ **Acting out** → defense mechanism and means of Self expression (Margherita, 2009; Troisi & Gargiulo, 2014)
- ...BUT...
Psychosexual maturity: the ability to think about sexuality and schedule it (Rossi, 2002).

Aims

- ✓ to explore how adolescents represent the sexual risk in their life contexts;
- ✓ to evaluate the role of gender differences in promoting and influencing these representations.



Participants

118 high school students from South Italy
Average age: 16 years old

Results: Cluster Analysis

PRINCIPAL LEMMA	CLUSTER
To love, person, know, feel, bar, start, attract, fail, succeed, experience, feeling, accept, trust, reveal, group, facebook, cry, hug, respect, date, fall in love, love	Cluster 1 "LOVE" Love between desire and fear
Illness, test, rape, medical, protected, AIDS / HIV, detect, woman, birth control pills, pregnancy, analysis, victim die, control, delay, caring, risk, contract, terminate, serious, negative, positive, ruin, precaution	Cluster 2 "ILLNESS" Risks linked to sexuality
Change, start, rise, begin, dinner, friends, first, kiss, beautiful, tell, test, "Paul", become, transform, happy, to kiss, save, exchange	Cluster 3 "CHANGE" Openness to change
Child, parent, pregnant, grow, discover, stay, care, have an abortion, small, betrothed, father, explain, responsible, successful, escape, future, now, hold, birth, behavior, right, mother, face, pregnancy, give birth, decide	Cluster 4 "CHILD" Be a child/make a child
Friends, "Sabrina", disco, school, strip, birthday, room, class, assign, woo, desire, drink, run, party, pleasure, friends, fun, local, now, out, teen, scream, reach	Cluster 5 "FRIENDS" Concrete dimension of adolescence

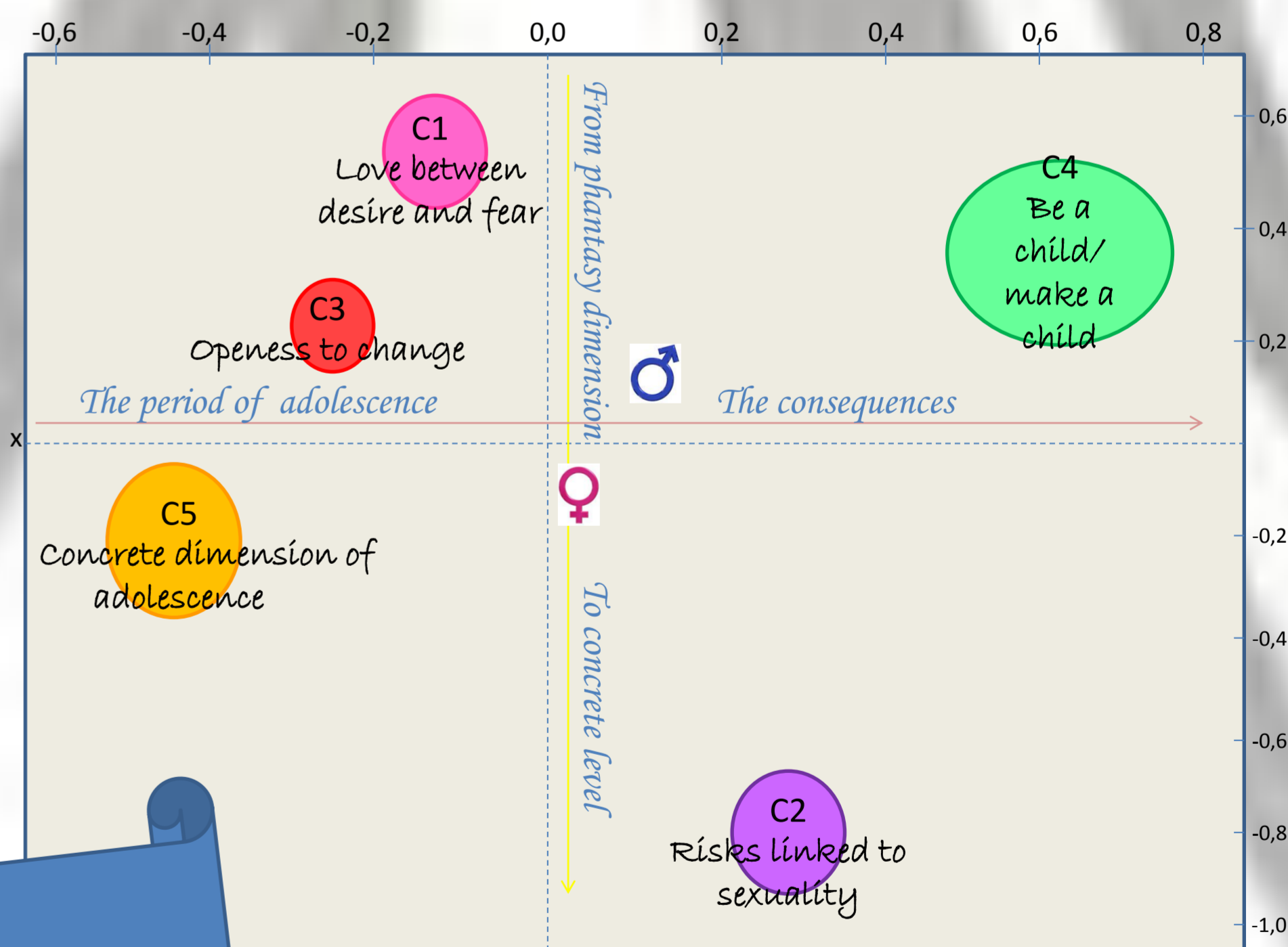
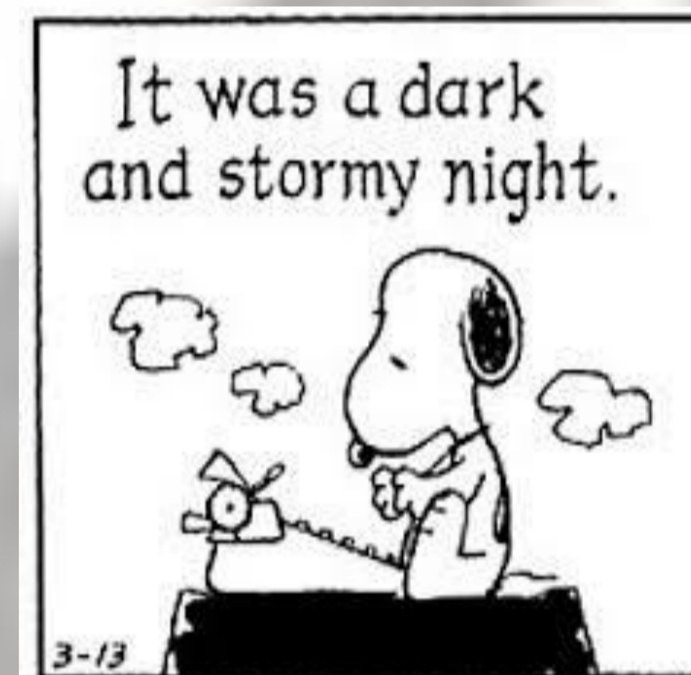
Instruments and Data Analysis

- ✓ the narration is able to promote knowledge and transformation (Shafer, 1983; Spence, 1982; Ricoeur, 1983; Bruner, 1991; Ferro, 2006; Freda, 2011; Margherita, 2009; Margherita et al, 2014).

«Write a story in which the main character enacts a risky sexual behaviour...»

- ✓ **Quali-quantitative Content Analysis** with the T-lab Software (Lancia, 2004):

 1. Analysis of the Elementary Contexts → identification of the dominant themes
 2. Analysis of the Specificities → evaluation of gender differences through the search for typical and exclusive words.



Discussion

Splitting between a phantasy dimension and a concrete one: a splitted way of living sexual behaviours (“acted” sexuality) and feelings (“affective” sexuality)

Sex and sexuality are splitted!

Worries about sexuality:

- Boys → performance (the success of the sex act, the risk of physical arousal);
- Girls → consequences of “irresponsible” behaviours cutting off the dimension of love.

- Usefulness of the narrative device →
- It promotes projection and identification
 - It allows the access to unconscious contents
 - It promotes mentalization.

Importance of preventive interventions taking in account the phantasies associated to sexuality, beyond sexual behaviours and practices.

Analysis of the Specificities:

- male**
Typical: worries about the success of a relationship; the need for contraception
Exclusively: risks associated with the sexual excitation
- female**
Typical: emotional dimensions of being in love and engaged.
Exclusively: love as a factor of protection against the risk of an acted sexuality

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