



## **Virtual Identity: Risk or Resource? A Study about Effects of Using Social Network and Multi-User Virtual Environment (Muve) on Processes of Identity Construction Of Emerging Adults**

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### **Abstract**

Using internet to build own social-relational system is an increasingly widespread phenomenon. It revolves both very young people and emerging adults (Arnett, 2001) for which the dimensions of identity exploration often seemed to constitute areas of uncertainty and risk (Aleni Sestito, Sica, 2010). The motivation factors to use a social network are related to self-presentation and socialization (Li, 2005; Trammell et al., 2006). On the other hand, it was demonstrated (Goldberg, 1995) that the use of virtual environment and/or social networks for continuous and sustained periods can have directly negative effects on self- definition processes (Bauer & Bonanno, 2001a, 2001b, King et al., 2000). Therefore, the goal of this explorative contribution is to study the effects of using of virtual environment and/or social networks in terms of risks and resources on processes of identity construction of emerging adults.

It was used a narrative format of survey (autobiographical narrative interview; Bruner, 1990, 2002; Smorti, 2003), considered one of the most suitable instruments to analyze the construction processes of narrative identity. Participants are 25 emerging adults (average age 23 years), balanced by gender.

The texts produced were analyzed by lexical content analysis, which identifies semantic worlds of texts, through lexical cluster analysis (Reinert, 1992).

Results show the presence of 4 lexical clusters (with a stability index of 78%) related to self construction processes (Cluster 1: Curiosity and exploration; Cluster 2: The need for affiliation and masking of emotions; Cluster 3: The "potential self"; Cluster 4: The mask effect) and they highlight the existence of risks associated with the construction of identity, but also benefits linked to the relational and emotional dimensions of the self. That finding underlines the need for a thorough study of the effects of the use of new technologies in order to plan for such use in education.