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Premarital Sexuality in Morocco Rabat as a
Case Study**

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Intergenerational Perceptions of Gender and Premarital Sexuality in Morocco Rabat as a Case Study

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Abstract

Premarital sexuality is among several thorny issues that raise generational conflicts. Sexuality is defined as a central aspect of being human and it encompasses among other things sex, dating and intimacy. It is commonly acknowledged that parents cannot typically get through to their teenage and young daughters as regards negotiation over sexuality issues. Drawing on capabilities approach, social construction theory and a feminist perspective, the present study aims at comparing intergenerational perceptions and attitudes towards dating and premarital sexuality, and how both social background and religiosity are the deciding factors in shaping one's sexual attitudes. This paper explores how the interaction, between mothers and their adolescent daughters, shapes girl's agency in negotiating decisions about their sexual behaviour. The findings indicated that gender, generation, social background and religiosity have an impact on some attitudes related to gender, dating and premarital sexuality. As regards young participants, the higher the social background was, the more liberal were the sexual attitudes. Irrespective of their social background, middle-aged participants, on the other hand, did not reveal palpable divergences in attitudes. Besides, religiosity proved to be a deciding factor in moulding one's sexual attitudes. Thus, high degrees of religiosity were more related to conservative sexual attitudes. Furthermore, a firm grasp of religion, a clear understanding of duties and family obligations, as well as daughters' need to balance family demands and socialisation with liberal mainstream had a role on daughters' agency in negotiating decisions about dating.

Keywords: Premarital Sexuality, Intergenerational Conflict, Gender.

Introduction

This study aims at drawing an intergenerational comparison of perceptions and attitudes towards dating and premarital sexuality. It examines the roles of religiosity and social background in shaping one's sexual attitudes. The fact that parents and their teenage children are frequently light-years away from each other is usually attributed to the abstract idea of the '*generation gap*'. Some of those differences range from musical preferences, dress styles, to overall attitudes. A thorny issue about which generations are usually poles apart is their attitudes towards gender roles and intimacy. These encompass sensitive questions for both parents and children, as both tend to feel strongly on what they believe according to their value system. The latter is influenced by peer groups, family, religiosity, social background, media to name just a few.

Much of the literature and research on the field of attitudes towards sexuality, intergenerational comparisons and parents-children communication about sexual behaviour was conducted by American and Asian scholars. It has focused on Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Vietnamese and Koreans, while scarce research has been done on Arabs-especially North African populations. There appear to be several reasons for this blatant shortage. First, the lack of empirical research on Moroccan population discourages further research. Second, scholars interested in these fields do not tend, for some reasons, to focus on the Moroccan population. Third, though the literature on other Arab, Muslim or African populations unhurriedly increases, there seems to be a propensity to lump all of them together and ignore the individual and unique attributes of each group.

It is worth noting that youngsters gradually learn to accept the generation gap phenomenon, but parents are usually confused and puzzled by the fast behavioural and attitudinal change of their growing children. Segal (1991) suggests that parents are more liable to embrace a unique set of culture, values, and societal roles. This process grows more difficult and painful as it deals with a thorny taboo-issue such as gender and premarital sexuality. Ghumam (1997) has asserted that the quest of a stable identity of youth can be difficult because of the divergent values at home and outside.

The debate revolving around dating leads to a further intergenerational issue related to how differently females are treated than their male counterparts. A typical *traditional* good Moroccan girl is the one who does not date, is shy, delicate and marries a man of her family's choice. The gender imbalance is highly felt by females and many believe that gender roles are still adhered to. Females are confronted with cultural ideologies and religious prescriptions that render the path of identity development different from those of males. This socially driven division in identity construction becomes especially visible in the realm of sexual development. Welsh et al. (2000: 130) state that "*sexual feelings, behaviours, and motivations are only given meaning, and thus, experiential significance, by the cultures in which the adolescent has been socialised*". This statement has been corroborated by sexuality studies on diverse samples. Wyatt and Dunn (1994) have consistently suggested that female

adolescents and adults are torn between conforming to culturally constructed gender standards, which infuse female sexuality with shame and guilt, and the desire for sexual knowledge and exploration.

The study advances the hypothesis that higher levels of religiosity are associated with conservative sexual attitudes; and it is evidently also hypothesised that lower levels of religiosity are associated with liberal sexual attitudes. At the level of generations, parents should hold more conservative views on their attitudes towards dating and sexuality than the youth as measured by the Dating and Sexuality Scales respectively. Besides, at the level of gender, males are assumed to have more conservative views on gender roles than females, as measured by the Women Scale, the Dating Scale and the Sexuality Scale

Aiming at confirming or denying these hypotheses, and due to the various subtopics tackled, the core of this paper relies on two theoretical frameworks, namely the feminist perspective and the social construction theory. Feminist perspective is necessary to this study for it is the female part of the Moroccan social fabric that is repressed and is subject to social unfairness. The social construction theory¹ will be efficient to demonstrate how an individual's reality is socially constructed; that is, what an individual perceives as reality has been shaped through a system of social and cultural processes.

Methodology of Research

Purposive sampling was used for this project. Choice of participants was driven by a concern to gain insight into different variables and understand generational differences. All the subjects who were involved in this study were Moroccan. They filled in the questionnaire and some of them were interviewed of their own free will. The questions that dealt with intergenerational comparisons and sexual attitudes in this study were addressed by breakdown based on response to the Attitudes towards Women Scale (AWS), the Sexual and Attitudes towards Sexuality Scale (ATSS), and the Dating Scale (DAT).

The total sample was comprised of 697 individuals; 348 were females, and 337 were males. Locating participants for this study was challenging. I chose four educational institutions, namely Lycée Descartes and I.I.H.E.M., which represent largely expensive private schools and are emblems of high social class in Rabat; and Lalla Aicha lycée and the faculty of Arts and Humanities Souissi-Rabat.

Data Analysis

One of the most interesting findings is that sexual attitudes unceasingly

¹I am indebted to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *the Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1966.

change across generations, though not always in the direction one might expect. Overall findings revealed that the high social background and low religiosity students responding to this survey felt that virginity was irrelevant in a life partner. Female premarital sex was tolerable and homosexuality was acceptable. They agreed that prostitution should be legal, approved of oral sex, and thought sexual intercourse was important in a love relationship. That stated, there were important differences between high religiosity youngsters and low religiosity middle-aged participants. Specifically, these categories held more conservative attitudes than the former ones when it came to the importance of finding a life partner who is a virgin and non-acceptance of premarital sex. Besides, more participants in these categories held negative attitudes towards the legalisation of prostitution.

Despite earlier studies (DeSantis et al.1999, Espin 1999, Raffaelli and Ontai 2001, Zhou and Bankston III 2001) suggesting that college students are more liberal in their sexual attitudes, it is important to acknowledge that the 'abstinence-until-marriage' message, as well as the pro-life/anti-abortion discussion, has clearly influenced a small segment of this new generation of college students. On the other hand, these results also found youngsters samples holding more accepting attitudes towards homosexuality. Significantly higher social background students felt that having a gay friend was acceptable. Perhaps greater exposure to homosexuality in the media and in schools has influenced this change in attitude.

The findings maintain the hypothesis that generation influences views on dating and sexuality. As anticipated, the youth held a more liberal outlook on dating and sexuality. The males held the most liberal views on dating followed by females. Besides, many middle-aged and young subjects, who were interviewed, listed dating and sexuality issues as some of the main differences between generations. Fathers were more liberal on the dating issue than mothers. This may be explained by a gender bias in rearing practices of young males and females. According to Mani (1992), parents admitted their fear in dating is stronger for their daughters than their sons. Despite the fact that many girls tend to date, a tendency of self-restraint appears present and a duty to family holds more girls back from dating than boys.

On sexuality issues, young males held the most liberal views followed by young females. Mothers were less conservative than fathers in their views on sexuality and marriage. For the majority of middle-aged respondents, marriages were arranged and the concept of dating was non-existent. Many parents showed that they know little about dating except that it may lead to sex and therefore is an unacceptable form of socialisation. Young adults admitted they often do not disclose their dating habits to their parents and only do so if they feel it is '*serious*' between them and their dating partner. In addition to this belief, many parents admit that their worst fear is their son or daughter marrying an inappropriate spouse.

Empirical evidence did not support the hypothesis that parents would have more conservative views on gender roles than the youth. In fact there were intergenerational similarities between the two groups. Dasgupta (1998) found similar results when administering the Attitudes towards Women Scale to Asian

Indian parents and their adult children. He said that “...*the belief in gender equality of both mothers and fathers was positively correlated with that of their children regardless of age...*” Dasgupta (1998: 962). Mothers held the most liberal attitudes towards gender roles followed by young males while fathers held the most conservative views.

As a matter of fact, parents grapple with their children facing young adulthood and external threats to the ‘*Moroccan identity.*’ Parents differ the most from the youth in their attitudes towards dating and marriage. The rejection of dating and conservative views on sexuality and marriage demonstrate the resistance parents feel and show towards dating.

Many parents may not ‘*believe*’ in dating but this phenomenon exists and affects the self-esteem of the youth generation. I am part of the Moroccan society and do not fail to observe aspects of dating in different places. Irrespective of houses, there are cafés, cinemas, corniches, streets, schools backyards... where dating is plainly seen. It is evidently manifested within all ranks of society.

Nevertheless, scores of all scales, namely the Attitudes towards Women Scale, Dating Scale and the Attitudes towards Sexuality Scale, and interviews as well demonstrated that the higher the social class is the more open and liberal are attitudes about dating and premarital sexuality. Several parents showed they are not against the fact that their daughters date. Though these parents do not hold the same obstinate attitude towards dating, they did not allow me to go into details. However, several parents of Lycée Descartes students, for instance, hinted at the fact that there may be some petting among youngsters (but not full sexual intercourse), referring to them as mere kids. Further a father participant said: “*Each person gets used to the environment where one grows. Students here develop some hints of belonging. They learn and teach that lighting a Marlboro cigarette at the yard in front of everybody is a sign of maturity, moral and financial independence, adulthood (for boys), sophistication (for girls)... If ever you come across an exception, be sure that either it represents a case of a student who suffers an integration problem, or enjoys a strong spirit of resistance*”.

While interviewing a Lycée Descartes teacher about parents’ attitudes to their children’s conduct, he answered: “*Well-off parents who opt for enrolling their children in our institution bear in mind two points: 1)- Their son or daughter will be involved in a French modern educational system, which stands for best quality. 2)- The better you speak French, the further are your possibilities in the job market. Parents are aware that this institution does not only represent better education system, but it also involves a conduct. Therefore, the two aforementioned points represent the goal while the means is a whole personality that is being built up. You can say that the end justifies the means. Further, unlike the Moroccan society mainstream, the French educational system helps develop an independent personality with regard to the student*”.

A mother whose daughter pursues her studies in I.I.H.E.M. reacted to the question “what do you think about dating?” as follows: “*If we talk about my daughter in particular, I would tell you that I know her present boyfriend. He*

is a young respectable engineer, and seems to be serious regarding their relationship. The intimacy that is involved in their relationship concerns them. However, it is a must that my daughter keeps her virginity; besides I will never forgive her if she falls pregnant”.

When discussing gender differences during interviews for this study, females held more liberal attitudes towards gender roles than males. A study by Dasgupta (1986) confirms that regardless of whether mothers were working women or housewives, they held similar, more egalitarian views on sex roles. Many females feel the sharp contrast in treatment of themselves versus males. Females have expressed concern that males have opportunities to be independent and to express their points of view. It may seem plausible to assume that many young educated girls feel that in order to succeed in such a society, breaking out of the more rigid gender roles stereotypes will be more beneficial for them.

Aged-based divergences are commonly expected due to a bunch of causes: mothers most likely were socialised to rather a continuum of traditional values vis-à-vis the correct female role; marriage and childrearing has provided them with experiences none of the daughters in the sample studied had hitherto had; and these experiences might have caused them to feel a certain emotional commitment with or investment in the determination of these time-honoured instances. Quite some substantiation for these postulations can be found in the literature on generations.

Discussion

It is widely recognised that there is a contradiction between the Islamic doctrine, which is quite lenient regarding sex and a system of social conventions that applaud men’s sexual prowess and repress women’s pleasure both outside and within the institution of marriage. Besides Islam has a positive view of sexuality, and does not enhance a double standard regarding sexual behaviour. Unlike Christianity and other religions, Islam does not recommend asceticism; it rather sees marriage as partial fulfillment of religious duties. However, the importance of mutual consent and shared pleasure is less acknowledged. This is stated in both Koran and the Hadith, which hold an affirmative stand with respect to pleasure for both partners and foreplay as a vital part of a good intercourse.

These positive attitudes are, yet, gainsaid by the fundamentally inegalitarian construction of gender in Morocco. There is a wide ethnographic literature on the importance of notions of honour and shame, and how they are linked women’s bodies, as well as the support they provide for customs such as veiling and seclusion, wedding ceremonies that display proof of the bride’s virginity, (Dialmy 1997, Collectif 1997, Bennani-Chraïbi 1994, Bakass et al. 2013). These practices have always generated a great deal of controversy, in particular regarding the explanations that are offered for their existence, and the extent to which the

particular situations where they are found can be taken to express a Muslim construction of gender (Kateb 2011).

Moroccans vary in their religiosity levels and social classes as well. This variation was sought to enrich the study and provide information about the context of sexuality and its ramifications for people's attitudes and for effective intervention. Factors such as religiosity and social class were examined to determine their impact on participants' sexual attitudes. This study partially attempted to combine the efforts of previous researchers by exploring both religiosity and social background as variables interfering in shaping an individual's sexual attitudes.

Bivariate correlations revealed that intrinsic religiosity and religious fundamentalism were strongly associated with low scores for the three scales, and the other way round. Out of the three extrinsic religiosity measures, only extrinsic-personal significantly correlated with one measure of attitudes towards sexuality, although it should be noted that the insignificant correlations between the extrinsic religiosity measures and Attitudes towards Sexuality Scale items were generally in the predicted direction. At this point, it appears that there is much support for the first hypothesis that high levels of religiosity are associated with very conservative sexual attitudes.

Findings also suggest that the social control function that religious values have historically served for young adults still exists. Those who felt religion played an important role in their lives were much more likely to feel that virginity was important in a life partner, premarital sex was not permissible and legalisation of prostitution was unacceptable. However, acceptance of homosexuality was not linked to religiosity, nor was acceptance of oral sex. This might reflect the movement in some religious organizations toward accepting the homosexual person, while still not accepting the act of homosexuality.

The aforesaid four measures of religiosity, namely behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, and practice were generally associated, but at relatively modest levels. This finding suggests that these constructs are overlapping but include distinct features. That is, religious behaviour and practice are associated with religious attitudes and perceptions, but attitudes do not fully determine behaviours (in this case, the behaviour was attendance at religious services).

Some divergences emerged based on participants' different social backgrounds. Particularly, participants emerging from higher social backgrounds had fewer lifetime sexual partners than lower background individuals. The latter category reported more conservative sexual attitudes than did the former. Most Descartes and I.I.H.E.M. (International Institute for Higher Education in Morocco) students reported marginally higher confidence in their ability to talk to a partner about condoms than did Lalla Aicha and Souissi students. However, these differences in sexual attitudes by the different social background groups identification were inconsistent. These inconsistent findings are similar to those examining sexual behaviours (e.g. Bearman and Bruckner 1999, and Thornton and Camburn 1989). Findings of group differences in conservative attitudes are also supported by the literature (Sheeran et al. 1993. and Thornton and Camburn 1989. Because most religions disapprove of premarital sex, reference

group theory suggests that variations based on religious group membership may be less significant than variations based on religious behaviours or attitudes (Thornton and Camburn 1989).

In support of this distinction and as frequently reported in the literature (e.g. Jessor and Jessor 1975, Samuels 1997), religious behaviour differed between sexually active and abstinent youth and was associated with a number of lifetime sexual partners. These associations are important because emerging adults' decisions about religiosity and sexual attitudes were made while living away from home and, presumably, under less immediate influence from their parents. However, when other aspects of religiosity were taken into account, religious behaviour had little explanatory power for sexual attitudes. Thus, religious behaviour may be more important in explaining sexual behaviour than in explaining sexual attitudes. Most of the prior studies that have examined associations between religious service attendance and sexual attitudes have not considered other measures of religiosity simultaneously, which may explain the difference in findings.

Sexually abstinent youth reported that religion was more important in their daily lives than did sexually active youth. In addition, religious attitudes were associated with conservative sexual attitudes. Youth who perceived religion as more important in their daily lives tended to be sexually more conservative. Previous researchers have consistently found associations between religious attitudes and sexual behaviour and conservative attitudes (e.g. Jessor and Jessor 1975, Samuels 1997, Sheeran et al. 1993). In the present study, religious attitudes were also a powerful predictor of sexual attitudes, even after taking other measures of religiosity into account. The importance of religion in daily life may be assessing the extent to which emerging Moroccan adults use their religion as a reference group (Zaleski and Schiaffino 2000).

Surprisingly, the association between religious attitudes and full sexual intercourse was in the opposite direction of the association for religious behaviours. In other words, girls who had high scores in the Religiosity Scale tended more frequently to avoid full sexual intercourse. Though I have tried to raise the ambiguity that may lay between the two overlapping poles, namely tradition and religion, most of the female participants attributed these attitudes to religion.

As previously hypothesized, religiosity was significantly related to permissiveness. Participants with greater adherence to and belief in Islamic practices reported conservative attitudes toward sexual behaviour and topics such as contraception, abortion, dating and premarital sexual expression. Conservative views held that sexual knowledge, behaviour and intimacy are unacceptable and immoral. Youniss et al. (1999) suggested that religion is an integral element of adolescent identity. This finding extends the importance of religion to the sexual identity development of Moroccan adolescent girls. The inverse relationship found between religiosity and sexuality in this study is also consistent with past research findings (Davidson et al. 1995, Sack et al. 1984). Hence, the more religious a person tends to be, the more likely he or she will also hold conservative attitudes about sex.

Taking this into consideration, it was expected that male and female participants, who were believed to be conservative with strong religious beliefs, had significantly different perspectives on premarital sexuality. Findings were consistent with a vast amount of previous research linking religiosity with fewer sexual experiences (Pluhar et al. 1998), less conventional (McLaughlin et al. 1997) and traditional values (Young 1986), and less sexually permissive attitudes (Hendrick and Hendrick 1987a, Strouse and Buerkel-Rothfuss 1987). The findings of this study further supported previous research suggesting that religiosity is negatively correlated with more liberal attitudes about sex.

Mincec (1985) opined that Islamic societies promote a patriarchal ideology that reinforces female inferiority as the norm. The internalisation of female sexual inferiority and degradation may lead to a negative self-image and sexual repression. Within the realm of Islamic sexuality, the social preoccupation with female virginity remains prevalent, as evidence by the rise of guilt and confusion among Muslim adolescent girls (Hafiz 2002). Inhibition of sexual expression by Muslim females, due to the guilt that may overshadow sexual identity, may emerge and persist even after marriage.

Researchers suggested that the overemphasis on physical and bodily definitions of the female identity may lead to disempowerment, depression, and a confused sense of self relative to males (Ollech and McCarthy 1997). Sexuality may also become associated with male behaviour, as religion and culture tend to primarily punish female sexuality, leading to potential feelings of worthless and identity confusion if a Muslim girl assumes what is perceived to be male behaviour. Thus, sexual expression may be equated with forgoing the social norm of female inferiority which defines Muslim girls' national and gender identity.

Islam has been termed a religion of non uniform interpretations and practices (AbuKhalil 1997, Khalidi and Tucker 1996). Interview responses revealed two definitions of religiosity; one is practice-based, while the other centres upon ideology and belief. Participants who selected the latter tended to express less condemning attitudes towards female sexual expression as they pointed to the Islamic values of tolerance and acceptance. Participants who endorsed the former idea, consistent with survey findings, expressed more conservative attitudes towards sexuality, suggesting that diverse Islamic practices may variously impact sexual perceptions.

Interviewees who reported higher levels of religious adherence believed they would experience an absence of guilt and increased likelihood of exploring their sexuality as likely outcomes of being non-Muslim. Interview themes further suggest that the impact of adhering to Islamic practices and beliefs on sexual attitudes was more pronounced when coupled with stronger religious affiliations. All respondents described fears of being rejected or labelled as cultural or religious deviants. Muslim youth struggle to simultaneously fulfil Islamic expectations, social roles, and familial obligations (Abu-Ali and Reisen 1999, Sabbah 1984), and attempts to individuate during adolescence may be viewed as a direct negation of religion. Thus, sexual adolescent ventures that

are beyond the frontiers of institutional religion may warrant an automatic expulsion from the religion and culture, especially for females.

Data illustrated that participants emerging from higher social backgrounds presented a different perspective on gender and sexual attitudes from those embedded in contemporary dominant discourse. It was deduced that social background is a complicated mixture of the material, the discursive, psychological predispositions and sociological dispositions. As such, the ways in which social background as a complex set of interrelated issues is liable to contribute to forming individual attitudes about sexuality.

Results, as hypothesised, confirm that lower and middle social class' participants enjoy a greater sense of belonging and attachment to traditions. They have largely reported more conservative attitudes on sexuality. This finding is consistent with previous research that has demonstrated an inverse relationship between sense of social pride and belonging, and sexual attitudes (Belgrave et al. 2000) and with other identity facets such as gender role attributes (Abu-Ali and Reisen 1999). Analogous to preliminary hypotheses, a sense of a secure social identity was significantly related to sexual attitudes. Interviews suggested that across social layers, the most frequent reason for same group interactions is the attainment of a sense of belonging and acceptance. However, participants belonging to high social class, particularly middle-aged ones identified such attitudes as exceptional among them. Irrespective of gender, the lower the social background, the more important is the establishment of a cultural connection. On the other hand, the higher the social class, the lower is the concern to develop a committed and secure identity. That is, female sexual expression may lead to more negative implications of belonging than for having an established identity. A Moroccan female adolescent may be forced to sever all cultural ties if she expresses her sexual self; a process that may be intolerable for adolescents.

Belgrave et al. (2000) postulated that the social background does establish a sense of belongingness that may serve as a protective function in relation to both sexual attitudes and behaviour. Although this positive function may be applicable to Moroccan adolescents, variance of social backgrounds may have negative implications as well. Adolescents are confronted with patriarchal cultural values and religious interpretations that dictate modesty, shame, and guilt as emblems of female sexuality (AbuKhalil 1997, Mincec 1985 and Timimi 1995). Interviews revealed that with the exception of high social class female participants, girls could not help but show their concern about being judged by members of their cultural group; and also expressed their fear of being misunderstood.

Both Lycée Descartes students who filled out the questionnaire and the sub-sample interviewed reported low levels of social identification emphasised the insignificance of family representation. With regard to the virginity issue, social and familial perceptions of female sexuality and loss of virginity were described by interview participants as primarily negative and intolerant. Thus, to girls, voicing their sexuality may entail rejection and stigmatisation by both family and society. Sexual expression and equality are viewed as western

constructs that, if endorsed by a Moroccan girl, may lead to being labelled as disloyal and to the dispossession of social affiliation. Concurrently, high social background girls fear no rejection due to their liberal adopted views that are usually against mainstream stereotypes and potential misjudgements.

Studies that examined the relationship between sexual attitudes and social affiliation in other samples have found similar conflicts between retaining values of the society and embracing those liberal trends (Espin 1995). These studies further indicated that some girls wish to discard of their hindering traditional roles, but fear the isolation that may be paired with an endorsement of new liberal expectations. This pattern of isolation may have serious implications for girls' psychological and interpersonal functioning. Risky sexual behaviour may also be a likely outcome because secrecy and isolation become the only option for girls who engage in intimate relationships. Girls who seek sexual knowledge and education may also be viewed as protesting and rejecting cultural and religious jurisprudence because this gesture may imply sexual acceptance.

Other researchers such as (Budman et al. 1992) documented the extent to which these familial and cultural expectations placed on Moroccan adolescents are likely to complicate the process of identity development. Contradictory intertwining of Islamic religious and cultural values may add to potential identity conflicts experienced by adolescents. These conflicts may give rise to risky sexual behaviour that is veiled by the epidemic of silence referred to by Foster (2000). Adolescent girls are forced into a conformity (Bauer 1985) that replaces self exploration and expression, in the service of preserving familial and cultural values, and at the risk of impeding identity growth. However, values are more maintained as the social background is low. As the probability of falling pregnant was tackled, most low classes female participants opted for having an abortion and would choose not to tell their closest peers or relatives, while a great majority of Lycée Descartes and I.I.H.E.M. students claimed that the first person they would have recourse to is their mothers.

Conclusion

Study findings suggested the importance of incorporating religiosity for understanding attitudes towards female premarital sexuality in field research. It was deduced that religious behaviour may be more important in explaining sexual behaviour than in explaining sexual attitudes. Religious attitudes were also a powerful predictor of sexual attitudes, even after taking other measures of religiosity into account.

Furthermore, irrespective of gender, the lower the social background is, the more important is the establishment of a cultural connection. On the other hand, the higher the social class, the lower is the concern to develop a committed and secure identity. Besides, Findings indicated that although girls predominantly preferred to have their mothers as sexuality educators, communication was barred by mothers' embarrassment and lack of skills.

However, findings showed that mothers and daughters were more open to sexuality issues than were fathers with both daughters and sons irrespective of age and social background.

Consequently, all that was assumed regarding the association of high social background to non-conservative attitudes towards dating as measured by both the Dating and Sexuality Scales was confirmed; the fact that obviously entails the other way around. Yet, that was mostly corroborated with respect to youngsters only, because though emerging from higher social background most parents demonstrated conservative attitudes towards their daughters' premarital sexual conduct. Thus, the hypothesis that high social background parents would display liberal attitudes towards the dating phenomenon as measured by the Dating Scale was denied. Further, interviews suggested that across social layers, the most frequent reason for same group interactions is the attainment of a sense of belonging and acceptance.

As was hypothesised with regard to religiosity, low religiosity youngsters held open attitudes towards dating as measured by the Dating Scale, while low religiosity middle-aged participants demonstrated conservative posture. In contrast, high religiosity participants' category was unanimous in terms of their extremely conservative attitudes towards both dating and sexuality. All in all, middle-aged participants were not as open as youngsters concerning sexuality as measured by the Sexuality Scale and as previously foreseen.

There are aspects of the sample studied –though it was not random- that deter the generalizability of the current findings. The relatively small size of the sample and the way subjects were recruited must caution against making overall sweeping statements about the larger Moroccan population. All of the young participants surveyed were students attending school or university, which represents a certain majority of the Moroccan youth but does not account for all Moroccan youth of all social and economic classes. While this study focused on certain social backgrounds of the Moroccan society, research needs to also target sexual attitudes of individuals of other social backgrounds and how they obtain information regarding sexuality. It is worth noting that the concerns and issues of unapproachable people must be quite different. The more different the background is, the largely different the attitudes will be. The response rate was also given the number of participants addressed and administered questionnaires. Young participants were selected from four educational institutions. Familial backgrounds and demographics of participants attending other institutions may differ from those attending other types of schools

Another caveat of the study has to do with the sensitive nature of the study. Because of the 'sensitive' items of the Dating and Sexuality Scales, a number of people who were approached to participate in the study were reluctant or refused to participate. Furthermore, it was also noticed that some participants' responses to such items were consistently extreme on one side of the spectrum. Hence, the possibility that participants' responses to such items genuinely reflected their attitudes may be questionable. Admittedly, the items of both scales were crude and straight to the point. Future studies may perhaps

attempt to be more moderate with this aspect. However, it remains to be seen if this is possible, given the sensitive nature of the topic of study that was undertaken.

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