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# RELIGION AND SEXUALITY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS

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## Abstract

In human life, bio-psycho-socio-cultural and theological explanatory factors for the sexuality are determinative factors and have an effect on sexual feelings, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Religion is still seen as an important predictor of thoughts and attitudes about human sexuality. The aim of this research is to assess the perceptions of believers in different religions and faith groups and non-believers who different nationalities around the world, about sexuality which is based on qualitative data. The data have been analyzed by using interpretative phenomenological analysis as a qualitative research technique. Participants' views about sexuality were collected by both face-to-face and web-based surveys with an open-ended questionnaire created by the researcher as a qualitative data collection methodology and strategy. In this exploratory qualitative study, open-ended responses of the participants, have different nationalities such as Japanese, Scottish, Indian, Pakistani, Caucasian, Irish, Arabic Asia, Dutch, Portuguese and French, 13 (72%) male and 5 (28%) female, (n=18) regarding their thoughts and attitudes about sexuality such as dating, marriage, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, virginity, pornography, homosexuality have been analyzed. In conclusion, this qualitative study provides information about the personal perceptions of the participants in small-sample of different types of believers and non-believers regarding the relationship between religion and sexuality. The results indicate that (a) personal religious beliefs have a great effect on thoughts and attitudes about sexuality in different belief systems; (b) Muslim participants have more conservative orientations about sexuality than other covered religious groups and non-believers.

**Keywords:** Psychology of religion, Religious diversity, Sexuality, Feelings of guilt and sinful, Forbidden sexual practices.



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## DİN VE CİNSELLİK: İNANAN VE İNANMAYAN BİREYLERİN ALGILARI ÜZERİNE NİTEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA

İnsan yaşamındaki biyo-psiko-sosyo-kültürel ve teolojik faktörler, cinsellik konusunda belirleyici etmenler oldukları için bireyin cinsel duygu, düşünce, tutum ve davranışları üzerinde oldukça önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Dolayısıyla din hala bireylerin cinsellik hakkındaki düşüncelerini ve tutumlarını belirleyen önemli bir yordayıcı olarak görünmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, nitel veriye dayalı olarak çeşitli ülkelerin milletlerinden farklı dinlere inanan ve inananmayan bireylerin, belirlenen alt temalardan oluşan cinsellik hakkındaki kişisel algılarını analiz etmektir.

Bu çalışmadaki nitel veriler, yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz tekniği kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Katılımcıların deneyimlerini, bilişsel değerlendirmelerini ve anlam oluşturma yöntemlerini incelemeyi amaçlayan adı geçen bu teknik, nitel verileri analiz etmek için sistematik bir yol sunmaktadır. Nitel bir veri toplama metodolojisi ve stratejisi olarak katılımcıların cinsellik hakkındaki kişisel görüşleri, araştırmacı tarafından oluşturulan açık uçlu bir anket kullanarak Birleşik Krallık'ta hem yüz yüze hem de web tabanlı anket uygulaması yoluyla toplanmıştır.

*[Geniş Öz, çalışmanın sonunda yer almaktadır.]*



### Introduction

Religious belief systems play an important role on the thoughts and attitudes of different believers and non-believers about sexuality such as dating, petting, premarital and extramarital sexual experience and virginity, as well as different sexual preferences such as homosexuality, pornography and lesbianism. Therefore, the personal identity, preferences, lifestyles, and interpersonal relationships of believers and non-believers are influenced by these religious belief systems (Reynolds, 1994; Rosenberg & Sutton-Smith, 1972; Wink, 1999).

An individual's sexual attitudes and behaviors are influenced not only by ethnic and socio-demographic backgrounds, but also by religious beliefs and attitudes. In addition, believers and non-believers in the Western and Eastern countries may differ significantly from one another in either prohibiting or permitting various human sexual practices based on religious beliefs. Most empirical studies supported the conclusions that individuals with high levels of religious beliefs developed more conservative attitudes and behaviors about sexuality than those with low levels of religious beliefs or atheism, as well as those with lack of religious practices (see also Anderson & Morgan, 1994; Leiblum et al., 2003). For example: two surveys are conducted by Sneddon & Kremer (1992) on the sample of Northern

Ireland students in 1987 and 1988. In these studies, the survey questionnaires which measure behaviors, knowledge and attitudes of the samples towards sexual issues such as homosexuality, contraception and relationships are completed by a total of 419 female and 201 male subjects. In these studies, the possible effects of religiosity on sexual behavior and attitudes are discussed in the context of Northern Ireland. As a conclusion in the samples of empirical studies, it was found that there is a negative relationship between religiosity and sexual experience. In the mentioned studies, it was found that regular churchgoers showed more concern for sexual attitudes about permissiveness and promiscuity than the irregular churchgoers (pp. 296-311).

Theoretical and/or empirical social and religious researches on the relationship between sexuality and religious diversity are very limited in social sciences and religious studies. In practice, it is generally accepted that most religious traditions, including Eastern religions, see heterosexuality as the sole permissible sexual orientation. In addition, heterosexual attractions that lead to sexual relationships between a man and a woman in marriage are allowed by religious authority and references (see for instance the Quran, 5:5). Furthermore, it is assumed that non-heterosexual intercourses between a man and a man or a woman and a woman as in homosexual, lesbian and bisexual relationships are rejected by various religious traditions (Berliner, 1987; Sherkat, 2002).

The aim of this research is to assess the perceptions of believers in different religions and faith groups, and non-believers who different nationalities Western as well as Eastern countries about sexuality. The research is based on qualitative data. In the context of objectives and the scope of the current study, by looking at diverse belief systems together, the first objective is to present brief descriptions and explanations, and to analyze the minds and behaviors regarding sexuality based on the thoughts and attitudes of the sample of both believers and non-believers.

### **A. Methodology**

The data have been analyzed by using interpretative phenomenological analysis as a qualitative research technique in the study. The technique provides a systematic way of analyzing qualitative data that aims to explore participants' experiences, cognitions and meaning-making (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Therefore, this qualitative research technique that allows people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives and perceptions about a particular

phenomenon or concept and is used to describe how they experience this phenomenon (Rose et al., 1995). Using this methodology, this research aims to explore how believers from diverse religious traditions and non-believers approach issues, especially controversial ones, regarding sexuality such as dating, marriage, pre-marital and extra-marital sex, virginity, pornography, homosexuality.

### **B. Procedures**

Participants' views about sexuality were collected by both face-to-face and web-based surveys with an open-ended questionnaire created by the researcher as a qualitative data collection methodology and strategy. Before the application of the questionnaire, the 'participant consent form' was filled and signed by the participants. Data were collected in 2013 using face-to-face meetings and using the internet in the United Kingdom. The qualitative findings including personal opinions are in the form as follows: "The participants' personal information about... (gender, age, socio-economic status, education level, marital status, occupation, ethnicity/nationality, religious affiliations, importance of religion and frequency level of worship/prayer/ritual in the lives and perceptions of subjective religiosity)" for each subject (see appendix: Questionnaire Form: Part One-Personal Information).

In this exploratory qualitative study, open-ended responses of the participants (n=18) regarding their perceptions based on thoughts and attitudes about sexuality, such as dating, sex before and outside marriage, virginity, homosexuality and lesbianism, pornography, etc., have been analyzed. Therefore, the main body of the questionnaire form contains nine open-ended questions about the participant's thoughts about religiosity and sexual issues.

The research attempts to provide a number of answers to the perceptions of the participants regarding following questions: (i)-Why should people get married? (ii)-What do you think about dating and sexual experience before the marriage? (iii)-How important is sexuality within a marriage? (iv)-What do you think about feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage? (v)-Do you agree with the idea that people should have their first sexual experience when after they get married? Why? (vi)-To what extent can religion and/or society interfere with individuals' sexual life? Why? (vii)-How important is virginity until marriage? Why? (viii)-What is your point of view regarding different sexual preferences, such as homosexuality and lesbianism? (ix)-What do you think about pornography?

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(see also appendix: Questionnaire Form: Part Two-Religion & Sexuality).

### C. Participants

In the study, socio-demographic characteristics of the participants were described and limited in (a) gender (b) age, (c) socio-economic status, (d) education level, (e) marital status, (f) occupation, (g) ethnicity. According to the framework, socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are as follows: (a) Gender: In terms of participants' gender 13 (72%) were male and 5 (28%) were female; (b) Age: Participants' mean age was 38.5 years (range 27-50); (c) Socio-economic status: Regarding the perceptions of subjective socio-economic status of the participants, two (11%) were upper class, ten (56%) were middle class, four (22%) were lower class, and two (11%) other (lowest) situations; (d) Education level: In terms of their educational levels, one (5%) had a primary degree or diploma-[primary school], two (11%) had secondary degrees-[high school], five (28%) had higher qualifications-[college or university], ten (56%) had post-graduate levels-[master or doctorate]; (e) Marital status: Turning to marital status, ten (56%) were married, three (17%) were never married, one (5%) was separated, four (22%) were divorced; (f) Occupation: Concerning the subjective occupations of the participants, one (6%) was an accountant, six (33%) were instructors, two (11%) were therapists, and the remaining four (22%) participants, each individually, had different jobs [pastor, tutor, counselor, economist]; five participants (28%) were postgraduate students; (g) Nationality: Five (28%) were Americans, three (17%) were British citizens; and the remaining ten (55%) participants, each individually, have

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	13	72
	Female	5	28
	<b>Total</b>	18	100
<b>Age</b>	20-30 years old	5	28
	31-40 years old	7	39
	41-50 years old	6	33
	<b>Total</b>	18	100
<b>Socio-economic status</b>	Upper class	2	11
	Middle class	10	56
	Lower class	4	22
	Other (lowest)	2	11
	<b>Total</b>	18	100

<b>Education level</b>	Primary	1	5
	Secondary	2	11
	Higher	5	28
	Post-Graduate	10	56
	<b>Total</b>	18	100
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	10	56
	Never married	3	17
	Separated	1	5
	Divorced	4	22
	<b>Total</b>	18	100
<b>Occupation</b>	Accountant	1	6
	Instructor	6	33
	Student-PG	5	28
	Therapist	2	11
	Pastor	1	6
	Tutor	1	6
	Counselor	1	5
	Economist	1	5
	<b>Total</b>	18	100
<b>Ethnicity/Nationality</b>	American	5	28
	British	3	17
	Japanese	1	5
	Scottish	1	5
	Indian	1	5
	Pakistani	1	5
	Caucasian	1	5
	Irish	1	6
	Arabic Asia	1	6
	Dutch	1	6
	Portuguese	1	6
	French	1	6
	<b>Total</b>	18	100

different nationalities (Japanese, Scottish, Indian, Pakistani, Caucasian, Irish, Arabic Asia, Dutch, Portuguese and French), as seen in Table 1.

In addition, religious affiliations of the participants were described by the researcher in the work based on seven types of religious affiliations. According to these findings, religious affiliations of the participants are as

follows:

**Table 2:** Religious affiliations of the participants

<b>Religious affiliations</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Protestant Christian	3	17
Roman Catholic Christian	2	11
Evangelical Christian	1	5
Sunni Muslim	6	33
Shia Muslim	1	6
Hindu	1	6
Atheist	4	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of participants' current religious affiliations, 3 (17%) described themselves as Protestant Christian, 2 (11%) as Roman Catholic Christian. One participant (5%) described himself as Evangelical Christian, while six (33%) as Sunni Muslim. One (6%) felt that being Shia Muslim was currently very important to him. 1 (6%) defined himself as associated with Hindu traditions and 4 (22%) described themselves as atheist, as seen in Table 2.

Additionally, the numbers of clusters in data about the importance of religion and the frequency level of worship/prayer/ritual in their lives have also been obtained from the participants in the qualitative research. According to these findings, firstly, the importance of religion in the lives of the participants is as follows: The responses of the participants to the question titled "How important is religion in your day-to-day life?" are shown in Table 3. Seven participants (39%) attribute more importance to religion than the other participants who declared it unimportant (6%) and very unimportant (17%) in their lives. It has become obvious that most of the participants generally found religion to be an important aspect in their lives.

Secondly, the frequency level of worship/prayer/ritual in the lives of the participants is as follows: Of the 18 participants, 2 (11%) and 7 (39%) identified themselves as religious people (frequency level = 'very often' and 'often'). Two (11%) described themselves as sometimes, three (17%) as rarely, and four (22%) as never worshippers.

**Table 3:** Importance of religion and frequency level of worship/prayer/ritual in the lives of the participants

<i>Importance of religion</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Very important	7	39
Important	4	22
Somewhat important	2	11
Not very important	1	5
Unimportant	1	6
Very unimportant	3	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Frequency level of worships</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Very often	2	11
Often	7	39
Sometimes	2	11
Rarely	3	17
Never	4	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

On the other hand, some information about perceptions of subjective religiosity of the participants from the qualitative data has been obtained in the study. For this purpose, a question entitled “How would you describe your religious beliefs/orientation?” was asked to them. Perceptions of subjective religiosity of the participants are as follows:

**Table 4:** Perceptions of subjective religiosity of the participants

<i>Perceptions of subjective religiosity</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
I believe in a religion and its foundations/belief system	4	22
I believe in a religion and perform its worships/prayers/rituals	5	28
I just believe in God	3	17
I believe in a religion, but have doubts on some religious issues	1	5
I am only interested in religion out of curiosity	1	6
I am an atheist/non-believer	4	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>



The responses of the participants to the above question are shown in Table 4. Of the 18 participants, 4 (22%) described themselves as believers who believe in a religion and its foundations/belief system while 1 (6%) participant stated that s/he is only interested in religion out of curiosity. 3 participants (17%) stated that they just believe in God while 4 (22%) described themselves as atheist / non-believers who have no religious beliefs, especially one who does not follow a particular religion. Additionally, 5 (28%) said they believe in a religion and perform its worships/prayers/rituals while 1 (5%) participant stated that s/he believes in a religion, but has doubts about some religious issues according to these findings (see also appendix: Questionnaire Form-Part One = Personal Information—[Socio-demographic characteristics: Questions between 1 and 7 & Religious Affiliations: Questions 8 & 11]).

#### **D. Findings**

This study proposes to reveal the importance and place of religious diversity within sexuality based on the small-sample of different types of believers and non-believers who different nationalities around the world. Sub-qualitative themes of this study is to limited in scope to (i) getting married, (ii) dating and sexual experience before marriage, (iii) importance of sexuality in marriage, (iv) feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage, (v) having first sexual experience after getting married, (vi) interfering with individuals' sexual life by a religion and/or society, (vii) importance of virginity until marriage, (viii) thoughts about homosexual preferences and (ix) pornography. For this purpose, the most important findings were obtained from this research about participants' perceptions on aforementioned sexual issues depends on personal religious beliefs.

##### **1. Getting Married**

The responses of the participants about personal reasons for getting married are seen in Table 5. According to these sub-themes based on the qualitative data of the 18 (39%) participants' reasons to get married, 9 (23%) indicated having a family and baby / child while 8 (21%) participants stated that this is the right way to have sex / sexual needs. 7 participants (18%) stated that they want to get married for close relationships / companionship while 5 (13%) wanted to get married for love. In addition, 6 participants (15%) want to get married for religious obligation / requirements while 2 (5%) participants stated that they want to get married for a comfortable life.

**Table 5:** Participants' personal reasons for getting married

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) Having a family and baby / child	9	23
(b) Right way to have sex / sexual needs	8	21
(c) For close relationships / companionship	7	18
(d) Love	5	13
(e) For religious obligation / requirements	6	15
(f) For a comfortable life	2	5
(/) Others	2	5
<b>Total</b>	39	100

The participants' personal assessments association with the reasons for getting married can be exemplified as follows:

[a, b, c, d]–“Companionship, love, friendship, children, sexuality.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, b, c]–“Marriage is a social institution. Establishing a family, the desire for having children and meeting individual sexual desires through legitimate ways are the most important reasons for it.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a]–“To have a family and a baby in a religious and regular way.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]–“My opinion is that people should get married if they want to make that commitment to each other, not out of religious obligation.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [a, b, e]–“To get a family and not look in the wrong place to get sex; only do it with his wife so the children will know who their fathers and mothers are.” (Male, 30 years old, Muslim, Saudi Arabian); [c, d, e]–“In my opinion, people should get married if they wish to, in order to show their sincerity and commitment to their partner and to show loyalty. The fact is that nowadays culture, especially the western culture where there is a trend towards people being happy enough to have a boyfriend/girlfriend but not always commit to a marriage, does in my opinion call into question their commitment to each other, like it's ok to spend time with somebody but not to marry them.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [b, c, d, e]–“I believe God created us and designed us to desire and need relationship with the opposite sex. I believe that God has created men and women as equals in His sight, but as different. When a man and woman marry it is wonderful to see how we complement each other.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [e, f]–“Family bond/unity in the eyes of God... I would have said

for the family unity in God's eyes. But I have been informed that the government introduced marriage to trace the location of people. That's my opinion." (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [f]–"If it simplifies life for them within a legal or social framework." (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [/]–"I think that people don't need to get married." (Male, 39 years old, Atheist, Japanese); [a, d]–"People should get married to have a family for whom one can live passionately." (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [c, d, e]–"Love, companionship, Biblical purposes." (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [f]–"For tax purposes." (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [a, b, f]–"For children, living a comfortable life and some other needs." (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, b, e]–"People should get married, because this is a very important humanistic need for them. In my belief, a person who gets married, he/she perfects his faith." (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–"People should just get married for sex." (Male, 44 years old, Atheist, Turkish); [d]–"For love." (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b, c]–"For sexual needs and close relationships." (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

According to the marital results, however, it has become obvious that the most important personal reasons of the participants for getting married are to have a family and children (23%); 'the right way to have sex / sexual needs' (21%) and 'for close relationships / companionship' (18%).

## 2. Dating and sexual experience before marriage

**Table 6:** Participants' personal opinions about dating and sexual experience before marriage

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) Okay to date, but no sexual experience	7	25
(b) Prelude to getting married	5	18
(c) To find the right person	5	18
(d) It is not good	2	7
(e) Dating is necessary	4	14
(f) It is not allowed by religion	2	7
(g) Both dating and sexuality are possible	2	7
(/) Others	1	4
<b>Total</b>	28	100

As shown in Table 6, among the participants' current personal

opinions about dating and sexual experience before marriage, seven participants (25%) stated that it is okay to date, but it should be done without any sexual experience, while 5 participants (18%) described dating as a possible mean to getting married and gaining a sexual experience before marriage. Of the 28 participants, 2 (7%) stated that it is not good, while four participants (14%) stated that dating is necessary before marriage. Additionally, two participants (7%) defined that it is not allowed by religion, while two participants (7%) pointed out that both dating and sexuality are possible before marriage.

The participants' personal thoughts on dating and sexual experience before marriage can be exemplified as follows:

[d]–“I think that it is not good.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, b, c, e]–“It is necessary to know your partner closely. But I am against sexual experiences before marriage.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“It is possible if they intent to get married.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c, e]–“Sometimes it’s stressful to find the right person if marriage is your ultimate goal; some people just want to date and not get married.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [a, b]–“Traditionally, it is possible but without sex before marriage.” (Male, 30 years old, Muslim, Saudi Arabian); [b, c, e]–“I think that dating and getting to know a potential spouse before deciding to get married is important, because marriage is a potentially lifelong decision and, therefore, one has to get to know and appreciate a partner’s likes, dislikes, beliefs and morals before committing to a marriage. If one does not know or appreciate these, then this can have a very bad effect on any relationship.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [b, c, e]–“I think it is wise to get to know a person before getting married. I don’t think it is wise or healthy to “date” lots of different people before choosing one person to marry, as this causes emotional upheaval in our lives.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [a, b, c, d, e]–“Fine, you have to get to know someone before you share all of your life with them....” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [a, b, c, e]–“I think it is a good idea. However, sex is not a necessity, but dating is when a couple gets to know each other and decides if they actually want to grow old together.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [a, c, e]–“Dating will help to develop stronger relationship, but I’m not too sure about sex.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [a, e]–“Dating is necessary. Sex is often disregarded as an act meant to be for husband and wife, but it happens and I’m not

judgmental of others for their actions.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [f]–“It is not allowed by religion.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, f]–“Dating may be, but it should continue according to religious and moral principles and it should not takes a long time. Sex should not be before marriage.” (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [g]–“Everything is okay.” (Male, 44 years old, Atheist, Turkish); [d]–“It is not good.” (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [g]–“I believe it is a normal sexual act and it is necessary.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

The majority of participants state that dating is acceptable, but not sexual experience (25%). Some of the participants describe that both dating and sexuality are acceptable (7%). And several participants state that dating is necessary to get married (18%), as well as to find the right person (18%).

### 3. The importance of sexuality in marriage

**Table 7:** Importance of sexuality in marriage

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) Very important for human needs	14	44
(b) A wonderful expression of love	5	16
(c) Is necessary to live in a family	6	19
(d) Sexuality is not important	3	9
(e) More important to men than to women	2	6
(f) Essential element for a successful marriage	1	3
(/) Others	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

The responses of the participants about the importance of sexuality in marriage are seen in Table 7. According to these findings, of the 32 participants, 14 (44%) described that sexuality is very important for human needs, while 5 (16%) participants stated that it is a wonderful expression of love in a marriage. Six participants (19%) stated that sexuality is necessary to live in a family, while three participants (9%) described it as an unimportant part of marriage. Additionally, 2 participants (6%) emphasized that it is more important for men than for women, while one (3%) participant stated that it is the essential element for a successful marriage.

The participants' personal assessments regarding the importance of

sexuality in marriage can be exemplified as follows:

[a, c]–“It is very important.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, b, c]–“It is really important. Especially for the maintenance of marriage and good relations between husband and wife.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, d]–“It is important but it is not everything.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, c]–“It is very important. I think if you are going to be with one person for the rest of your life, you should have that compatibility.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [f]–“I think it is important as it can be one of the few things that keep a couple together. This is because loyalty and sexuality are essential elements amongst others for a successful marriage. This is why I attach importance to sexuality in a marriage.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [a, b, c]–“It is very important and God created sex as a good thing to be enjoyed within a marriage. Sex is a wonderful expression of love; in a marriage it deepens the intimacy between husband and wife.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [e]–“It is important if both partners are happy... It’s more important for men than for women, so 90 % for men and 40 % for women.” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [a, d]–“It is very important. It is a communication, not just a method of male-directed pleasure and copulation.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [c]–“It makes the bonds strong.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [a]–“It’s very important - it keeps the emotional and mental state of the relationship strong, as well as the physical.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [f]–“It is very important.” (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [a, d]–“Sexuality is not everything, but I think that it is highly important. Couples can satisfy each other sexually.” (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a]–“I think it is very important for human needs and pleasure and reproduction.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

According to some of the results about the importance of sexuality in marriage, one of the most obvious facts is to experience sexuality in marriage for human needs (44%). Other most personal importance of sexuality is its necessity to live in a family (19%), and it is more important to men than to women (6%).

#### **4. Feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage**

In terms of participants’ current personal opinions about feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage, 5 participants (24%) stated that

it is quite an appropriate feeling, while five other participants (24%) described that it is a risky sexual behavior. Of the 21 participants, 1 (5%) stated that s/he never experienced it, while two participants (9%) emphasized that they have no idea about feelings of guilt and sin after sex outside of marriage. In addition, 6 participants (7%) mentioned that it is religiously prohibited, while two participants (9%) pointed out the different thoughts related to the subject unlike the above opinions, shown in Table 8.

**Table 8** Participants' personal opinions about feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) It is quite normal/appropriate feeling	5	24
(b) I did not experience it	1	5
(c) I have no idea	2	9
(d) A risky sexual behavior	5	24
(e) Religious prohibition	6	29
(/) Others	2	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants' personal thoughts on feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage can be exemplified as follows:

[c]–“I have no idea.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a]–“Feeling guilty or sinful after sex outside marriage is quite normal. Because this is an act of betrayal, and anyone who commits this act should feel guilty or sinful. The reverse is abnormal.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“I did not experience it, so I don't know.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [d, e]–“It is very bad and unhealthy. It will affect his wife when he is married.” (Male, 30 years old, Muslim, Saudi Arabian); [d]–“My feelings regarding sex outside marriage is that it is risky due to the fact that committing to a sexual relationship outside marriage is easier than committing to a marriage partner. The fact that one is married to their husband/wife traditionally means loyalty to that marriage partner. I feel that in western society it is too easy to pick up a boyfriend/girlfriend without much regard for the future or the particular direction of the relationship.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [d, e]–“I believe sex is like a fire. When fire is used properly, it gives wonderful warmth and comfort. However, if fire is allowed to

go anywhere, it can cause great damage. I believe sex within marriage is a wonderful thing. I believe sex outside of marriage ultimately causes damage to people and is also a sin before God.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [e]–“I think that you should do, but I was brought up Catholic and those are my beliefs.” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [d]–“If you don’t get caught and it can’t harm your marriage, it’s a useless emotion. However, one should consider the reasons for marriage in the first place.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [a]–“People must think about the guilt before sex outside marriage.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [/]–“It is likely warranted but you can’t dwell on the past. If there are negative thoughts after the act- don’t do it again.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [a]–“It is an appropriate feeling.” (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [e]–“It is not allowed in Islam.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, e]–“I agree with this idea, because my belief, my culture, my morality thought, and my soul tell me this idea is true in every respect. I think that this is a very important experience and this special experience should be lived between wife and husband.” (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]–“I have no idea about the situation.” (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [/]–“Such feelings are not necessary for the sexual life because every sexual act should be done every time.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

The majority of participants emphasize that sex outside of marriage is not allowed by Abrahamic religions, and there is a religious prohibition in place (29%). A number of the participants describe that it is quite a normal/appropriate feeling to have (24%). Other participants state that it is a risky sexual behavior during the family life (24%), some have no idea/opinion (9%) about feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage.

### **5. Having first sexual experience after getting married**

The responses of the participants about having first sexual experience after getting married and their reasons are seen in Table 9. According to these sub-themes based on the qualitative data, of the 18 participants, 10 (53%) described that the first sexual experience should be in marriage, while 1 (5%) participant stated that it is a nostalgic thought in the modern world<sup>3</sup> participants (16%) stated that people should have sex every/right time, while 2 (10%) described that it is not necessary. In addition, one participant



(5%) remarked that it is a sin because of religious reasons, while 2 (11%) participants commented differently on the first sexual experience after getting married.

**Table 9:** Participants' personal opinions about having first sexual experience after getting married and their reasons

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) The first experience should be in marriage	10	53
(b) A nostalgic thought in the modern world	1	5
(c) It is sinful	1	5
(d) People should have sex every/right time	3	16
(e) It is not necessary	2	10
(/) Others	2	11
<b>Total</b>	19	100

*Reasons for having first sexual experience after getting married*

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) Healthy relationship	5	23
(b) Strong commitment	6	27
(c) Special and personal act	4	18
(d) Law of God	2	9
(e) Physical and mental health	4	18
(/) Others	1	5
<b>Total</b>	22	100

As for the reasons for having first sexual experience when getting married, five participants (23%) stated that it is necessary for healthy relationship, while 6 participants (27%) described that it should be experienced for a strong commitment (between the married couple). Of the 22 participants, 4 (18%) stated that it is a special and personal act, while two participants (9%) stated that it is a law of God. Additionally, four participants (18%) defined that it is necessary for physical and mental health, while one participant (5%) commented that people should have sex every time, as another category, shown in Table 9.

The participants' personal assessments associated with having first sexual experience after getting married and their reasons can be exemplified

as follows:

[a; r=a, b]–“I do believe that if men/women experience “firsts” together, the marital bond between the two will be stronger. On the other, if one of the partners had his/her first sexual experience before marriage, there appears the possibility that s/he might one day remember that experience in a positive or negative way, which might affect the marital relations negatively.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c; r=d]–“First sexual intercourse should be experience after getting married because of religious reasons.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [/; r=c]–“I think it’s based on a person’s personal preference, but personally I think it’s better to give that part of yourself to the person you love.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [a; r=a, b, c]–“The sexual experience should be something people look forward to when they get married....It also means that you are saving yourself for your marriage partner, for the happiness and challenges that are attached to marriage.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [a; r= a, b, e]–“Love without commitment is shallow. Love with commitment is healthy. When you keep sex for marriage it shows honor and commitment to the one you love.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [a; r= a, d]–“Yes! ... It’s God’s law, that’s it!...” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [d; r=e]–“People should have sex when they feel it’s the right time for them. Remember, sex is more than just for reproduction. It’s also for pleasure and pleasure is a natural human pursuit.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [a; r=c]–“The experience is a special thing. Because of this it must be done by someone special with whom we decide to live our complete life.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [a; r=c]–“Yes- keeps it a special and personal act.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [e; r=b]–“It is not necessary, but it’s a good idea to uphold.” (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [a; r=e]–“It is suitable for physical and mental health.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [d; r=/]–“I don’t agree with the idea. People should have sex every time.” (Male, 44 years old, Atheist, Turkish); [c; r=d]–“It is a sin.” (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b; r=e]–“This is a nostalgic thought in the modern world.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

According to the results, it has become obvious that the most important personal reasons of the participants for having first sexual experience after getting married are spouses’ strong commitment to each other (27%) and healthy relationship (23%). Furthermore, ‘special and

personal act' and 'physical and mental health' reasons (18%) have subsequently followed by the same percentage.

### 6. Interfering with individuals' sexual life by a religion and/or society

**Table 10:** Interfering with individuals' sexual life by a religion and/or society

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) Religion is more effective than society	5	19
(b) For auto-control mechanism	5	19
(c) Religion always can/must interfere	6	22
(d) They should not interfere	4	15
(e) For guidance and direction	5	19
(/) Others	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of participants' current personal comments about interfering with individuals' sexual life by religion and/or society, five participants (19%) stated that religion is more effective than society, other 5 participants (19%) described that the religion and/or society is necessary for an auto-control mechanism regarding sensitive issues, such as sexuality. Of the 27 participants, 6 (22%) stated that religion always can/must interfere, while four participants (15%) stated that they should not interfere in human sexuality. Additionally, five participants (19%) defined that they are necessary for guidance and direction in order to control human needs, while two participants (6%) pointed out the different explanations for the interfering, as shown in Table 10.

The participants' personal thoughts on interfering with individuals' sexual life by religion and/or society can be exemplified as follows:

[d]–“They should not interfere in individuals' sexual life.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b, c, e]–“I think every religion puts limits on sexual life. No religion recognizes unlimited sexual freedom. Therefore, I believe in the regulatory role of the religion in this sense. Otherwise, secular laws are not sufficient to regulate/control or limit the sexual desires of individuals. Society can have an auto-control mechanism in this regard.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“Religion can always interfere in individuals' sexual life.” (Male, 32

years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b, c, e]–“In my opinion, any marriage is sacred and sex should be viewed as a commitment of the two persons in the privacy of a marriage. However, I do believe that when guidance and direction is required for those in marriages, society, through public attitudes, and religion can offer solutions to issues and problems when and where they may occur.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [a, c]–“I believe people were created by God and must give an account to God, so I think that religion should influence our sex life. Society’s influence isn’t always good.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [/]–“That is a very wide scope to answer... there could be many if I think about it.... way too much to put in...” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [a, b]–“If a person has a religion, it can interfere to a great extent. Within society, social rules and norms can do the same if the individual allows it to happen. The same goes for religion.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [d]–“Not really... it's about the values they learn not only from family but the whole environment which also includes friends from other religions.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [a]–“Religion can cause the negative thoughts of sex outside of marriage. Society thinks it's ok to be sexually active with multiple partners with or without marriage. Actually, society doesn't place an importance on marriage at all.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [/]–“If someone wants to choose sterilization for personal reasons, it should be okay.” (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [c]–“Religion interferes in individuals’ everything” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“Yes, they can. Both religion and society determine the rules and principles which are useful and beneficial for people. So, this is a natural right for religion and society. Sexual life should not be continued hedonistically.” (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [d]–“They should not interfere in human sexual life.” (Male, 44 years old, Atheist, Turkish); [d]–“It depends on situation. But I think any religion or thought must not interfere in human sexual life, because sexual feelings and acts are very personal not common.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

The majority of participants state that religion always can/must interfere in individuals’ sexual life (22%). A number of the participants disagrees, indicating that religion should not interfere (15%). Several participants state that religion is more effective than society (19%) in terms of influence, as well as an auto-control mechanism (19%) regarding

interfering with individuals' sexual life.

### 7. Importance of virginity until marriage

The responses of the participants about the importance of virginity until marriage are seen in Table 11. According to these sub-themes based on the findings, of the 18 participants, 7 (35%) answered that it is very important in sexual life, while 6 (30%) participants stated that it is important. Two participants (10%) replied that it is not very important, and five participants (25%) described that the virginity is unimportant until marriage.

**Table 11:** Importance of virginity until marriage and their reasons

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
(a) Very important	7	35
(b) Important	6	30
(c) Not important	2	10
(d) Unimportant	5	25
<b>Total</b>	20	100

*Reasons for the virginity until marriage*

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
(a) It is a gift for each other	5	25
(b) Being loyal to each other	6	30
(c) It is contrary to human nature	2	10
(d) Experienced people have better sex	3	15
(e) It's very rare nowadays	3	15
(/) Others	1	5
<b>Total</b>	20	100

As for the reasons for the virginity until marriage, five participants (25%) emphasized that it is a gift for their partner, while 6 participants (30%) described that it is to show loyalty to each other. Of the 20 participants, 2 (10%) stated that virginity is contrary to human nature, while three participants (15%) stated that experienced people have better sex. Moreover, three participants (15%) defined that virginity is very rare nowadays, as shown in Table 11.

The participants' personal assessments associated with the importance of virginity until marriage and their reasons can be exemplified as follows:

[a]–“The woman's virginity is very important.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“I consider it as important. Although not obligatory, virgin women are most preferable for me.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [r=a]–“As I look back, it might have been better if I waited to give my virginity to my husband, but it wasn't that important.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [r=b]–“To keep virginity is healthy and important to get a good relationship with her husband.” (Male, 30 years old, Muslim, Saudi Arabian); [a; r= a, b]–“In my opinion, virginity until marriage is extremely important because of the fact that both parties save themselves for each other until marriage. Virginity is also important so that the partners to the marriage do not bring diseases to the sanctity of the marriage and are loyal to each other.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [a; r= a]–“It is very important. It's a gift which you can only give once; therefore, people should reserve it for the person they marry.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [d]–“Not at all important.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [a]–“It is extremely important.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [r=e]–“Virginity is ideal but not likely in today's world.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [b; r=e]–“It is important, but probably pretty rare nowadays.” (Female, 43 years old, Christian, Alaskan); [d; r=c]–“I think that they are diseased individuals. I believe that these preferences are against nature of human.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]–“It is not an important thing.” (Male, 44 years old, Atheist, Turkish); [d; r=d]–“It does not matter. On the contrary, people who have sexual experience have better sex than virgin girl.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

According to the results regarding the importance of virginity until marriage and their reasons, one of the most common one is loyalty among marriage partners (30%). Other reason is that virginity is a gift to their spouses (25%), while others stated that virginity is contrary to human nature in the modern world (10%).

### **8. Thoughts about homosexual preferences**

In terms of participants' current personal opinions about homosexual preferences, 10 participants (42%) stated that they are not acceptable, while four participants (17%) described that they are wrong/sin in the eyes of God.

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Of the 24 participants, 4 (17%) stated that people should not be judged for their sexual preferences, while three participants (12%) emphasized that all sexual preferences should be respected. In addition, 2 participants (8%) defined homosexual preferences as perversions, while one participant (4%) pointed out different thoughts related to the subject, as shown in Table 12.

**Table 12:** Participants' personal opinions about homosexual preferences

<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
(a) They are not acceptable	10	42
(b) They are wrong/sin in the eyes of God	4	17
(c) They should not be judged	4	17
(d) They should be respected	3	12
(e) They are perversions	2	8
(/) Others	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants' personal thoughts on homosexual preferences can be exemplified as follows:

[e]-“They are perversions.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a]-“I do not accept such sexual preferences. Hetero-sexuality should be the only form of sexual life. The remaining forms should be forbidden.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a]-“I am definitely against other sexual preferences.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]-“As long as they don't infringe on me, I don't care what they do.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [b]-“I think it is not allowed in any religion and it opposes the system of life.” (Male, 30 years old, Muslim, Saudi Arabian); [a, b, e]-“Being a Muslim, personally, other sexual preferences such as homosexuality and lesbianism do not agree with me as I believe that a marriage can only be between a man and a woman. So, any other sexual preference such as homosexuality is not an appropriate substitute for a marriage between a man and a woman. Homosexuality and lesbianism can be the catalyst for the destruction of generations and civilizations, because such sexual preferences are not natural and spread diseases such as HIV, AIDS. Therefore, such sexual preference should not exist and be encouraged in any society.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [d, e]-“God has created us as men and women to enjoy sex

in marriage. I believe for a man to have sex with a man or for a woman to have sex with a woman is a distortion of God's design." (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [b, c]—"I am not here to judge others, but it is wrong in the eyes of God, and that's whom I look up to." (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [d]—"I have no views. People are people. They are judged on their good and bad actions, not by whom they love." (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [/]—"It should not be an addiction." (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [a, c]—"I don't agree with it from a Christian perspective or from an evolutionary standpoint but also, as a Christian, I'm not going to judge homosexuals or lesbians." (Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); [d]—"It's a personal choice--sometimes not even a choice for the individual, as they seem to be born homosexual/lesbian." (Female, 43 years old, Christian, American); [b]—"It is not allowed by religion." (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, e]—"I think that they are diseased individuals. I believe that these preferences are against human nature." (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]—"They are sins." (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [d]—"People's sexual orientation should be respected." (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

The majority of participants emphasize that homosexual preferences are not acceptable (42%). A number of the participants describe that they are wrong/sin in the eyes of God (17%), and the same number of participants stated that they should not be judged by people of different beliefs (17%). However, a significant number of participants states that there should be respect for them (12%). And 2 participants (8%) view this as perversions.

### 9. Thoughts about pornography

**Table 13:** Participants' personal opinions about the pornography

<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
(a) It is very degrading to women	5	14
(b) It is harmful and prohibited by religion	14	40
(c) It is a commercial product	6	17
(d) It is not a real sexual act	3	9
(e) It can be necessary for education	5	14
(/) Others	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>



The responses of the participants about personal opinions about pornography are seen in Table 13. According to these sub-themes based on the qualitative data, of the 35 participants, 5 (14%) described that it is very degrading to women, while 14 (40%) participants stated that it is harmful and prohibited by religion. 6 participants (17%) stated that pornography is a commercial product, while 3 (9%) described that it is not a real sexual act. In addition, 5 participants (14%) said that it can be necessary for education, while 2 (6%) participants explained different thoughts related to the subject unlike the above opinions.

The participants' personal assessments associated with pornography can be exemplified as follows:

[b]–“It is a perversion.” (Male, 50 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [e]–“It depends on what we mean by pornography. If you mean a young teenager reading/watching pornographic magazines/film, I would say that this can be tolerable within the framework of puberty. But if you mean, for example, group sex by pornography, I would not tolerate this. Such acts would spoil the society.” (Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“It is harmful and prohibited by religion.” (Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [a, d]–“Some of it is artistic, some of it is disgusting.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, American); [c, d]–“I think pornography exists only for financial and entertainment reasons. The reason why pornography exists is because the makers and distributors of pornography, be it in photos, electronic form such as internet, DVD’s, videos and so on, wish to profit from a person’s desire to see sexual images not realizing its bad effects and ramifications upon a society and viewers.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani); [a, b]–“I believe our desires should be for our spouse. Pornography makes people view women as objects of desire rather than as human beings, this is very degrading.” (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British); [a, b, c]–“It should be banned. That’s why men and boys become perverted and want more and probably why most have extramarital affairs. In pornography, it is all on display all of the time, showing off a woman’s body like it is meat for men. Even though women participate in pornography out of necessity, it doesn’t make it right. It is God’s creation and is meant to be modestly covered for all but her husband.” (Female, 41 years old, Christian, Irish); [d]–“I don't like to see people being abused, but pornography isn't real sex. The only problem it has is that it can twist the minds of people who have never experienced sex.” (Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish); [/]–“At times it's

important.” (Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian); [b, c]–“It is a grave sin and that is (unfortunately) very common. It also creates human sex trafficking all over the world, which is very detrimental for all involved.” (Female, 27 years old, Christian, British); [b]–“It is not allowed by religion.” (Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b, e]–“Basically, it is very harmful and useless but people should get sexuality education; it can be used for education. They should learn their sexual characteristics. This is very important for satisfied sexual life.” (Male, 29 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [b]–“It is sinful.” (Male, 33 years old, Muslim, Turkish); [c]–“Pornography is a commercial product around world. Some like it, some hate it. This is a case about people's sexual fantasies and enjoyment.” (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American).

According to the results on views on pornography, the most common personal opinions of the participants is that pornography is harmful and prohibited by religion (40%); ‘it is a commercial product’ (17%); ‘it is very degrading to women’ (14%); ‘it can be necessary for education’ (14%). For the quantitative data see also appendix: Questionnaire Form-Part Two = Religiosity & Sexuality: Questions between 1 and 9.

### **E. Discussion**

In religious studies and human sciences, both subjects of sexuality and religion are sensitive areas. Although the effect of religion on sexuality is known, empirical studies have also examined the relationship between different belief systems and most sexual behaviors in the context of the effects of religious diversity on sexuality. However, some empirical results regarding the effects of different belief systems on sexual behavior seem to be contradictory. For example, a study by Bayer (1977) found that Jewish students had more sexual experience than Christian students. On the other hand, another study by Lottes & Kuriloff (1994) found no difference in the frequency of sexual experience between Jews and Christians. Finally, another field study by Pluhar et al. (1998) found that Jewish students had less sexual experience than Christian students (Le Gall et al., 2002).

Several recent studies have explored the role of different beliefs in the context of religious diversity on sexual thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. For example, Lefkowitz et al. (2004), the relationship between religiosity that emerged in adulthood, sexual attitudes, and behaviors were detected. In this study, besides the religiousness of the participants, sexual behaviors such as ‘conservative attitudes towards sexuality and beliefs about condoms’ and

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sexual behaviors such as 'avoidance of sexuality, age of onset, lifetime partners, condom use' were examined. According to the empirical results, significant relationships were found between religiosity and sexuality. Many aspects of religiosity have been associated with general sexual attitudes (Sümer, 2015). Moreover, another empirical study investigating the relationship between religiosity and sexuality showed significant differences between older believers and young non-believers regarding sexual thoughts and attitudes. Therefore, it was found that elderly believers in sexuality had less permissive and more conservative attitudes than young non-believers (Le Gall et al., 2002).

Using qualitative methodology, this study describes different believers and non-believers' responses regarding their thoughts and attitudes about (i) reasons for getting married, (ii) dating and sexual experience before marriage, (iii) importance of sexuality in marriage, (iv) feeling guilty after sex outside of marriage, (v) reasons for having first sexual experience when getting married, (vi) interference with individuals' sexual life by religion and/or society, (vii) importance of virginity until marriage, (viii) different sexual preferences/orientations, and (ix) pornography.

(i)-*Reasons for getting married*: The general results obtained from the qualitative and quantitative studies on marriage show that belief systems play important roles in the reasons for getting married (e.g. Booth et al., 1995; Call & Heaton, 1997; D'antonio, 1983). According to this qualitative study, each of the participants had personal reasons for getting married. For example, it was found that the main reason for the marriage of most Muslim participants was 'having family and children' as a result of their religious beliefs (e.g., Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish). Moreover, in the context of different types of believers, a group of Christian participants stated their personal reasons for marriage as 'for love, companionship, Biblical purposes, etc.' (e.g., Female, 27 years old, Christian, Caucasian); cf. (Searle, 2005; D. W. Torrance, 2005). On the other hand, most of atheists as non-believers have indicated the personal reasons for getting married as 'for sexual needs, close relationships and social framework' (e.g., Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American; Male, 42 years old, Atheist, Scottish). According to these qualitative findings that are consistent with previous studies, it was found that Muslim and Christian participants gave more place to religious agents as a more influential predictor than the non-believers (see also Sullivan, 2001; Waite & Lehrer, 2003). For instance, theoretically, marriage is a psychosocio-theological contract with sacred content and sanction in Islam (Qur'an 25: 54 Ally, 2005).

(ii)-*Dating and sexual experience before marriage*: Participants who consider themselves religious generally evaluate flirting/dating and sexual experience before marriage based on religious point of view. Previous studies (e.g., Cannon & Long, 1971; Clayton, 1969) have shown that religious people are more reluctant to relate to premarital sex than non-religious people. In this study, it has been seen that most Muslim and Christian participants differentiate sexual behaviors such as dating/flirting, kissing, necking, petting from sexual intercourse before marriage. On the other hand, it was found that most of non-believers have more permissive and liberal sexual thinking about the sexual themes mentioned above. For instance, one of the Muslim participants mentioned that flirting may be necessary for the partners to know each other better, but they should not experience sexual intercourse before marriage (e.g., Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish). In contrast, one of the non-believer participants emphasized that this is a normal sexual act and it is necessary (e.g., Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American). Looking at the literature on the psychology of religion and sexuality related to the subject, extradyadic sexual behaviors such as dating (e.g., Davids, 1982; Mattingly et al., 2010) and premarital sexual experience (e.g., Barkan, 2006; Roche, 1984; Ruppel Jr, 1970) depend on the content and intensity of religious beliefs of individuals, and are closely related to their own perspective and belief systems.

(iii)-*Importance of sexuality in marriage*: Sexual phenomena related to human life such as sexual attitude, sexual behavior and sexual satisfaction play an important role in spouses' sexual lives, especially in the context of family life (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000). In addition, there is a significant relationship between sexual dimensions and quality of spousal relationship and spousal religiosity. When the related literature is examined, it can be seen that many studies examine the effect of religiosity on sexual attitude and behavior. In this context, the effects of religiousness on sexual attitudes and behaviors in family life have been investigated in some empirical studies (e.g. De Visser et al., 2007; Rostsoky et al., 2003). As seen in the evaluations of the participants on the importance of sexuality in marriage, most of the participants who are either Muslims, Christians, Hindu or Atheists stressed that 'it is important but is not everything' (e.g., Male, 32 years old, Muslim, Turkish), 'loyalty and sexuality are essential elements amongst others for a successful marriage' (e.g., Male, 34 years old, Muslim, Pakistani), 'God created sex as a good thing to be enjoyed within a marriage between husband and wife' (e.g., Male, 36 years old, Christian, British), 'it makes the bonds strong' (e.g., Female, 28 years old, Hindu, Indian), as well as 'it is very

important for human needs and pleasure and reproduction' (e.g., Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American). These findings are consistent with the studies on the relationship between sexuality and religiosity in marriage. In addition, Wallin & Clark (1964) conducted a study on spouses living a family life. In this study, the relationship between sexual pleasure and religiosity was investigated. According to the results of this study, it is found that religiousness reduces sexual dissatisfaction of women within the scope of general marriage satisfaction (cf. also Storkey, 2005; Uludağ et al., 2021).

(iv)-*Feelings of guilt and sinful after sex outside of marriage*: When the relevant literature is examined, it is found that most of the experimental research on sex-guilt and sinful feelings are related to premarital sex (e.g., D'augelli & Cross, 1975; Sack et al., 1984) and pornography (Love et al., 1976). Therefore, this issue can be seen as an important variable independent of marital life (see also Pelletier & Herold, 1988; Woo et al., 2011). In the past half century, field research has also analyzed the relationship between sex-guilt and sinfulness with factors such as sexual behavior and experience, sexual knowledge, age, religion and ethnicity" (Wyatt & Dunn, 1991). In this qualitative study, in addition to certain issues affected by religious beliefs, especially the sexual intercourse outside of marriage while continuing the family life was evaluated as an important determinant of feelings of sex-guilt and sinfulness due to sex. In regard to the mentioned sex-guilt by the participants, it has been described that 'feeling guilty is quite normal, because this is an act of betrayal. And anyone who commits this act should feel guilty or sinful. The reverse is abnormal' (e.g., Male, 38 years old, Muslim, Turkish). Christian participants' assessment is also similar to Muslim participants', such as 'I believe sex is like a fire. When fire is used properly, it gives wonderful warmth and comfort. However, if fire is allowed to go anywhere, it can cause great damage. I believe sex within marriage is a wonderful thing. I believe sex outside of marriage ultimately causes damage to people and is also a sin before God.' (Male, 36 years old, Christian, British). In contrast with this evaluation, atheist participants' explanation based on sexual permissiveness is that 'such feelings are not necessary for the sexual life because every sexual act should be done every time.' (Male, 45 years old, Atheist, American). According to this finding, religious participants underlined the aspect of sex-guilt on the basis of religious prohibition while non-religious participants emphasized sexual permissiveness. Other studies regarding the topic that show similar results (Craig & Scott, 2007; Lantero & Beyer, 1951; Lenes & Hart, 1975) have highlighted the importance of religious belief systems in the context of the

sexual loyalty and intimacy. In addition, this qualitative study shows that both religious beliefs and sex-guilt are active agents that are mutually influential (see also theological references from the Qur'an, 4: 15; 17: 32).

(v)-*Having first sexual experience after getting married*: In the context of the modern era and post-modern discourse, in many developed countries around the world, the 'timing of first sexual intercourse', which has an important place in women's loss of their virginity, has psycho-socio-anthropo-theological meanings in connection with periods of development, fertility or marriage. Especially in developed Western societies, the state of waiting until marriage for the first sexual intercourse as a traditional norm has weakened over time and getting married as a virgin has no psycho-sociological theological significance. Therefore, the social change accelerated by modernity has led sexuality to a more 'pleasure/pleasure-centric' lifestyle, almost tearing sexuality out of its religious context in traditional life. For example, among younger generations in the United States, the first sexual experience now usually takes place before marriage (Miller & Heaton, 1991). However, in Eastern societies, such as Chinese society, which are still based on a closed way of life, women's virginity is given great importance. For this reason, premarital sexual intercourse is seen as a loss of virginity, and especially women are condemned. In this context, an empirical study on adolescents by Adamczyk & Felson (2006) examined the effect of adolescent peer religiosity on the possibility of early sexual intercourse. As a result of this research we see (i) that peer religiosity affects adolescent sexual behavior independently of other variables; (ii) peer religiosity has the strongest effect on the sexual behavior of adolescents associated with the peer group. The theological support for the conclusion of this empirical research is an example of the traditional Christian faith. According to this religious belief, it is emphasized that only sexual intercourse in married life can fulfil the role of psycho-social unifying among individuals (Shannon, 2005). Besides, this research reveals that the first sexual experience should be with marriage for reasons such as healthy relationship and strong commitment (see also Table 9). Therefore, this finding is consistent with the relevant literature in the field (Santhya et al., 2011; Tenkorang & Maticka-Tyndale, 2008).

(vi)-*Interfering with individuals' sexual life by religion and/or society*: Considering the history of religions, almost all religious teachings seem to guide the sex lives of their believers. In all societies with religious beliefs, the sex lives of individuals are determined by society under the influence of religion (Ali, 2016). Therefore, when religious interpretations are taken into

account, a negative attitude towards more liberalism and the proliferation of sexual identities emerges in sexuality. Therefore, a religious perspective on sexuality does not allow the development of individual embodied sexual freedom and autonomy (Kam & Yip, 2009; Meladze & Brown, 2015). Indeed, in this study, it is underlined by participants that religion should intervene in the sexual life of the individuals more effectively than the society in order to provide an auto-control mechanism (see also Table 10).

(vii)-*Importance of virginity until marriage*: Basically, the priority of virginity in all religious teachings is important in terms of revealing the necessity of sexual intercourse in marriage. On the other hand, in order to understand a woman's sexual attitude, it may be necessary to ask her if she can control her own sexuality. Therefore, for women more than men, the prohibition of premarital sexual intercourse can be considered as a defining factor in men's control over women's sex lives (Schlegel, 1991). The psycho-socio-theological meaning, which is more attributed to the virginity of women than men, is associated with traditional gender roles, especially since it varies according to gender in eastern societies in the modern era. Therefore, the virginity of women in these societies is still seen as an important indicator of 'purity and chastity'. In addition, "being a virgin" in all Western and Eastern societies can still be considered as a sign of high moral standing (Eşsizoglu et al., 2011). Looking at the historical process, for example, the Hindu society's greatest concern about sexuality is the preservation of women's virginity. Moreover, since the first period of Christianity, it is observed that the Christian community insists on the virginity of women in the process of marriage (Menski, 2005; Phipps, 1974). In this context, this study found that the majority of the participants stressed that virginity was 'very important' and 'important', as well as the causes of virginity are: 'it is a gift for each other' and 'being loyal to each other' (see also Table 11). Other studies in the relevant literature have shown similar results (Lammers et al., 2000; Wills et al., 2003; Zhou, 1989).

(viii)-*Different sexual preferences/orientations*: Homosexuality, which is the opposite of heterosexuality in the modern era, seems to have become acceptable in everyday life in the Western societies. Today, when we look at the practical social lives of Western societies, it is seen that the places where gays and lesbians live, especially in big cities, are prominent. Because these social environments include homosexuals as well as heterosexuals, celebrities such as film actors, athletes and politicians, who are growing in numbers, can easily reveal their homosexuality. Furthermore, the news in the media about homosexual marriages, homosexual tendency adoption is

becoming more and more commonplace (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015). From the theological perspective, however, it is known that no main religious doctrines endorse different/nontraditional sexual preferences/orientations such as homosexual and lesbian relations (Lawton, 2005; Morgan, 2005; Shannon, 2005). According to Islam, as in other monotheistic religions, homosexual and lesbian relations are forbidden from the theological perspective. The different sexual preferences such as homosexual and lesbian orientations are perceived as unnatural and a deviation from the theological norms of Islam (see also theological references from the Qur'an, 26: 165-166). Looking at the participants' personal opinions in this study about different sexual preferences/orientations, the majority of them were described as 'unacceptable' (see also Table 12).

(ix)-*Pornography*: Pornography is prohibited in Buddhism as well as in monotheistic religions. This prohibition is not a direct prohibition, but a theological inference. Considering the Islamic religious example, women are forbidden to show their bodies to a man other than their husband, or men to show their bodies to a woman other than their wife. Therefore, vaginal or anal sexual relations of unmarried men and women are theologically forbidden. In summary, since all kinds of homosexual relationships, as well as heterosexual relationships out of wedlock are banned, it is of course not expected to be theologically acceptable to photograph or make video films of them (Atlay, 2013; Short et al., 2015). In the modern era, with the acceleration of access to the Internet, pornographic publications are watched in greater quantities than ever before in human history. At the same time, the pornography economic sector is increasingly becoming a major source of income. Recent scientific research on pornography has shown that the consumption of pornography, especially the violent kind, has psychologically negative effects on viewers. Although more studies on the subject are needed, a significant proportion of existing research shows that pornography can negatively affect 'psychological dependence and the quality of interpersonal relationships, sexual health and performance, as well as social expectations about sexual behavior' (Eberstadt & Layden, 2010). In fact, in this study, the majority of the participants emphasized that pornography is harmful and prohibited by religion (see also Table 13). Therefore, this finding is consistent with most of the relevant literature (Hotchkiss, 2021; Jelen, 1986; Patterson & Price, 2012; Swatos Jr, 1988; Wood & Hughes, 1984).

### **Conclusions**

Throughout the history of humanity, religions often regulate sexual

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thoughts, emotions, attitudes and behaviors of the believers. Therefore, they determine which sexual attitudes and behaviors are allowed or prohibited. From this point of view, sexuality can be vital in theological context (Herling, 2007). Furthermore, a healthy sexual life prescribed by religions is also necessary for the mental health of the individual (Calderone, 1967). This qualitative research suggests that thoughts of believers in various belief systems contribute to sexuality, including dating, sex before and outside marriage, virginity, homosexuality, lesbianism, and pornography. According to the qualitative results of the research, however, it has become obvious that (a) the most important personal reason of the participants for getting married is to have a family and children (23%); (b) most of their personal viewpoint about dating and sexual experience before marriage is that 'it may be dating, but not sexual experience' (25%); (c) participants' thoughts regarding the importance of sexuality in marriage is that it is 'very important for human needs' (44%); (d) most of the participants' personal opinions about feeling guilty /sinful after sex outside of marriage is related to religious prohibition (29%); (e) the most important personal reason of the participants for having first sexual experience only after getting married is the belief that the first experience must be in marriage (53%), and the strongest reason for it is a strong commitment of the partners to each other (27%); (f) most of their personal viewpoint about interfering with individuals' sexual life by religion and/or society is that 'religion always can/must interfere' (22%); (g) the participants' strongest thought regarding virginity until marriage is that it is 'very important' (35%), and the strongest reason for it is for couples being loyal to each other (30%); (h) most of the participants' personal opinion about sexual preferences/orientations is that 'they are not acceptable' (42%); (i) most of their personal viewpoint about pornography is that 'it is harmful and prohibited by religion' (40%).

In studies on religiosity and sexuality, it was found that individual religiosity significantly predicted sexuality and family life (Allsop et al., 2021) Finally, the results of the research indicate that (i) personal religious beliefs have a great effect on thoughts and attitudes about sexuality in various belief systems, (ii) participants who believe in any religion have more conservative ideas about sexuality than non-believer participants; (iii) especially the Muslim participants have more conservative opinions about sexuality than the other believers.

However, this study has several limitations associated with the subject content and its methodology as a limitations and future research:

Firstly, small-sample is too diverse in terms of religious affiliation and the number of participants from each group (religious and ethnic) is not representative enough to develop group-based (religion and ethnicity) categorical comparison. Therefore, to draw some conclusions, participants divided into following basic categories; believers and non-believers, and Muslim and other believers.

Secondly, in terms of the subject content, the participants described their personal opinions according to the following agents: 'religiosity, marriage, dating, sexual experience, feeling guilty, virginity, different sexual preferences/orientations, and pornography' as sub-topics in this study. Therefore, other concerned exploratory factors such as 'petting, sexual fantasy, sexual beliefs, oral sex', which are part of sexuality and closely related to religious beliefs, were excluded from the assessment. Therefore, the abovementioned explanatory factors should be included in further studies.

Moreover, another important limitation of this study is that the data were analyzed by using only qualitative methodology. It may be necessary to use quantitative and mixed methodologies in order to obtain more effective and holistic data, as well as to be more descriptive and further interpretative in future studies.

Finally, the cross-sectional research design was used in this research. This research design only gives an overview of the time at which the research was conducted. However, longitudinal research design can also be used regarding the topics in future studies. The relationship between religiosity and sexuality may give more descriptive and interpretive results based on age-related changes in the design.

This qualitative study provides information about the personal perceptions of the participants in small-sample of different types of believers and non-believers regarding the relationship between religion and sexuality. Future research might wish to concentrate on how an interactive relationship between religiosity and sexuality occurs, how religious identities shape sexual identities, and how religious identity problems affect sexual identity formation.



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# **DİN VE CİNSELLİK: İNANAN VE İNANMAYAN BİREYLERİN ALGILARI ÜZERİNE NİTEL BİR ARAŞTIRMA**

 Mustafa KOÇ<sup>a</sup>

## **Geniş Öz**

İnsan yaşamındaki biyo-psiko-sosyo-kültürel ve teolojik faktörler, cinsellik konusunda belirleyici etmenler oldukları için bireyin cinsel duygu, düşünce, tutum ve davranışları üzerinde oldukça önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Dolayısıyla din hala bireylerin cinsellik hakkındaki düşüncelerini ve tutumlarını belirleyen önemli bir yordayıcı olarak görünmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, nitel veriye dayalı olarak çeşitli ülkelerin milletlerinden farklı dinlere inanan ve inanmayan bireylerin, belirlenen alt temalardan oluşan cinsellik hakkındaki kişisel algılarını analiz etmektir.

Bu çalışmadaki nitel veriler, yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz tekniği kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Katılımcıların deneyimlerini, bilişsel değerlendirmelerini ve anlam oluşturma yöntemlerini incelemeyi amaçlayan adı geçen bu teknik, nitel verileri analiz etmek için sistematik bir yol sunmaktadır. Nitel bir veri toplama metodolojisi ve stratejisi olarak katılımcıların cinsellik hakkındaki kişisel görüşleri, araştırmacı tarafından oluşturulan açık uçlu bir anket kullanarak Birleşik Krallık'ta hem yüz yüze hem de web tabanlı anket uygulaması yoluyla toplanmıştır.

Keşfedici bu nitel çalışmadaki katılımcıların cinsiyetlerine göre dağılımlarına bakıldığında, 13'ünün (% 72) erkek, 5'inin (% 28) ise kadın (n=18) olduğu görülmüştür. Japon, İskoç, Hindistanlı, Pakistanlı, Kafkasyalı, İrlandalı, Asyalı Arap, Hollandalı, Portekizli ve Fransız gibi farklı milletlerden oluşan katılımcılardan açık uçlu yanıtlar toplanmış ve flört, evlilik, evlilik öncesi ve dışındaki cinsel ilişki, bekâret, eşcinsellik ve pornografi gibi cinsellikle ilgili tematik konulardaki düşünce ve tutumlarına ilişkin verilen nitel cevaplar

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analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmada, dünyanın çeşitli ülkelerindeki milletlerden farklı dinsel inanışlara sahip olan ve inanmayan bireylerden oluşan bir çalışma grubu (n=18) üzerinde, dinsel inanç çeşitliliğinin cinsellikle ilgili belirlenen tematik konulara ilişkin etkisi algısal bir perspektiften betimlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Bu nitel çalışma sonucunda, katılımcıların kişisel dinsel inanışlarına bağlı olarak biçimlenen cinsel konulardaki algılarına ilişkin elde edilen bulgulara bakıldığında;

(i)-Aileye ve çocuğa sahip olmak (% 23), cinsel ilişki ve ihtiyaçlar için doğru ve onaylanan bir yol olması (% 21), yakın bir ilişki/yol arkadaşlığı (% 18) sağlaması gibi nedenlerin katılımcılar için en önemli kişisel evlenme nedenleri olduğu;

(ii)-Katılımcıların çoğuna göre cinsel deneyim dışında flört etmenin kabul edilebilir bir durum (% 25) olduğu, bazı katılımcılara göre hem flört etmek hem de cinsel deneyimin normal olduğu (% 7), birkaç katılımcının ise evlenmek için (% 18) ve doğru kişiyi bulmak için (% 18) flört etmenin gerekli olduğu;

(iii)-Evlilikteki cinselliğin, insani ihtiyaçlar (% 44) ve aile olarak yaşama zorunluluğu (% 19) gibi nedenlerden dolayı gerekli olduğu;

(iv)-Katılımcıların çoğuna göre, İbrahimi dinlerde evlilik dışı cinsel ilişkiye izin verilmediği hatta bu konuda bir teolojik yasağın bulunduğu (% 29) ve aile hayatı boyunca evlilik dışı cinsel ilişkinin riskli bir davranış (% 24) olduğu; bir kısım katılımcıya göre ise evlilik dışında yaşanan cinsel ilişkiden kaynaklı suçluluk ve günahkârlık duygusunun oldukça normal bir duygu durumu (% 24) olduğu;

(v)-Katılımcıların önemli bir kısmına göre, sağlıklı bir evlilik ilişkisi (% 23) ve evli çiftler arasında güçlü bir bağlılık (% 27) için ilk cinsel deneyimin evlenirken yaşanması gerektiği; bazı katılımcılara göre ise bu durumun son derece öznel bir durum olduğu (% 18), bazılarının göre de fiziksel ve ruhsal sağlık için gerekli (% 18) olduğu; dolayısıyla adı geçen bu nitel temaya ilişkin elde edilen sonuçlara bakıldığında, ilk cinsel ilişkinin evlilikte yaşanmasına yönelik katılımcıların en önemli kişisel nedenlerinin eşlerin birbirlerine güçlü bir şekilde bağlanması (% 27) ve sağlıklı bir evlilik ilişkisi (% 23) için gerekli olduğu yönünde ortaya çıktı;

(vi)-Katılımcıların çoğunluğuna göre, dinin her zaman bireylerin cinsel hayatına müdahale edebileceği/etmesi gerektiği (% 22), bir kısım katılımcıya göre ise dinin buna karışmaması gerektiği (% 15); yine bu temaya ilişkin olarak din olgusunun topluma göre cinsel yaşama daha etkili

bir müdahale işlevi olduğu (% 19);

(vii)-Katılımcıların bazılarına göre, bekâretin eşine bir hediye (% 25) ve eşlerin birbirlerine vefa gösterme (% 30) anlamına geldiği; bazı katılımcılara göre ise bekâretin insan doğasına aykırı olduğu (% 10) ve aksine cinsel deneyim sahibi bireylerin daha iyi cinsel ilişki yaşadıkları (% 15); bazı katılımcılara göre de bu modern dönemde bekâretin çok nadir olduğu (% 15); evleninceye kadar bekâretin önemi ve bunun sebeplerine dair elde edilen nitel sonuçlara genel bakıldığında ise bekâretin en önemli nedenlerinin evli çiftler arasındaki sadakat duygusunu ortaya çıkardığı (% 30) ve bekâretin kadının kocasına bir hediye olarak görüldüğü (% 25);

(viii)-Katılımcıların çoğunluğuna göre, eşcinsel tercihlerin kabul edilemez bir durum (% 42) olduğu; bir kısım katılımcıya göre ise Tanrı katında bunun hata/günah olduğu (% 17) ve eşcinsel yönelimlerin farklı inançlara sahip insanlar tarafından yargılanmaması gerektiği (% 17); Bununla birlikte eşcinsel yönelimi olanlara karşı saygı gösterilmesi gerektiğini vurgulayan katılımcıların (% 12) yanı sıra bunu bir sapkınlık olarak değerlendiren (% 8) katılımcıların da olduğu;

(ix)-Katılımcıların çoğunluğuna göre, pornografinin zararlı ve din tarafından yasaklanan bir alışkanlık olduğu (% 40); bazı katılımcılara göre ise bunun ticari bir araç (% 17) olduğu; bazılarına göre de, pornografinin kadınları oldukça aşağıladığı (% 14) ve eğitim için gerekli olabileceği (% 14) saptanmıştır.

Farklı tiplerdeki inanan ve inanmayan bireylerin oluşturduğu küçük-örneklemdaki katılımcıların din ve cinsellik ilişkisine yönelik kişisel algıları hakkında nitel bilgi sağlayan bu araştırma sonuçları (i) kişisel dini inançların, çeşitli inanç sistemlerindeki cinsellikle ilgili düşünce ve tutumlar üzerinde büyük bir etkiye sahip olduğunu; (ii) herhangi bir dine inanan katılımcıların, inanmayan katılımcılara göre cinsellik hakkında daha muhafazakâr düşüncelere sahip olduğunu; (iii) özellikle Müslüman katılımcıların cinsellik konusunda diğer inananlara göre daha muhafazakâr görüşleri olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din psikolojisi, Dinsel çeşitlilik, Cinsellik, Suçluluk ve günahkârlık duygusu, Yasak cinsel pratikler.



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