

## Gender, Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Analysis of the Construction of Sexuality in the Evangelical Religious Communities of Yopougon (Abidjan District-Cote D'Ivoire)

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the social forces that guide and legitimize actors' positions on sexual behaviour. The study was essentially qualitative. Based on a methodological approach based on the literature review and autobiographical and semi-structured interviews conducted with a category of actors in the evangelical religious communities of Yopougon, we were able to arrive at the following results: the object explored in this study (sexuality) reveals its polymorphism through the number of perceptions and phenomena associated with it in this case; sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptive methods, gender relations and the prescriptions of religious authorities (abstinence and virginity). To conclude, this study dealing with sexual and reproductive health allows us to take a particular look at the analysis of identity profiles showing that the majority of study participants are at a stage of socialization where they are rather ready to act in accordance with external prescriptions or according to a logic of immediacy. To varying degrees, differences are observed in the dynamics of anchoring the sexuality of actors: Women emphasize emotional and ethical elements (honour, trust, marriage). While men develop ideologies of a commitment based on ethical principles.

**Keywords:** Gender, Health, Sexuality, Reproduction, Religion, Côte d'Ivoire

### I. INTRODUCTION

The idea that gender and sexuality issues deserve to be thought of together is not new. Nevertheless, it has taken time to establish itself and is still not self-evident (C. Broqua and F. Eboko, 2009, P.3). In a landmark text published at a time when the notion of gender is emerging at the heart of feminist theory, Gayle Rubin develops the concept of "sex/gender system", which she defines as "the set of provisions by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (G. Rubin, 1998, 1975, P. 6 cited by C. Broqua and F. Eboko, idem, P.3). Along with social sex, gender reflects sexual orientation: "Gender is not only identification with one sex; it also implies that sexual desire is oriented towards the other sex" (G. Rubin, 1998,1975, P.33). Gender and sexuality are inextricably linked here within the framework of a theory that aims to highlight the link between the oppression of women and that of homosexuals (C. Broqua and F. Eboko, idem, P.3).

The relationship between religion and sexual identity is also mentioned, from the point of view of practitioners this time, by the work of MaitéMaskens, which concerns the effects of participation in Brussels Pentecostal assemblies (C. Broqua and F. Eboko, 2009, P.9). According to the authors, in both ethnographic groups, women occupy a predominant place and the majority of the faithful are migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. For the authors, while positions on gender and sexuality are not very homogeneous, these religious assemblies are used as spaces to challenge the dominant norms of the host society on these issues. Women use their influence in this arena to promote their conception of masculinity. They reinforce men in the authority they recognize them, while ensuring that they respect the prescribed prohibitions, in order to protect themselves from the feared abuses of virility (C. Broqua and F. Eboko, idem, P.9).

The practice of renouncing sexuality developed very rapidly from the beginning of Christianity, to such an extent that, in the second half of the 2nd century, the Galen doctor, himself a non-Christian, wrote about Christians: "Their contempt for death is evident every day, and similarly their abstention from sexual activity. Because there are not only men but also women in them who refrain from making love during their entire lives" (A. Houziaux, 2008, P.73).

On the other hand, according to the authors, beyond the international sexology and sexual and reproductive health communities (WAS, IPPF) and international organizations (WHO, UNESCO) that have made significant contributions to the development and dissemination of sexual health and sexual rights concepts, new activist movements are advocating for these rights. The notion of sexual rights is gradually gaining ground in

consciences and debates, and to a lesser extent in practices, with different themes according to the countries and groups concerned (E. Petitpas, 2008 cited by A. Giami, 2019, P.3). In France, this idea is beginning to be heard and discussed in sexology circles and among lawyers interested in sexuality and health issues. For the author, the notion of sexual rights remains controversial and is not immediately obvious among lawyers (E. Petitpas, 2008 cited by A. Giami, idem, P.3). In order to better understand the dimensions of this progressive development and to open up sexual rights and have adapted it according to their respective objectives. The issue of sexual rights has already been the subject of numerous studies and controversies in the international community (Kismödi, E., Cottingham, J., Gruskin, S. and Miller, A.M. 2014 cited by A. Giami, 2019, P.4). We would like to highlight how the links between discourses on sexuality in the health register, on the one hand, and that of human rights, on the other, have been articulated to give rise to "sexual rights". Such a genealogical reflection is all the more necessary since there are currently several sexual rights declarations drawn up and disseminated by different institutional mechanisms and these declarations have evolved over the past fifteen years (A. Giami, 2019, P.4). Indeed, it has been observed that successive statements by organizations such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) have evolved over the years and do not focus on the same aspects within the very broad and fluid scope of sexual rights, with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) giving more attention to reproductive health (A. Giami, idem).

In addition, IPPF is a global network of associations working for the service delivery and advocacy for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Recognizing that all young people, regardless of their faith, have the right to a satisfying and safe sexuality and to decide on their sexual life, IPPF partners with them to improve their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The IPPF strategic framework includes a focus on adolescents. Similarly, with the Declaration of Sexual Rights, IPPF reiterated its commitment to young people by emphasizing their right to make decisions about their sexuality. After reviewing adolescent programmes with member associations, tradition, culture and religion emerged as the main obstacles to the implementation of youth sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programmes (IPPF, 2010, PP.26-27).

In 2008, a meeting brought together young volunteers and IPPF staff from around the world to find a common platform to discuss youth sexuality. The specific objectives of the meeting were: (i) To identify ways to support young people in integrating a positive approach to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights into their faith and religion; (ii) To exchange experiences from the programmes and activities for young people of associations working with religious organizations and leaders, to explore how to work with young people in religious environments (IPPF, idem).

In view of the above-mentioned theoretical observations, it should be noted that in Côte d'Ivoire, in the municipality of Yopougon, the cohesion of the evangelical communities is maintained in part through the conception and exercise of the authority characteristic of the religious field. First, biblical teachings constitute the unquestionable primary authority in the moral, behaviour and conduct of individuals. This idealization of biblical teachings is accompanied by biblical hyper-conformism or ethical hyper-normativity on the part of individuals belonging to the same religious field, each showing strong normative self-control, thereby limiting deviant behaviours such as having sex before marriage or engaging in any sexual acts that would harm group cohesion. This same cohesion is also maintained through strong horizontal authority: the generally close ties that unite members of the same church lead to social control on the part of individuals, an authority of all over everyone (Caroline Gachet & Emmanuelle Buchard, 2013, P. 2).

That said, evangelism is part of a congregationalist tradition, which means that the organization of the church is built around the local assembly of the faithful, tending towards an ideal autonomous and sovereign functioning. Evangelical churches are then generally formed in association with three powers defined within a steering committee: members, pastor and elders. Depending on the churches, the power and legitimacy granted to each figure varies and can produce more hierarchical and theocratic associations, with a pastor as a strong figure of authority, or rather democratic with more power granted to members (cf. Fath, 2001; Willaime, 1986; Lüthi, 1994; Baatard/Campiche/Vincent/Willaime, 1990). However, in practice, this model cannot do without an authority figure. If all evangelicals agree on the conception of biblical teachings as the primary authority, there are obviously different interpretations of sexual and reproductive health in reality, some more conservative than others. Why do some Christians give up sex life? Faced with this question, we will limit ourselves to a more modest subject: why did sexual abstinence appear in the evangelical religious field? This study analyses the identity issues raised by the actors' positions on sexual conduct. These are specifically: i) Define the perception of sexual practice among actors; ii) Describe the process of legitimizing sexual practices among actors.

Drawing inspiration from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1964), for whom the social field is a space for legitimizing position-taking, proposes a structural homology model in which social actors develop social representations in accordance with their positions in the social space. This current, developed in Geneva by W. Doise's team (1986 cited by J. C. Vladimir, 2013, P. 22), draws from Pierre Bourdieu the concepts of field structure and habitus to define social representations as: "principles that generate positions that are linked to specific insertions in a set of social relationships and organize the symbolic processes involved in these

relationships" (P. 85). These generating principles reflect the idea that religion influences the regulation of individuals' cognitive systems. This pattern of thinking is relevant for this study undertaken in the sense that it explains, through the sociological characteristics of individuals, the variability of their positions around a controversial object (W. Doise, 1986 / 1985, cited by J. C. Vladimir, idem). L. Negura (2006) agrees when she argues that: "These sociological characteristics of individuals often hide identity dynamics that translate into social and symbolic relationships of power, among other things, having some effect on the way in which social representation organizes discourse around sexuality. These identity dynamics have an effect on the behaviour of individuals, which, in turn, is endowed with a symbolic charge" (P. 47). In relation to this study, the data that will be collected in this work will enrich the debate on the justification of individuals' positions on sexual and reproductive health. But above all, to highlight the resources available to the evangelical church in relation to the sexual aspirations of individuals. This observation allows actors to claim total autonomy with regard to sexuality offers in society. While it is not easy to question sexual practices between actors.

The literature review reveals that few studies seek to understand how, at the present time, evangelical Christians are appropriating sexuality (the subject of controversy) and what identity strategies they are implementing in this regard following the debates it generates around sexual and reproductive health. The results of this study may contribute to further discussion. It should be noted that despite this deficiency, some empirical research shows the value of such a perspective. For example, the conclusion of a research conducted by J.T. Hernandez and R.J. Diclemente (1992) on identity development and risky sexual behaviour among young people aged 18 to 22 suggest that subjects who have an identity profile reflecting a lack of psychosocial engagement (diffusion, foreclosure) are those who adopt risky sexual behaviour the most (J.C. Vladimir, 2013, P.16).

## II. METHODOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Survey site and participants

The study took place in Yopougon, Abidjan District, from 7 October 2019 to 16 October 2019 inclusive, among 50 evangelical Christians, including 25 Christian women and 25 Christian men. We interviewed male and female respondents because perceptions of a fact differ between male and female respondents. The sample was determined using the nonprobability sampling technique. To this end, Matthieu Wilhelm (2014, pp.7-8) teaches us that: "The non-probability survey is characterized by an additional assumption about the target population: the homogeneity of the distribution of the observed characteristic. Thus, the selection of individuals participating in the survey is not necessarily purely random. This is a very strong hypothesis, which is rarely verified. The sampling method determined by the respondents, respondent-driven sampling (RDS) in English, belongs to the family of snowball methods. The main idea of snowball sampling is to increase the sample size by using the social networks of the recruited persons. The RDS technique takes up this idea and adapts it to be applicable. However, the purpose of the RDS method is quite different in that it estimates the proportions of sub-populations within the sampled population. In addition, the eligibility criteria of our college of informants was their status as women and men. But above all, the fact that these resource persons interviewed belong to evangelical religious communities where sex is still a taboo before marriage and it is absolutely necessary to get married in order to have sexual pleasure.

### 2.2 Data collection techniques and tools

This study was essentially qualitative. Several techniques were used in this research to obtain a body of available, accessible data that is consistent with the purpose of the study. We have opted for two collection methods: Documentary exploration and semi-structured interviews.

The documentary exploration allowed us to take stock of the situation regarding our research topic. We consulted methodological works and specific works on sexual and reproductive health. The syntheses and criticisms of these documents helped us in the choice of our subject and in the elaboration of our problem. These documents allowed us to understand the perceptions of the actors in the game of sexual intercourse. But also to understand the socio-cultural logics that justify the position of the actors with regard to the taboo built sexual relations before marriage on the one hand, and on the other hand, to understand the stakes of sexual relations. All the documentation is presented in the bibliography. We found it in the libraries of IES, CERAP, but also the contribution of Internet research was considerable.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of an oral one-to-one, direct contact between us and the actors interviewed. This exchange allowed actors to express their perceptions and interpretations as well as their experiences on sexual and reproductive health.

### 2.3 Method of analysis and data processing

The data collected from the above-mentioned actors were analysed under the prisms of Karl Popper's (1956) dialectical method and methodological individualism. The combination of the dialectical method and Popper's theory have made it possible to understand the stakes of the different positions of the actors in the game of sexual intercourse related to the way sexual and reproductive health is constructed in a socio-cultural environment but above all in the search for the affirmation of its masculinity and fertility. The dialectical method has highlighted the contradictions and strategies of the actors in the use of sexual intercourse.

### III. RESULTS

Sexual practice is a significant event in the life of a woman or a man. It is therefore a period that gives women or men time to mobilize resources and choose their "ideal type of man or woman". However, the perception of sexual and reproductive health initiates, to varying degrees, differences observed in the dynamics of anchoring the sexuality of actors. Consequently, this study examines the sociological constraints that guide and legitimize the positions taken by actors in terms of sexual behaviour.

#### 3.1 Perception of sexual practice among actors

##### 3.1.1 The ideology of spiritual maturity: a normative dimension of legitimizing sexual practices

For Moscovici, the content of a social representation consists of three types of elements; opinions, attitudes and stereotypes. Indeed, the objectification process "*allows representation to become a cognitive framework and to guide perceptions and judgments about behaviour or relationships between individuals*" (Moscovici S., 1976 cited by A.J. Agobe, K.G.J.C. Koffi, K. Adjoumani and N.N.K. Nana, 2018, P. 127).

First, the ideology of spiritual stability mobilized by women and men encourages them to strengthen their links with transcendence or divinity. In this respect, biblical teachings encourage women and men to postpone their sexual and reproductive projects. Thus, they wait until they have found spiritual stability at the need to fulfill themselves socially and spiritually before engaging in sexual maturity and conceiving sexual intercourse. The following comments illustrate this case: "*I could have sex if and only if I have a dense religious cultural capital. This would allow me to assume responsibility for managing a marriage relationship with a man.*" (T.M., Yopougon, October 7, 2019 at 9 am). It is in this same vein of thought that this evangelical Christian testifies in these expressions: "*Sexual intercourse is accepted in the life of a man or a woman, when the latter is married before a religious authority. It is a precept or a norm of the church. The church is an institution because of its values and norms, which it advocates, but above all it reframes the individual not to engage in deviant or anti-social behaviour. On this aspect, I am referring to sexual depravity, to prostitution. As a Christian, I am required to engage in sexual intercourse with a woman after marriage.*" Such a deliberate, thoughtful and assumed choice by evangelical Christians to conceive of sexual intercourse explains the social influence exercised by the home religion but especially for the preservation of religious values. This social influence consists in imposing dominant norms and values in terms of attitude and behaviour on actors.

##### 3.1.2 Religious identity of the actors: a source of legitimization of social behaviour

Attachment to certain religious values derived from Christianity promotes practices that aim to abstain from all sexual intercourse before marriage.

###### 3.2.2.2.1. Attachment to religious values derived from Christianity

The mode of sexual relations is based on religious dogmas, thus giving actors the privilege of unilaterally deciding on sexual and reproductive health issues. From the above, the evangelical Christian women and men interviewed adopt pro-dogmatic social practices linked to the satisfaction of the religious values that the religious field conveys. To this end, the use of premarital sex seems to be relegated to the habits of pagans (people who are not Christians).

Indeed, although the actors have had sex in the past, they do not show any sign of satisfaction with their libido before marriage. For the evangelical Christian, "Giving oneself to sexual acts before marriage is an act of sin before the divinity. God is sacred and approves all actions related to the sacred. This is the example of sexuality. Knowing the nudity of others is sacred. It is not a trivial act" (Y.N., yopougon, October 10, 2019 at 4 p.m.).

It is clear from these remarks that the practice of sexuality is not always unanimously accepted in society. Thus, the evangelical Christian could have as many sexual relations as this individual has fulfilled his or her function as a Christian by legitimizing his or her sexual relationship before a religious authority such as the pastor. On the other hand, although aware of the natural physiological needs (erection and natural desires to satisfy one's libido) to which the actors (faithful of the evangelical church) are exposed, the actors will only entrust this physiological need for libido satisfaction to the divinity by using or remembering biblical teachings in order not to succumb to sexual immorality to offer themselves sexual pleasure outside marriage. It is in this sense that this evangelical Christian testifies in these words:

*"Too often, we focus on the recreational aspect of sex to the exclusion of another important aspect: procreation. Sex in the marriage relationship provides enough pleasure and God intended it that way. He wants men and women to enjoy their sexual activity in the context of marriage. The Song of Songs and several other Bible passages (such as Proverbs 5:19) clearly describe the joys of sexuality (N.G., Yopougon, October 10, 2019 at 10am). For his part, a Christian testifies in these few words: "Couples must understand that God first planned sexuality in order to have children. Therefore, a couple who have sex before marriage sins both by enjoying pleasures that were not intended for them and by risking giving birth to a human life outside the family structure that God has planned for each child" (K.A., Yopougon, October 10, 2019 at 5pm). In this respect, a faithful woman says:*

*"Even if, sexual practice should not be a determining factor in distinguishing good from evil, if biblical teaching on pre-marital sexual practices (i.e., paying dowry matrimonial compensation or legitimizing the couple's relationship by a contract signed before an administrative authority) were followed, there would be far fewer*

sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and others, voluntary abortions, single mothers, unwanted pregnancies and children growing up in single-parent families. For God, there is no alternative to abstinence before marriage. Abstinence protects us from sexual immorality, protects babies, gives their appropriate value to sexual relations and, above all, honours the creator God".(D.J, Yopougon, October 11, 2019 at 7pm). It is in this same vein of thought that an evangelical Christian interviewed in these expressions testifies:

*"The implications of satisfying one's libido before marriage very often lead to risks in this case; sexually transmitted diseases, lack of control over the other's personality, which could lead to misunderstandings in the couple and lead to a deconstruction of the relationship between man and woman. In my opinion, it would be a good idea to deprive yourself of all sexual intercourse before marriage. It is true that the body and the spiritual are two different entities insofar as these entities do not have the same way of reacting to a situation, such is the penis that would be erect in the presence of a body of the attractive and seductive woman of a woman. On the other hand, the spiritual (soul) matures by the word of God could easily resist this reaction of the (Physical) body requiring it to accept the desires of the body. In other words, the spiritual (soul) dominates the body. Not every "good" Christian should fall into the desires of the flesh, that is, the physical. All sexual intercourse is admitted before God and accepted if and only if there is a contract signed before the religious or administrative authorities insofar as it is God himself who establishes the administrative authorities and to them, we must respect such are the signatures of the mayors recognized to consolidate and approve a relationship, see allow sexual intercourse in complete peace of mind.(D.J., Yopougon, October 9, 2019 at 10 a.m.). By ricochet, an evangelical pastor expresses himself in these words: "According to 1 Corinthians 7:2, the answer is clearly "yes", namely: Is sex before marriage a sin? (D.J., Yopougon, October 9, 2019 at 10 a.m.). By ricochet, an evangelical pastor expresses himself in these words; "According to 1 Corinthians 7:2, the answer is clearly "yes", namely: Is premarital sex a sin? "However, to avoid sexual immorality, let each man have his wife and each woman have her husband. In this biblical text, Saint Paul presents marriage as a "remedy" for sexual immorality. In conclusion, 1 Corinthians 7:2 says that since men do not know how to control themselves and there is so much sexual immorality outside marriage, they must marry to satisfy their passions in a moral way" (T.P., Yopougon, October 9, 2019 at 8:00 pm). Thus, for the pastor interviewed, verse 1 Corinthians 7:2 clearly includes sex before marriage in its definition of sexual immorality.*

To add to this, an evangelical prophetess confirms in these expressions:

*"All the Bible verses that condemn sexual immorality also condemn sex before marriage as a sin. Sex before marriage is part of the biblical definition of sexual immorality. Many passages from the biblical texts (Romans 1:29, 2 Corinthians 12:21, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:3, Colossians 3:5, Judaism 1:7, Acts 15:20) say that sex outside marriage is sinful. The Bible teaches abstinence before marriage (O.P., Yopougon, October 10, 2019 at 7:00 p. m.). For his part, a faithful evangelist testifies in these few words: "According to the biblical verse, Hebrews 13:4, sexual intercourse between a husband and his wife is the only form of sex that Jesus Christ approves of".(A.M., Yopougon, October 12, 2019 at 4 p.m.).*

From these statements, these sexual practices are subject to risks before marriage, and seem to go against Christian values. Anyone who engages in sexual practices before marriage is willing to control or monitor sexual and reproductive health in a cultural context of respect and appreciation for the norms and values that legitimize the conduct of individuals. In contrast to these, the position of other evangelical religious on their positions on sexual relations seems to be decided in these terms:

*"It is not easy for a man or woman who has practiced sex in the past to abstain to the satisfaction of his or her libido. It happens sometimes that, we evangelical Christians by our ways of showing other religious congregations that we know the biblical verses in relation to them, that we very often fall into errors, this is the example of evangelical couples who rush their marriages to avoid the humiliations of society but especially to be punished by their texts of their religions of attachment because having had discreet sexual relations, their women have fallen pregnant. However, both men and women have emotional reactions. The satisfaction of libido is a natural fact as the philosopher Freud teaches us. I think you could satisfy your libido with a woman if there's a marriage plan. This would also avoid unpleasant surprises after the wedding. Because, there are couples who break up their marriages either because, the man or the woman is not sexually satisfied or the man has problems getting an erection. Anything that the couple could correct or avoid before engaging in the marriage process" (K. E., Yopougon, October 11, 2019 at 3 p.m.).*

### **3.2 Ideology of the quest for the "ideal woman or man" as a prerequisite for the construction of sexual and reproductive health**

The ideology of late sexual practice is explained by the new ways of living as a couple: to have sex and have a child, solidity (being Christian) and stability (having a Christian status conferring on him or allowing him to assume family responsibility in complete peace of mind) are prerequisites for engagement in sexual practice among actors. In other words, women want to find the "ideal man" before engaging in sexual practice. However, this position requires "time" and many of them enjoy life in solitude before embarking on family building: *"I am a Christian and I will be able to engage in a sexual relationship if God gives me the man of my "life". I am talking about someone who is a Christian like me and who respects the commitments of marriage*

that it is a contract for life" (Y. M., Yopougou, October 13, 2019 at 10 am). The ideology of the "ideal man" referred to here refers to the modalities of choosing a spouse. These criteria therefore make it possible to meet one's aspirations. These are based particularly on the woman's perception and vision of the couple's life. In reality, these criteria are subjective and constructed under a social and psychological background: *"I expect my man to be professionally active, ambitious and realistic; I would not like to have children from different fathers; he must marry me before engaging in sexual relations; he must love my parents as much as I do; I am looking for a man who can take care of me and my children; he must be responsible and know what he wants; he must be intelligent but not pretentious; confident in his abilities, okay, but not proud; he must preserve peace in the couple; whenever I need help, he is always there for me"* (A. J. Agobe, K.G.J.J.C. Koffi, K. Adjoumani and N.N.K. Nana, 2018, P. 128).

These words reflect the aspirations of the actors of a successful home with cultural, economic, religious and social elements. These different perceptions constitute the scale that allows actors to measure the degree of socialization over time in conjugal life in order to engage in any sexual relationship.

### 3.3. Process of legitimizing sexual practices among actors

#### 3.3.1. the ideal of chastity and the duty to legitimize union (marriage)

"In fact, it is often ignored that the renunciation of sexuality was a fundamental characteristic of Christianity at an early age. It should even be added, even if it means opposing the current opinion, that Jesus himself may have had a preaching in this sense. It is indeed wrong to present the preaching of Jesus, and also that of Saint Paul, as a liberation from the rules of asceticism, purity and holiness. Jesus is readily presented as a good-life permissive. We insist that he has

refused to condemn adulterous women, and Christianity is considered to have been an announcement of forgiveness for sinners and a force for liberation from the prohibitions of Judaism. We forget that the preaching of Jesus and Saint Paul already called for certain renunciations, especially in the field of sexuality" (A. Houziaux, 2008, P. 74).

This shows that religious ideology is a source of legitimization of the renunciation of sexual practices. It is in this context that a Christian woman testifies in these expressions: *"The church, like the Western school, teaches us the values of "true" socialization. In other words, it helps us to respect the values of the construction of the individual personality, but above all, the church is a tool for the integration of the individual into the social sphere. Sexual practices are an integral part of the individual's socialization through procreation or reproduction. So the church comes to reframe the behaviour of individuals in the field of sexuality. Thanks to the church, sexual intercourse has a meaning in the life of the individual. We now know that sex is "sacred" because through sex, we give birth to a life. Sex should therefore not be an object of distraction or satisfaction of any physiological need. All sexual intercourse must be based on the achievement of an ideal. That is, the legitimization of the relationship before a religious authority that guarantees responsibility and seriousness* (T. N., Yopougou, October 14, 2019 at 4 p.m.).

For Huynh, the "socio-cultural values of traditional societies in general, and African societies in particular, are indeed less placed in the perspective of their own history than in that of the Western world. (Huynh Caotri, 1986 cited by A. J. Agobe, K. G. J. C. Koffi, K. Adjoumani and N. N. K. Nana, 2018, P. 130) Indeed, a socio-cultural value finds its meaning in the fact that individuals need to share values to act and live together. It is therefore a principle, a reference that allows us to choose and therefore to judge and act. Thus, certain religious beliefs favour sexual practices linked to respect for religious norms.

However, the observance of religious dogmas related to "purity" and the preservation of social virtues such as continence, allows individuals to refrain from having sex before marriage. This attitude for the actors is at the origin of preserving religious values and avoiding weakening couples' relationships. Nevertheless, the intervention of the church makes it possible to consolidate or legitimize a couple's relationship. Thus, the possibility of having sexual intercourse that could lead to marriage is high. However, the curiosity to discover sexually the other just to satisfy one's libido is not to be neglected. A church leader rightly testifies in these few words: *"The church teaches values for a successful couple. But individuals must take responsibility for their choices. The church plays the role of raising awareness to call Christians to action on behaviours that do not honour God"* (Y. P., Yopougou, October 15, 2019 at 6 p.m.).

On this aspect, "Jesus led a minority group that was formed following him on the basis of an identity subversion of its members, who left their homes, their way of life, their social, ethical and cultural references. The ethical subversion brought by Jesus led to affirming this in his life (and finding his identity in this): "the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark in Bible: 2, 27-28 quoted by L. Lemoine, 2011, PP.12-13).

To add to this, "Jesus is rather discreet in terms of sexual ethics. This has been stressed many times. Contrary to what one might at first think, when this ethics speaks of the subject in search of identity, it is not to systematically put sexuality at the forefront. It first focuses on research into

In truth, on the way in which, alas, subjectification is often taken into account in the nets of power issues. (J. BUTLER, 2007, cited L. Lemoine, 2011, P.12). In short, "it places the quest for self, the quest for identity on a

very vast backdrop of which sexuality, to be important, is only one aspect, not a detail of course, but an aspect"(L. Lemoine, idem).

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Against the backdrop of this study, there is an analysis of some factors that guide and legitimize the positions of actors on sexual conduct in the context of Christianity. The study showed how actors' perceptions and experiences of sexual practices are articulated and interpenetrated to legitimize their choices of sexual intercourse after marriage. It could be argued that the observance of religious precepts related to teachings on sexual immorality and the preservation of social virtues such as abstinence, allows individuals to refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage. This attitude for the actors is at the origin of preserving religious values and avoiding disruption of the couple's relationship but above all allowing the child to grow up with both parents on the one hand and consolidating his relationship with the divinity on the other hand. Nevertheless, biblical teachings make it possible to consolidate or legitimize the couple's relationship. Thus, the possibility of having sexual intercourse that could lead to marriage is high. However, the curiosity to discover sexually the other just to satisfy one's libido is not to be neglected.

It appears that the main challenge is to deprive oneself of any sexual practice before marriage within a cultural category in order to preserve the sexual and reproductive health of men and women. On this basis, this study does not come close to the results of the conclusion of a research conducted by J.T. Hernandez and R.J. Diclemente (1992) cited by J.C. Vladimir (2013, P.16) on identity development and risky sexual behaviour among young people aged 18 to 22 years showing that: "Subjects who have an identity profile reflecting a lack of psychosocial engagement are those who adopt risky sexual behaviour the most". This theoretical observation suggests that individuals who engage in sexual intercourse at an early age are at high risk of sexuality and often develop behaviours that are consistent with sexual immorality. In this respect, the results of this study confirm the results of the study by E. Petitpas, 2008, cited by A. Giami (2019, P.3), which states that: "The notion of sexual rights remains controversial and does not immediately emerge among lawyers". For the authors Kismödi, E., et al. 2014 cited by A. Giami (2019, P.4), "the issue of sexual rights has already been the subject of much study and controversy in the international community. We would like to highlight how the links between discourses on sexuality in the health register, on the one hand, and that of human rights, on the other, have been articulated to give rise to "sexual rights".

In addition, the present results of this study have shown some sociological burdens from the abstinence of women and men to the practice of premarital sex. These sociological burdens included the nature of the actors' relationships to the divinity on the one hand and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health values in a Christian context on the other. Moreover, in a context of the dynamics of the subject matter of health sociology, one could not merge into a unilateral logic of the interpretation of the actors of sexual practices. Indeed, the barriers that distinguish each of the popular knowledge and religious knowledge from sexual practices and their internal homogeneity are highlighted. The focus on sexual practices is now at the centre of the analysis of the plurality of disciplines in the social and medical sciences, all this for the sexual and reproductive health of individuals. In the light of the above-mentioned findings, it should be mentioned that sociological burdens are directly associated with sexual practice. Similarly, the consideration of religious dogmas in the practice of sexual intercourse is therefore an important issue as a condition of the sexual and reproductive health of women and men.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This study is a contribution to the sociology of sexual and reproductive health. It analyses some of the social factors that legitimize actors' positions on sexual behaviour. It was purely qualitative with appropriate investigative tools. This has allowed us to arrive at the results according to which the perceptions and knowledge of the actors interpenetrate and legitimize their sexual positions of the actors. Finally, it should be noted that biblical teachings or the relationship to the divinity constitute the first inseparable or indisputable authority in terms of morals, behaviour and conduct of the actors. This idealization of religious dogmas is accompanied by biblical hyper-conformism or ethical hyper-normativity on the part of actors belonging to the same religious field, each actor demonstrating strong normative self-control, thereby limiting deviant behaviours such as having sex before marriage or sexual immorality that would harm group cohesion.

Let us remember that the observance of religious dogmas related to "purity" and the preservation of social virtues such as abstinence, allows actors to avoid any sexual intercourse before marriage. This attitude for the actors is at the origin of preserving religious values and avoiding weakening couples' relationships. Nevertheless, the intervention of the church makes it possible to consolidate or legitimize a couple's relationship. Thus, the possibility of having sexual intercourse that could lead to marriage is high. However, the curiosity to discover sexually the other just to satisfy one's libido is not to be neglected.

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