



The Power of Cultural Normativity in Morocco Disability & Sexuality as Examples

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Abstract

Culture has the ability to create sets of norms for everyone to follow. This article shows how discursive practices result in the alienation and disenfranchisement of certain members of society. Specifically, it examines how this happens in the way disability and sexuality are constructed in Morocco. Since development at all levels is contingent on accepting and including all members of society regardless of their differences, this article sheds light on the social and economic results of this exclusion. Alternatively, we recommend three solutions: raising awareness, regulation, and education.

Keywords: *Cultural Normativity; Disability; Discourse; Education; Morocco; Sexuality*

Introduction

“Working towards understanding one’s belief systems and subsequent actions can be likened to opening a door that leads one on a positive journey towards self-acceptance. It may, therefore, help in shaping an inclusive societal pathway allowing for wider understanding and belonging.” (Lawson, 2008, p. 30).

In many countries around the world, the idea of exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, disability, race, sexuality, and others is prohibited. It is qualified as a human rights violation. To be a member of society, however, is not easy for those who stand outside of what is considered ‘normal’. Regardless of what the law says, racism still exists; religious discrimination still occurs; and inequity between disabled people, those whose sexuality is different and the rest of the ‘normal’ population still persists. In this article, we address the notion of cultural normativity and how its power results in the exclusion of certain minorities in society. We aim at showing the way the discourse is used in daily life or by certain institutions in Morocco to reinforce these discriminatory practices and resulting, among others, in social and economic stagnation of the country. On this basis, the present paper makes recommendations that aim at alleviating the current situation and building a society where difference is accepted and inclusion is achieved.

Disability Defined

Disability is a concept that has been used, in many cultures, as a tool of exclusion. Its understanding differs from one culture to another, but the general definition that many cultures around the world share associates disability with inability, dependence, and burden. To define disability, different models were used. Farkas (2014) outlines three models: charity, medical, and social models. The charity model is considered the most outdated; it considers disability ‘punishment from God’, ‘tragedy’, and the individual needs pity, mercy, and care from the others. The medical defines disability as a condition that is individual-centered and which “needs to be treated and cured with assistance from health professionals” to make it closer to ‘normal’ (ibid., p. 12). As the name suggests, the social model views disability as a result of the interactions between the individuals and their surroundings. Accordingly, Farkas (2014) notes that it “maintains that disability results from interactions between an individual with specific physical, intellectual, sensory or mental health impairments and the surrounding social and cultural environment” (p. 12). Here, the advocates of this model argue that it is the surrounding of the person with disability (PWD) that makes them disabled and not their physical condition. In other words, disability becomes a social construct where the barriers that are set by the attitudes of members and institutions of society result in marginalizing the PWD.

The last two models received much criticism, which has led to the emergence of a new approach called the Interactional or Biopsychosocial Model. Hassanein (2015) draws attention to the fact that neither of the two models should operate on its own; rather, both should be considered when talking about disability. On the one hand, the medical model ignores the difficulties that the environment can cause to a PWD. On the other hand, the social model ignores the children’s individual characteristics. Based on this criticism, the Interactional Model views disability as “the result of a complex interaction between the child’s strengths and weaknesses, the level of support available and the appropriateness of the education being provided” (Hassanein, 2015, p. 28). In 2001, the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health adopted the biopsychosocial model of disability as a step towards creating more inclusive environments by taking into account the different factors that result in disability. These models show that disability is a dynamic concept and its definition determines the quality of life that the PWD have in their societies as being either included or excluded.

Sexuality Defined

Sexuality has always been used as a tool of exclusion and control. However, it is a concept that may not have a set definition to which this research can refer. Often, there is a tendency to link sexuality to reproduction or, recently, to sexual orientation. Debates about the role and effects of biology in sexuality are still taking place today as more scientific research is published. However, it is clear that “sexuality” is not only biology, and more importantly, is not limited to sexual intercourse. Indeed, as Padgug (2007) states, “What the ideologists of sexuality describe, in fact, are only the supposed spheres of its operation: gender; reproduction, the family, and socialization; love and intercourse...” (p. 19). All we are left with, then, is a list of areas where sexuality is present. Gender is one of those areas and the closest definition to be considered acceptable, since it accurately describes what gender is while also holding many questionable presuppositions, is as follows:

...gender has mostly been understood in terms of a system of social structures, scripts, norms, and expectations that usually correspond to sex, with boy/man as the conventional gender “role” for males, and girl/woman as the conventional gender “role” for females. (Earp, 2020, p. 95)

Indeed, what we understand as gender is a socially constructed abstraction manifested in many ways, including physiology, clothing, and stereotypical gender roles. It is worth raising that the meanings and definitions of both “sexuality” and “gender” are questioned in this article.

While disability and sexuality may seem dissimilar as cultural issues, the way they are dealt with in society justifies grouping them together. First, “disabled” is used to define, categorize and exclude a significant number of members of society based on what it has considered “normal” bodies. Second, any other form of sexuality different from a heterosexual activity is considered deviant, and actors are considered abnormal, sick, or, in the worst cases, criminals. Society therefore, defines what is culturally normal and acceptable in order to exclude everything that does not fit its definitions, and eventually, assume its role as guardian of “sanity” and “normality” within the culture.

Cultural Normativity

Normality governs the way people behave toward each other. According to Durkheim (1895), it is based on the most common behavior in a society. Lawson (2008) uses the Schema Theory to explain how normality is the result of a belief system that is “deeply rooted and enmeshed within one’s personality, upbringing, interaction with family and peers and personal decisions.” (p. 29). The term suggests conformity to social standards. Being normal, thus, becomes a safeguard that protects people from social rejection. Normativity consists in extracting norms from the most common behaviors within a culture. A closer and relevant concept here is “cultural normativity”. It is “a set of certain cultural norms, implicit in cultural practices, with the actors of the social life and participants of the culture not always aware of them” (Gołębiewska, 2017, p. 9). Accordingly, normativity is those internalized systems of structure that ultimately lead to the social construction of meaning in a particular culture. Acknowledging the role of cultural normativity allows one to question the agency of participants in defining concepts.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism refers to the view that “reality is socially constructed” (Burger & Luckmann, 1966). Any assumption, regardless of how obviously “true” or “real” it may seem at first, is questionable and potentially only “real” in the sense that it has socially been accepted as being so. This includes ideas that one may have about the experience of being human, which leads social constructionism to reject essentialist ideas about human beings. Accordingly, social constructionist theories “resist the idea of any set or fixed content (essence) to identities... [they] stress culturally and historically specific variations and complexity in relation to identity” (Beasley, 2005, p. 255). In a social constructionist framework, there is a strong focus on historicity and cultural relevance. Concepts do not have inherent and stable meaning; rather, their meaning is negotiated in time and space. Burr (2015) states that social constructionist research has to accept at least one of the following four assumptions in its theoretical framework: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity knowledge is sustained by social processes, and finally, knowledge and social action go together. Within the social constructionist theory, discourse is of utmost importance and gets the majority of the analytical focus. While it is often written language that is analyzed, “anything that can be ‘read’ for meaning can be thought of as being a manifestation of one or more discourses and can be referred to as a ‘text’”. (Burr, 2015, p. 78). This means that one can consider “text” anything from an image to a building, analyze and interpret it accordingly.

Within the framework of the two concepts discussed thus far, namely disability and sexuality, this article investigates how discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions prevailing in the Moroccan society can contribute to excluding any different features related to the norms as they are collectively set. These discourses are analyzed from the perspective of reinforcing the marginalization of PWD and sexually different members of society.

Part 1: Disability

Discourse is powerful and ubiquitous. It is present in all corners of life in society. It is shown in the way an institution is built, transportation, proverbs, politics, novels, media, etc. This is why it is worth exploring the way discourse in Moroccan culture is used to refer to disability and sexuality. We will limit

the exploration to three aspects; (1) Moroccan proverbs, (2) novels, and (3) definitions of disability in some Moroccan institutions.

Disability in Arabic Proverbs

Proverbs are widespread in societies. They are often used in certain situations and are thus an indicator of popular beliefs. The studies that were conducted on disability in Morocco (Khalil et al. 2018; Elouahabi & Bekouchi, 2014) have revealed that just like other cultures, disability is also negatively viewed in Moroccan society. It is sometimes seen as a punishment, a gift from God, or Karma. Khalil et al. (2018) provide a few Arab and Moroccan proverbs that show the negative perceptions of disability:

الاشفتي لعمى ضربو وخود غذاه من قبو، ماشي نتا تحن عليه كثر من للي خلقو.

If you run into a blind guy, beat him and take away his food. You cannot have more compassion for them than their Creator. (our translation)

This is a saying that encourages violence towards visually impaired people and presents lack of divine compassion as an excuse for that. The saying not only incites violence towards people with disabilities (PWD), but also represents it as a punishment from God.

أقربهم للأرض أكثرهم بلاء

The shorter their stature is, the more evil they are. (our translation)

This one shows that people of short stature are harmful, immoral, and evil for society. These sayings and proverbs can be considered a kind of heirloom that is passed down from one generation to another, internalized without being questioned. This is an instance where cultural normativity is clearly at play. Sometimes, they are said without even realizing what they mean. In Morocco, people usually say "اللهم لعمش ولا لعمما" (Better shortsighted than blind, our translation) to refer to a situation where getting little is better than having nothing. In popular culture and as seen here, the discourse used in the proverbs carries negative connotations about PWD and represents them as devilish and divinely-punished. These connotations and representations are eventually normalized and affect the degree to which disability is accepted in society. As Shridevi (2006) rightly argues, "a culture's way of defining and categorizing disability determines how people with disabilities are treated and what roles are assigned to them." (p. 161). This shows that the way culture views disability decides and mirrors the extent to which PWD are included in society.

Disability in Moroccan Literature

Another site where Moroccan culture manifests is literature. A reading of a Moroccan novel, *Au Pays*, by Tahar Ben Jelloun explores the ways disability is perceived in Moroccan culture. It spotlights one character who has a close relationship with the protagonist. Shedding light on the character, Nabil, a trisomic child, provides insight into how he and other children with down syndrome are viewed. Different perceptions are presented in the novel.

For example, the mother and the uncle, Mohamed, (who is the protagonist) see him as a Baraka, a Gift from God, and an Angel. Another character, the midwife, tells the mother that the reason Nabil is born as a trisomic child is that she ate too much garlic during pregnancy. These perceptions are sometimes even non-salient, but they still reflect a great deal about society. Mohamed suggests to Nabil's mother that he takes him to France because there, he would lead a better life. In the same line, he states:

Je crois que s'il était resté au bled, il serait aujourd'hui comme un légume, bavant, sans envie de vivre. Chez nous, on ne fait rien pour ces enfants, on les laisse dans la nature comme des

animaux, personne ne leur fait de mal mais on ne s'en occupe pas non plus.” (Ben Jelloun, 2014, pp. 64-65)

I believe that if he'd stayed in the village he'd be like a vegetable today, drooling, with no zest for life. At home, we do nothing for such children; we just leave them to nature, like animals; no one hurts them, but no one takes care of them, either. (our translation)

In this statement, Morocco is represented as a land where the person with a disability has no place and cannot lead a life of dignity and rights. The ultimate result of this is dependence on their surroundings as subjects of charity because 'no one harms them' and no one takes care of them. This is one example from the novel that shows how disability is negatively perceived in Moroccan culture (see more details on this novel in Ouknider & Benzidan, 2022).

Moroccan Institutions and the Definition of Disability

The negative perceptions regarding disability in Morocco that are explored in proverbs and novels are not the only contributors to the systematic exclusion of PWD in society. In fact these views and attitudes are reinforced by the discourse of Moroccan official organizations such as the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Solidarity, Woman, Family, and Social Development. Such institutions are direct actors in the field of disability in the country. It is, thus, very relevant to investigate how they define it and how that very definition may affect the quality of life of PWD.

In 2004, the Haut Commissariat du Plan (HCP: High commission for Planning) conducted the first consensus of people with disabilities in Morocco. Its definition states:

Une personne handicapée est toute personne désavantagée par rapport à une personne normale dans l'exercice d'une activité suite à une déficience ou à une incapacité physique ou mentale (p. 11)

A handicapped person is any disadvantaged person compared to another person who is normal in the exercise of an activity due to an impairment or to a physical or mental incapacity (our translation).

This definition adopts a medical approach to defining disability in the sense that it focuses on the person's impairment as a cause of his/her disadvantage and incapability to do what 'normal' people can do. In fact, even the use of 'normal' here is problematic because it entails that people with disabilities are abnormal and justifies why they are left on the margins.

Ten years later, in 2014, the Ministry of Solidarity, Woman, Family and Social Development conducted the latest statistics of PWD in Morocco. The conceptual framework adopted in the study was based on a

une approche multidimensionnelle qui prend en compte, en plus des aspects médicaux, l'ensemble des facteurs environnementaux et personnels des PSH qui peuvent influencer, positivement ou négativement, leur situation de handicap. (p. 15)

A multidimensional approach that takes into account, in addition to the medical aspects, the environmental and personal factors of PWD, which may influence their situation either positively or negatively. (our translation)

This definition takes Morocco a step forward because it acknowledges the great role the surroundings of PWD play in the quality of the life they will lead.

In 2016, the Moroccan government approved Framework Law 97.13 on the protection and promotion of the PWDs rights. It includes different areas such as health care, education, employment,

accessibility, and participation in civil and political life, among others. However, its definition of a disabled person states that

“كل شخص لديه قصور أو انحصار في قدراته البدنية أو العقلية أو النفسية أو الحسية، بصورة دائمة، سواء كانت مستقرة أو متطورة، قد يمنعه عند التعامل مع مختلف الحواجز، من المشاركة بصورة كاملة وفعالة في المجتمع على قدم المساواة مع الآخرين (2.Article 2, p)

PWD: Any person with a permanent limitation or deficiency, whether stable or evolving, in their physical, mental, psychological or sensory faculties that may, in their interaction with various obstacles, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (our translation)

This present definition takes Morocco 12 years back to the 2004 definition as it also adopts a medical model of disability. It focuses on impairment that may hinder participation in the different aspects of social life and neglects the source and nature of these ‘boundaries’. Two out of three definitions focus on the individuals with a disability as the problem rather than on the culture that creates the problem for the individual. These inconsistent and changing definitions of disability pose a problem to its study in Morocco. They reflect how the culture is itself disabled due to its inability to consider disability as a mere difference.

Definitions are very important. Knowing how institutions that deal directly with PWD understand and define disability or people with disabilities communicates and sheds light on the extent to which they are included. These are institutions that represent the Moroccan society and that issue information and give recommendations about the lives of PWD and their accessibility to health, education, politics, and the public sphere. This is why the definitions they adopt need to be challenged and changed to take into account not just the individual but his/her surroundings and how they affect their experience of disability.

Part 2: Sexuality

The growing literature around sexuality and gender in Morocco points in the same direction: Moroccan society has an entrenched, deep social construction of sexuality. The implications of that is the construction of sexuality can be seen at different levels of culture, from the thoughts and behaviors of individuals to the overreaching ideologies of powerful social institutions. Ostensibly, the available discourse reaffirms the collectively shared ideas about sexuality.

Gender Construction

The use of discourse to limit deviant sexuality starts even before a person is born. It is common in Morocco to use the words “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. As a matter of fact, the equivalent term for “gender” in Arabic is almost never used. The reality is that the two terms are not the same. Sex refers to biological organs that aid in reproduction whereas gender is a social construct that begins taking shape as early as the parents acknowledge of the sex of their baby. The newly born baby’s femininity or masculinity is taken so seriously that gifts given to the parents on the occasion share roughly the same color shades: pink for girls and blue for boys. The type of clothing, the toys, even the type of cartoons babies and toddlers watch are dependent on their gender. Dresses, dolls, and family-oriented anime are for the girls while the boys get overalls, fake weapons, and action-filled entertainment. If it is a boy, a ceremony for his circumcision is held. Gender roles are also predefined and predetermined for Moroccans. Men are pursuers, women are pursued; men are protectors, women are protected; men are providers, women are provided for. Cultural normativity sets the tone in Moroccan society and limits the allowed family structure to just one type: heterosexual family. These traditional gender roles are accepted in Morocco as being natural and God-given.

Islam and Gender roles

Cultural normativity uses religion as a reference for the designated gender roles, arguing that they are the natural order as that is how Allah has intended it. There are two common references. One is a Quranic verse that says

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ... فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ (4:34 Quran)

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women... Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. (Quran 4:34, Yusuf Ali's Translation)

The other is a Hadith that says:

إِنَّكَ تَكْتَرِنَ اللَّعْنَ وَتَكْفُرِنَ الْعَشِيرَ مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْ نَاقِصَاتِ عَقْلِ وَدِينٍ أَذْهَبَ لِقَلْبِ الرَّجُلِ الْحَازِمِ مِنْ إِحْدَاكُنَّ يَا مَعْشَرَ النِّسَاءِ

You are greatly given to abuse, and you are ungrateful to your husbands. Among women who are deficient in intelligence and religion I have not seen anyone more able to remove the understanding of a prudent man than one of you.

While context is important and interpretation of the two references can differ, at face value, they both bear a connotation that women are inferior to men. The verse clearly states that men have the upper hand in the relationship while women ought to be obedient to their husbands. Masculinity is, thus, only achieved when a man can prove his dominance while ultimate femininity lies in submission to male dominance.

Religion has been outspoken and clear about sexuality for centuries. Many verses in the Qur'an and Hadith by the Prophet give indications on what is prohibited and what is allowed regarding sexuality. Take for example this verse:

نِسَاؤُكُمْ حَرْثٌ لَكُمْ فَاتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنَّى شِئْتُمْ وَقِيمُوا لِنَفْسِكُمْ وَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ مُلْقَوَةٌ وَيَسِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (Quran 2:223)

Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear Allah. And know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give (these) good tidings to those who believe. (Quran 2:223, Yusuf Ali's Translation)

Again, interpretations of the verse can differ depending on the reader. However, generally, in Moroccan culture, the verse is read as Allah instructing believers to feel completely free in engaging in sexual intercourse with their wives. What is considered normal is derived from the words of Allah and His prophet, making it more difficult to question these assumptions. This creates a vicious cycle of reproducing discourse and self-censorship whereby discourse of sexuality is not questioned nor allowed to be questioned.

Sexual Orientation & Activity

In the context of normativity in Morocco, abstinence until marriage is heavily encouraged, especially for women. Girls and women are taught that their sexuality is directly linked to their family's reputation. Therefore, they are instructed to abstain from sexual activity to preserve their family's Honor. Young women will abstain until they get married at a later age in life to protect their family's lineage from being tarnished. In one of the popular proverbs, it says "اختر لولدك الأصل وختار لبتك الرجل" (translates to: Choose a girl of good descent for your son and a manly husband for your daughter). Not only is the couple's agency removed, but the wife's lineage is considered a major criterion while the husband should only show his manliness. Therefore, premarital sexuality for women is completely prohibited while for men, it tends to be overlooked. The discourse denies women pleasure while it allows it for men.

Compulsory (repressed) heterosexuality is the default lifestyle for many Moroccans. The only attraction allowed is between two opposite genders. Homosexuality is prohibited by religion and law. Homosexuals are often referred to as Lot's tribe who allegedly engaged in sodomy and whom Allah punished using stones. It is important to note that the discourse only refers the passives as homosexuals. They are considered inferior to other men as they are more feminine. Female homosexuality is rarely brought up as an issue and may not be acknowledged. The sexual discourse in Morocco grants normalcy only to heterosexuals while any divergence is considered abnormal and a sickness.

Law & Jurisprudence

The Moroccan juridical system has been updated to keep up with pressure from the human right's advocates. Nowadays, the Family Code grants women slightly more rights than before, which caused an uproar among conservatives when it was first enforced. However, the socially constructed discourse still has a major presence in the current laws. For example, 'perpetrators' of premarital relationships and homosexuality are sentenced to prison. Until recently, rapists were allowed to marry their victims to avoid prison. Biological fathers cannot be compelled to acknowledge a baby if it is not the fruit of an official relationship and single mothers could be punished following premarital sex laws. While the minimum legal age of marriage is 18, many judges still allow older men to marry girls as young as 14 years old. While it has almost always relied on religious scholarship to derive its guidelines, the stringent laws that exist today are only there to protect the patriarchal social and cultural status-quo.

Popular Culture

Popular culture has many explicit and implicit mentions of sexual topics. Poems and songs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would shock conservatives today as sexuality has been a major source of inspiration for singers, both male and female. El Haja Hamdaouia's *Bchwia* is a song about a first sexual encounter for a virgin. Expressions of admiration for bodies and of longing for lovers and experiencing sexual relationships were common in many songs. However, these expressions and songs have always been enjoyed in private as they are considered crude and indecent.

Barriers to Conversation

One of the effects of cultural normativity is that there are many barriers to a free, public discussion of sexuality. These barriers are moral, intellectual, as well as linguistic. First, topics around sex and sexuality in general make the interlocutors uncomfortable. There is a moral stigma associated with them, making the conversations short, uninformative, and more often implicit. The religious influence on sexual discourse is insurmountable. An individual feels shame, regret, and fear of being sinful while expressing their experience, especially when it is not within what is religiously allowed. Even today, the mere mention of the word "sex" summons an immense feeling of awkwardness. Second, theywho? lack the necessary knowledge to understand their experience. Education systems have largely ignored sexuality until studying it became a public health issue. Even then, sex education focused primarily on the biomedical and the religious aspect. Personal experience and sexual expression have not been explored to allow for a strong understanding of one's own sexual experience. Finally, individuals lack accessibility to the language they can use to describe their sexuality. Moroccan Arabic is the mother tongue of the overwhelming majority of citizens but it does not contain an appropriate lexicon for explicit talk about sexuality. Most of its terminology is obscene or not expressive enough. Discussions of sexuality in public media rely mainly on code-switching to soften the intensity and lower the awkwardness of the conversation. This language barrier is only lifted in a medical environment (for example, a patient visiting a doctor), or judicial proceedings (victim to a lawyer or a detective). It is not hard to imagine the discomfort the patient feels in these environments for lack of adequate vocabulary. All of this creates an environment where public discussions of sexuality are rare, short, and lacking depth.

Part 3: Impact of Exclusion

It is always eye-opening to explore how taken-for-granted information is actually socially constructed through discourses that are adopted and regulated in our daily lives by powerful institutions. It is likewise important to explore the impact of excluding certain categories of society on the social and economic development of the country.

Continuous exclusion of people with disabilities from the public sphere results in the continuous rise of stigma and discrimination against this category in society. Thus, seeing them as human beings with rights and the potential of being independent in their lives continues to be far from reality. As far as the economic impact is concerned, one could be surprised to learn that the economic impact of the exclusion of PWD is huge. For instance, in Morocco, in the 2011 report of the study, LJ Consulting was entrusted with by the Collective of the Promotion of People with Disabilities' Rights, the findings revealed that the cost of exclusion of PWD in 2004 was estimated to be 9.2 Billion MAD. This great amount contradicts the idea that PWD are a burden to the country's economy. Taking into account the rising number of PWD in Morocco, we can expect this loss to multiply. This is why there is an urgent need for these perceptions to change and start investing in the education of PWD in view of their becoming future contributors to the country's economy growth, a fact that will improve their social conditions and make them independent.

The cost of exclusion based on sexuality is harder to quantify economically. Yet, the use of a socially oppressive and repressive discourse of sexuality results in many societal issues. Recently, the number of social problems related to sexuality has exploded. According to HCP, as of 2014, the age of first marriage is 25.7 for women and 31.3 for men. According to Association INSAF's official website, 50.000 illegitimate babies are born each year in Morocco. A study (2010) conducted by the association found that in 2009, 17.680 single mothers gave birth to their firstborn. While it is not possible to give exact numbers, many estimate that there are anywhere between 200 and 800 illegal abortions in Morocco (Moroccan Family Planning Association; Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, 2016). The majority of these abortions is due to unwanted pregnancies, young Moroccans between 15 and 24 being the most concerned. In addition to that, UNAIDS estimates that in 2017, approximately 22.000 Moroccans were living with HIV, 12.000 of whom were men. Ouairdirhi of AlBayane Press (2017) reports that during the 17th edition of the IUSTI World Congress that took place in May 2016 in Marrakesh, the data presented showed that 440.000 were affected by at least one sexually transmitted disease, 70% of whom were women. The national average for gendered violence stood at 54.4% with domestic violence being more pervasive in urban settings. 55.8% women reported to have experienced it in some form—pointed or more subtle— between January and March (The National Commission for the Support of Women Victims of Violence, 2020). These numbers represent a wide variety of challenges that are affecting Moroccan society in general and the Moroccan youth in particular

Part 4: Implications/Solutions to the problem

It is not enough to raise problems, but it is important to also think of ways to help alleviate their intensity. We recommend three solutions that can have positive results in the short, mid, and long terms.

Short-Term Solution: Raising awareness

In the short term, sensitization is good to start conversations regarding the issues of disability and sexuality. As long as these topics are discussed publicly and regularly in order to deconstruct and challenge the discourses, people would become aware of the impact that the negative connotations have on society. Kulkarni et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of disability-related sensitization workshops in India. Their findings revealed that they seemed to succeed in expanding the knowledge on disability-specific matters for all their participants. For certain organizations, they helped hire more PWD than before. In the Moroccan context, such sensitization campaigns can help increase awareness of the issues

that PWD face and help in their accessibility to social life. This can target different stakeholders like teachers, parents, and business people.

Social media have been a helpful tool for raising awareness about taboo issues, especially regarding sexuality. Recent events in Morocco, such as sexual harassment scandals, grabbed the attention of many social media users. Many human rights advocates, including associations, artists, and social media influencers, have used the new platforms to raise questions and challenge the authorities to take actions against what is considered human rights violations. Therefore, social media platforms can be used to host online workshops, training, or any helpful information in the hope of sensitizing and making positive changes in attitudes toward disability and sexuality in Morocco, regardless of how small that change can be.

Mid-term Solution: Laws & Regulations

The second recommendation we are putting forward is related to laws and regulations. Morocco needs to completely change or remove some of the existing laws to respect individual freedom and accommodate the needs of different members of society. For example, many laws punish premarital sexual acts and homosexuality that could simply be reconsidered. Abortion laws can be changed to protect women and doctors. Other laws can be changed to be more severe against sexual harassers, rapists, and pedophiles. Likewise, there is a set of laws calling for the protection of the rights of PWD in Morocco. For example, Framework Law 97/13 was approved in 2016 to protect their rights to health care, education, employment, accessibility, and participation in civil and political life, among others. This is one document among many that deals with that, but which are not clear enough on how these rights are to be protected. New or updated laws are not enough, however. They also need to be supplemented with practical guidelines for better implementation. These changes may not have a direct impact on society but the existence of more appropriate laws can change the way the legal discourse is used to justify the exclusion and oppression of members of society.

Long-Term Solution: Education

The long-term solution we recommend to changing the discourses about disability and sexuality in Morocco is education. Both inclusive education and comprehensive sexuality education programs have long been argued to be efficient in creating inclusive societies that respect differences.

This inclusive education philosophy has been going on for so many years now and has been adopted in so many countries because of the belief in its efficiency through time. Inclusive education is defined as a system that guarantees access to children with disabilities in the general education setting while meeting their educational needs. In reaffirming their commitment to education for all, 92 governments and 25 international organizations assembled in 1994 in Salamanca, Spain during the World Conference on Special Needs Education. They recalled that the education of people with disabilities is an integral part of the education system. In one of its points, the Salamanca Statement argues that regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. (Salamanca Statement, 1994, p. 1).

As for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), it is defined as “a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality” (UNESCO, 2008, n. p.). Studies reviewed in 2008 revealed that CSE has positive effects on reducing risky sexual behavior. In its review, UNESCO reveals that 37% of programs have delayed sexual initiation, 31% reduced the frequency of sex among participants, 44% decreased the number of sexual partners, 40% increased the use of condoms, 40% increased the use of contraception and 53% reduced sexual risk-taking. Among all programs, no more than two (3% to 7%) had negative results while the rest had no effect on the behavior of the participants. The evidence for the effectiveness of CSE is hence undeniable.

Conclusion

Discourse spread the word in different forms. We have shown how it is present in proverbs, novels, laws, as well as the dominant ideology in Morocco. Through analyzing how discourse in Moroccan culture is used to refer to disability and sexuality, we have shown that Moroccans would benefit from sensitization, rectification of the laws, and appropriate education. These tools would allow members of society to appreciate differences and make Morocco a much more inclusive and open country. Future research could cover topics such as the extent to which our recommendations would benefit Moroccan society.

Through this article, we have tried to show how “normality” is constructed through different discourses that are unchallenged and passed on from one generation to another. We argue that there is, and there should be, no such thing as “normal”. Normality leads to the exclusion of different social categories from society which burdens the socio-economic development of the country. Leaving aside the moralistic understanding of inclusion, countries around the world can only move forward and grow if the inclusion of *all* its members is ensured regardless of their disabilities, gender or sexual activity.

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