

Chapter 10

Young People and Cybersex in a Sexually Conservative Society: A Case Study from Mauritius

Komalsingh Rambaree
University of Gävle, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the process, explains the aspects, analyses the experiences and considers the social policy implications, of cybersex among young people from the sexually conservative Mauritian society. This chapter is based on a study, in which it is found that some of young people from Mauritius are involved in cybersex. The chapter therefore argues that Internet-based technologies are further breaking down 'the traditional and moral values', which some politicians, religious leaders and parents want to preserve through social policy related to sexuality education in Mauritius. A sexual rights-based approach to policy making and interventions for a formal sex education programme in Mauritius is found more appropriate within this particular context, and therefore recommended in this chapter. Finally, this chapter concludes that an appropriate formal sex education for young people should take into account the 'Net Culture' context within which contemporary young people are growing sexually in Mauritius.

This chapter contains explicit content

INTRODUCTION

Mauritius is a small African island situated in the Indian Ocean. It has a land surface area of 1,865 square kilometres and a population of about 1.2 million. The youth population (14-25 years old) of the country is around 300,000 of which about 50% are female (MYS, 2009). It is commonly argued that the youth of today are the future of

tomorrow. For economic experts, this section of the population represents the vital future human capital. For sociologists, the contemporary youth population set new patterns for social and cultural changes in a dynamic society. In traditional theories, youth is seen as distinct transitional phase of life, between the more stable categories of childhood and adulthood (Worth, 2009). In various societies, the youth population express their identities and demonstrate their sense of belonging to a particular group of young people

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through having what is commonly referred as 'youth culture' (Buchmann, 2004).

Mauritius is considered as a peaceful multicultural, politically stable and economically successful country. Since 1983, the country has maintained an average annual economic growth of around 5 per cent (Shillington, 1991; ADB/OECD, 2008). In order to further diversify its economy, Mauritius is also investing towards becoming a technology-based society (Rambaree, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). Mauritius has no indigenous population and the inhabitants are of European, African and Asian origins. The vast majority of inhabitants from Mauritius speak Creole (lingua-franca) and more than half of the population can speak both French and English, and more than half of them can even speak one or more Asian languages. The religions followed by the inhabitants are Hinduism (52%), Christianity (28%), Islam (17%), Buddhism (2%), and Others (1%) (CSO, 2000). Most of the inhabitants on the island are descendants of those who had been sent or brought to develop the island during the French and British colonisation periods (1710-1810 and 1810-1968 respectively). It is commonly argued that from its colonial and political history, the current Mauritian society is shaped by certain conservative values regarding sexuality (Hillcoat-Nallétam & Dharmalingam, 2005).

Within the traditional and conservative nature of the Mauritian society, sex is still considered to be a taboo subject. Growing up as a young person in Mauritius means showing respect; importantly, by not challenging the traditional and conservative sexual norms and values. Within the traditional norms and values, sex is regarded as a private matter and no sexual activities between people before marriage is acceptable by the society. Parents guide and expect their children to follow the traditional norms and values by not bringing sexual discussions in public and not tolerating pre-marital sexual intercourse. Similarly, the community and religious leaders expect the parents and the extended family (grandparents and elder

siblings) to play an important role in transferring the traditional norms and values. The success/failure of a family in Mauritius is therefore commonly judged by its ability to pass on the traditional norms and values (Schensul et al., 1994).

In Mauritius, young people are commonly categorised as either 'Bien-Elevés' (well educated/brought up) or 'Mal-Elevés' (badly educated/brought up). It is also common to find young people who try to speak about sexuality openly being labelled as 'Mal-Elevés'. Sometimes, having sex is also referred as 'faire Mal-Elevés' (mis-behave) in the local jargon. Particularly, 'sexual purity' is among the basic norms and values that are shared by almost all ethnic communities in Mauritius. Within the family, more emphasis is laid on girls to remain virgin for the husband-to-be. Girls' virginity is the pride and honour of the family (Schensul et al., 1994). It is quite common in Mauritius, for families to go to the court asking for legal punishment and/or compensation from boys who have broken the promise of marriage with their female family members. Young people are given the message that they should date the one they are supposed to marry, and marry the one they have been dating (Rambaree, 2008). Sexual activities in a couple before marriage and even during the dating period are considered to be 'immoral'.

Morality related to sex, mainly the expected code of conduct and practices, is framed by the rigid moral values of certain value-based organisations such as church, schools, and voluntary ethno-socio-cultural organisations in Mauritius. Moral values are strong beliefs and opinions about what could be considered as being right or wrong. These values are therefore the guide for expected actions, directing individuals and groups to decide about what should or should not be done, and provide the basis for evaluating the conduct of others as being right or wrong (Smith, 2000). Almost all schools in Mauritius try to preach and instil moral values to the young people; and especially to girls, who are regarded as the main

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