Sexuality: Premarital Sex

Honors Blue Team: Lisbeth Peguero, Veronica Paez-Deggeller, Alyssa Pelletier, Natalie Bedoya, Juliana Restrepo
Summarize
Key Questions

- What is sex?
- Who should engage in it?
- Under what circumstances?
- When and where is it permissible?
- What are some factors in culture that influence attitudes towards premarital sex?
**Article Summary**

★ **Sex** is a biological component of human nature + **socially constructed**.
★ Our **purpose**: explore **variations among attitudes and practices concerning sex** through an anthropological lens.
  ○ Recognize **societal factors** that can influence these attitudes.
★ The **spectrum of tolerance of premarital sex** and how it changes over time in specific cultures.

“Societies vary considerably in the degree to which they encourage, discourage, or even appear to fear sex at different life stages and in varying circumstances” (Ember et. al, 2019).
Synthesize
Relation to Textbook

Chapter 1:
★ **Ethnology**: comparative analytic approach to many cultures using data collected from ethnographers

Chapter 2:
★ **Feminist anthropology**: considers all gender dimensions + provides corrective to traditional ethnographic male bias
★ **Culture shock**: psychological disorientation while operating in a different culture
★ **Cultural universals**: common features shared by societies
Relation to textbook

Chapter 10:

★ **Patrilineal descent:** A form of descent in which people trace their primary kin relationships through their fathers.

★ **Matrilineal descent:** A form of descent in which people trace their primary kin connections through their mothers.

“In the above chart, blue shapes indicate individuals who are the patrilineal descents of a common ancestor. Moreover, the triangles indicate males and circles indicate females. You will notice that both females and males are included in the patrilineage, but only male links are used to trace successive generations.” (PEDIAA)
Chapter 11:

★ **Sex:** biological differences between males and females

★ **Gender** - the way members of the two sexes are perceived, evaluated, and expected to behave

  ○ **Gender norms and roles** impact views on premarital sex.

*Sex is biological, gender is socially constructed*
The impact of **male dominance** on **attitudes towards sex**.

- **Masculinity** - social definition of maleness
- **Femininity** - social definition of femaleness
- **Genderqueer** - nonbinary gender-expressive

Western culture tends to only recognize two genders... What can we make of this?
Sexual asymmetry: tendency of women to be subordinates in relationships with men

Gender stratification: hierarchical ranking of members of a society according to gender

Gender ideology: thoughts and values that legitimize gender roles

Disparities between Genders:
- Education
- Employment and compensation
- Reproductive health
- Finance
- Political power
- Marriage rights
Research
**Activity:** Compare attitudes towards premarital sexual relations among several cultures emphasizing social permissiveness and restrictions towards the behavior.

Cultures we investigated:
- Trobriands
- Copper Inuit
- Kanuri
- Libyan Bedouin
- Pawnee
# Region and Culture Results

Finished. Found 182 paragraphs in 23 documents in 5 cultures.

**Search Query:**
Show / Hide

---

### Narrow Results by Subsistence Type and Sample

**Africa** (16 paragraphs in 7 documents in 2 cultures)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>Culture Name</th>
<th>OWC</th>
<th>Subsistence Type</th>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>No. Documents</th>
<th>No. Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>Libyan Bedouin</td>
<td>MT09</td>
<td>Pastoralists</td>
<td>C1, EA, PSF</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Africa</td>
<td>Kanuri</td>
<td>MS14</td>
<td>Intensive Agriculturalists</td>
<td>C1, EA, PSF</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**North America** (49 paragraphs in 5 documents in 2 cultures)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>Culture Name</th>
<th>OWC</th>
<th>Subsistence Type</th>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>No. Documents</th>
<th>No. Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arctic and Subarctic</td>
<td>Copper Inuit</td>
<td>NO06</td>
<td>Hunter-gatherers</td>
<td>C1, EA, PSF, SCSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plains and Plateau</td>
<td>Passene</td>
<td>NQ18</td>
<td>Other Subsistence Combinations</td>
<td>C1, EA, PSF, SCSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Oceania** (126 paragraphs in 11 documents in 1 culture)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>Culture Name</th>
<th>OWC</th>
<th>Subsistence Type</th>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>No. Documents</th>
<th>No. Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melanesia</td>
<td>Trobrianders</td>
<td>OL06</td>
<td>Other Subsistence Combinations</td>
<td>C1, EA, PSF, SCSS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Close Box*  
*TIP – Hold Shift to Sort Across Multiple Columns*
Abu-Lughod, Lila
Veiled sentiments: honor and poetry in a Bedouin society

Peters, Enny L. - 1987
Writing women's worlds: Bedouin stories

5 Paragraphs

1. This association of sexual modesty with respect for the more responsible is reflected in the way the Bedouins conceive of virtuous women. The ideal woman who tahashams is called "the daughter of a man" (bint-i-raji). When I asked girls why a young [Page 158] bride cries when someone comes to ask for her hand, they answered, "So everyone will know her father is a man and that he raised her." On the question of premartial sex or elopement, the most egregious violations of the modesty code, the same connections are asserted. Whenever I questioned women about the motivations of girls who engaged in premarital sex or eloped, they explained, "They are sluts who don't care about their fathers and aren't afraid of their kinmen." As we saw in the last chapter, deference and fear are extremely close conceptually and are often used interchangeably in Bedouin utterances.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trobriands (OL06)</td>
<td>- Premissive - <em>Intercourse is allowed and begun at an early age</em>&lt;br&gt;- Preliminary trials lead to marriages&lt;br&gt;- A girl is advised not to get pregnant before she is married&lt;br&gt;- <em>Macula</em> (payment) for matrimonial relations (e.g., Bowana or Sebawana)&lt;br&gt;- Ceremonial cases of indulgence (e.g., Katuyausi Custom and Mortuary Consolations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copper Inuit (ND68)</td>
<td>- Permissive - <em>Parents tolerate premarital sex; it is common and openly accepted</em>&lt;br&gt;- Extensive <em>kin relations</em>&lt;br&gt;- Discourage pregnancy rather than sexual intercourse&lt;br&gt;- Young couples form households when suitable units are available&lt;br&gt;- Teenagers are <em>ignorant to birth control/contraception methods</em>&lt;br&gt;- Most sexual activity performed for the pleasure of males; females take low priority&lt;br&gt;- Sexual activity affected by change of <em>seasons</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanuri (MS14)</td>
<td>- Restricted - <em>Sexual relations before marriage are proscribed (women)</em>&lt;br&gt;- <em>Islamic view → Sex acts against religion</em>&lt;br&gt;- Girls have virgin <em>statuses</em>&lt;br&gt;- Payment for hand in marriage (<em>Kwororom</em>) → Marriage ceremony → Semi-public defloration&lt;br&gt;- Men have freedom of sexual behaviour at all times whether or not they are married&lt;br&gt;- Sex may lead to <em>finales offenses</em>, sanctions, diminish in <em>bridewealth</em>&lt;br&gt;- Relations between post pubertal men and a married girl deemed rape, severely punished in court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libyan Bedouin (MT09)</td>
<td>- Restricted - Premarital sex relations are strictly controlled&lt;br&gt;- <em>Men are seen as “possessors”</em> of a woman’s procreative facilities&lt;br&gt;- <em>Marriage Ceremony → Virginity test</em>&lt;br&gt;- Severe penalty → Killing culprit&lt;br&gt;- Men of family carry burden&lt;br&gt;- <em>Muslim views</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawnee (NQ18)</td>
<td>- Restricted - <em>Chastity is held in high esteem</em>&lt;br&gt;- Girls are virgins until marriage&lt;br&gt;- Boys have premarital relations&lt;br&gt;- Early intimacy results in marriage&lt;br&gt;- Girl has <em>no choice in selecting husband</em>, leading to many family disputes&lt;br&gt;- If a girl becomes pregnant, the husband’s treatment depends on his reputation in the family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*bridewealth* - Transfer of goods from the groom’s lineage to the bride’s lineage to legitimize marriage.
During usigola, and in other similar feasts, a person has the opportunity to seek out relationships with other people directly through her or his children. At the same time, her or his children have the opportunity to seek out sexual liaisons with others. I was told several stories of how chiefs from other villages often came to watch the dancers, seeking the most beautiful girls for themselves. Often these attractions led to marriage. The older men and women who are dancers and who have for the moment reversed their age by becoming beautiful also become objects of attraction and find themselves directly involved in tilewai exchanges.

immediately. This is the case in the normal intrigues, going on every night in the village between unmarried girls and boys, and also in more ceremonial cases of indulgence like the katuyausi custom, or the mortuary consolations, mentioned in Chapter II, Division some turtle-shell rings, or spondylus discs, such are the small tokens of gratitude and appreciation never omitted by the youth. An attractive girl need never go unprovided with the small luxuries of life.

the nature of this relationship. They have as a matter of fact a very coarse and direct way of formulating that such gifts are the macula (payment) for matrimonial relations, a conception in harmony with the ideas underlying another type of gift, of which I shall speak presently, that given in return for sexual intercourse.

whom they work. The sexual gifts are called buwana or sebuwana. I shall not enumerate the various terminological distinctions of sagali gifts, as this would be impossible to do, without entering upon the enormous subject of mortuary duties and distributions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Trobriands (OL06) | **Permissive**  
- *Intercourse is allowed and begun at an early age*  
- Preliminary *trials* lead to marriages  
- A girl is advised not to get pregnant before she is married  
- *Macula* (payment) for matrimonial relations (e.g., Buwana or Sebuwana)  
- Ceremonial cases of indulgence (e.g., *Katuyausi Custom* and Mortuary Consolations) |
Before continuing, it is necessary to make a brief note concerning the nature of biological and social kin relations in the settlement. The amount of cross-cutting of kin ties is staggering, and it takes years for an outsider to develop the same knowledge of kin relations taken for granted by local residents. Inuit society is not visibly sexually promiscuous; however, premarital and extramarital sexual liaisons are certainly more common and openly accepted than in our own society. Even

Although contraceptives are available at the nursing station, their use by adolescents is limited and seems to be confined primarily to older teenagers. This is partly due to the absence of any organized public health program to provide teenagers with birth control counseling or sex education, either at school or during nursing station clinics. As a result, many teenagers are ignorant of both birth control methods and reproductive physiology. Other obstacles to birth control lie in the methods available. Condoms are the only barrier method available in the settlement. Intrauterine devices and birth

In Holman the arousal of adolescent sexual interest and sexual play is unaccompanied by any serious parental surveillance or disapproval. While most parents disapprove of early sexual play (i.e., in the early teens), this is not due to any moral condemnation of adolescent sexual activity, but to the pragmatic concern that a young girl might become pregnant before she is mature enough to care for an infant. The response of some parents is to discourage pregnancy rather than sexual intercourse. One mother of

Spring was in the air and so were sensual pleasures—at the moment nothing else mattered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Copper Inuit (ND08)** | **Permissive**  
- Parents tolerate premarital sex; it is common and openly accepted  
- Extensive kin relations  
- Some parents may discourage pregnancy rather than sexual intercourse  
- Young couples form households when suitable units are available  
- Teenagers are ignorant to birth control/contraception methods  
- Most sexual activity performed for the pleasure of males, females take low priority  
- Sexual activity affected by change of seasons |
The *kwororam* applies only to non-preferential virgin marriages. It is not practised in cousin marriage because these unions are arranged years before they are consummated. In non-virgin marriage the money and gifts which the man gives to the woman while he is sleeping with her, as a divorced woman, serve instead as the initiatory behaviour which may or may not lead to marriage.

Furthermore, the Kanuri share a wider Islamic view of the weak willpower of girls in matters of chastity. Indeed, in the stories of rape, the man is often credited with having persuaded the girl to act illegally. Thus such acts are viewed as a male crime.

there are a great deal of extra-marital sexual relations by men which for all intents and purposes are culturally sanctioned. In other words, social reality and every day ethical standards give to men much freedom of sexual behaviour at all times whether or not they are married. This holds true for

For once-married adults, premarital and extra-marital sexual activity is jurally a fineable offense. However, only adultery with a married woman has a very strong negative sanction against it. In the questionnaire there was no attempt to include premarital sex information. Men do not speak of such things except to close friends.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kanuri (MS14)</td>
<td>Restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sexual relations before marriage are proscribed [women]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Islamic view</strong> → Sex acts “against religion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Girls have virgin <strong>statuses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Payment for hand in marriage (Kwororam) → Marriage ceremony → Semi-public defloration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Men have freedom of sexual behaviour at all times whether or not they are married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sex may lead to <strong>finable offenses</strong>, sanctions, diminish in <em>bridewealth</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Relations between post pubertal men and a married girl deemed rape, <strong>severely punished</strong> in court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nubile women are subject to restrictions because they possess what can be regarded as a kind of commodity: the ability to bear children. Like other commodities, it is owned by males, and its transfer from one set of males to another is a contractual arrangement. Until a contract has been concluded, a male who has exclusive usufructuary rights to a woman’s reproductive capabilities has not been designated, and it follows that a woman’s issue lacks designation also.

**the public virginity test** — an essential part of the marriage ceremony for all young girls which must act as a restraint on premarital intercourse — the circumstantial evidence is that pre-marital intercourse does occur, on however small a scale. Bedouin,


Bedouin were disgusted and disinclined to accept the information. One of them claimed that a Muslim would not do this - he knew nothing of infant betrothal, nor of early marriage, in other parts of the Muslim Middle East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Libyan Bedouin (MT09)** | **Restricted**  
- Premarital sex relations are strictly controlled  
- Men are seen as “posessors” of a woman’s procreative facilities  
- Marriage Ceremony → **Virginity test**  
- Severe penalty → Killing culprit  
- Men of family carry burden  
- **Muslim** views |
should the girl’s relatives be predisposed to the boy and think him likely to become a good husband, he was asked to marry her. The relatives of the young man gathered together and sent presents of ponies, robes, blankets, and other things to the girl’s parents, and the two young people were married. If the boy was not considered suitable, however, two men were sent to his lodge and he was severely beaten, and on rare occasions died as a result of the punishment. During the beating, tribal custom decreed that the boy’s relatives must not defend him. The young man’s parents sometimes tried to heal the breach between the two families by offering presents to the parents of the injured girl. If the girl’s

for water, or he might see her by stealth in the evening near her lodge. Often this [Page 97] early intimacy would ultimately end in a marriage according to the rites of the tribe, but the girl was not allowed to exercise much choice in the selection of a husband.

prevailing. No such custom as this existed for girls, as they were supposed to remain virgins until marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Premarital Sex Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pawnee (NQ18)   | Restricted  
|                 | - *Chastity is held in high esteem*                                                           |
|                 | - Girls are *virgins* until marriage                                                           |
|                 | - Boys have premarital relations                                                              |
|                 | - Early intimacy results in *marriage*                                                        |
|                 | - Girl has *no choice* in selecting husband, leading to many family disputes                   |
|                 | - If a girl becomes pregnant, the husband’s *treatment depends on* his *reputation* in the family |
Reflection
Workbook Reflection Questions

★ Which cultures hold similar and different attitudes towards premarital sexual relations?
★ Why are some cultures more restrictive or permissive about premarital sexual behavior?
★ Which culture is the most restrictive?
★ Which culture is the most permissive?
Which cultures hold similar and different attitudes towards premarital sexual relations?

★ **Restrictive:** Libyan Bedouin, Kanuri, Pawnee
  ○ Gender norms: male dominance/freedom
  ○ Severe penalties for premarital sex
  ○ Religious restrictions
  ○ Family disputes

★ **Permissive:** Copper Inuit, Trobriands
  ○ Open to early intimacy
  ○ Emphasis on expanding kinship
  ○ Socially supportive - Offer gifts and resources (i.e. contraceptive services)
Why are some cultures more restrictive or permissive about premarital sexual behavior?

★ Societal factors that can affect a culture’s attitudes and practices of premarital sex include:
  ○ Societal complexity
  ○ Patrilineal/Matrilineal descent
  ○ Gender norms
  ○ Attitudes on childhood sex/interpersonal relationships
  ○ Religious beliefs
  ○ Body contact/attachment to caregivers
  ○ Housing (privacy/availability)

See Ember et. al, 2019 for more discussion
Which culture is the most restrictive/permissive?

★ Most restrictive - Kanuri
  ○ Most severe punishments

★ Most permissive - Trobriands
  ○ Celebrate indulgence, gift giving

Trobriands people (above) and Kanuri People (left)
Discussion Questions

★ What did we learn about tolerance among individual cultures?

★ What are the consequences of variation in premarital sex norms?
What did we learn about tolerance among individual cultures?

- We learned that tolerance is a spectrum.
- Each culture has their own way of celebrating or punishing premarital sex based on their views.
What are the consequences of variation in premarital sex norms?

- Societies with more premarital sex...
  - Autonomy
  - Value romantic love
  - Stable marriages
  - Lower divorce rates
What are the consequences of variation in premarital sex norms?

- Couples whose families come from different cultures may experience disputes among their families.
  - Different expectations and views on sex norms/practices.
  - Hostile / tense family dynamics

- Culture shock

- Any other thoughts?...


