



## Being Decent, Being Authentic: The Moral Self in Shifting Discourses of Sexuality across Three Generations of Chilean Women

■ **Oriana Bernasconi**

*Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile*

### ABSTRACT

Scholars have interpreted changes in sexual discourses from behaviouralist and structuralist perspectives, in the context of social movements, as expressions of power relations, among other approaches. This article advocates the study of shifting discourses of sexualities from the viewpoint of transformations in individuals' moral orientations over time. To this end, thematically, the article recovers Foucault's view of sexuality as a field of moral self-formation; conceptually, it follows Taylor and examines selfhood through the person's moral sources. The article uses this framework to observe reformulations in sexual narratives across three generations of Chilean women. From grandmothers' stories to granddaughters' accounts, this analysis identifies a deactivation of the equation between being a 'good woman' and sexual disengagement. This movement reveals a change in the moral principle regulating Chilean women's sexualities (from a morality of decency to one of authenticity) and a displacement of moral authority from the community to the person.

### KEY WORDS

generations / life stories / morality / narratives / selfhood / sexuality

### Discourses of Sexuality and the Moral Person

**T**his article analyses changing discourses of sexuality over time from the viewpoint of shifting notions of the moral self. Although every field of human experience can be morally loaded, the socio-historical organization

of sexuality in the West makes it a key realm for exploring the ways that people qualify themselves morally. Weeks argues that, for centuries in the Christian West, the belief that the 'disruptive power of sex' can represent a threat to the person and the social order has prevailed in the interpretation of sexuality, relegating other approaches such as libertarian and liberal. Consequently, western societies have counterbalanced this 'menace' by promoting a clear-cut, moral regulation based on a 'particular set of social institutions: marriage, heterosexuality, family life' (Weeks, 1986: 100). Historically, therefore, sexuality has been associated with morality and sexual regulation has relied on techniques of self-management. As Foucault (1978) contended, people may need to agree on rules of conduct in different fields of activity, but with sexuality an individual's sexual behaviour contributes to his or her social production as moral agents in an active way. Sexuality, Foucault wrote, 'is related in a strange and complex way both to verbal prohibition and to the obligation to tell the truth, of hiding what one does and deciphering who one is' (1994: 223). Thus, western societies' obsession with sexual regulation stems from their view of sexuality as a threat and from the idea that individuals constitute themselves morally through their sexual practices.

Based on these premises, Foucault developed an approach to sexuality as a field of moral self-formation, in which individuals constitute themselves by their own means of self-transformation. Since Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, morality has appeared as an angle of reflection in nearly every topic of sexualities studies, from sexual education and sexual exploitation to queer theory and paedophilia. In this context, research has shifted its focus from the social construction of 'hetero-normativity' (Butler, 1990) and the relationship between sexuality, gender and nationalism (Gutmann, 1997; Stacey, 1997), towards the issue of sex and social justice (Nussbaum, 1999) and finally to its present emphasis on sexuality as an expression of the new 'politics of intimate citizenship' (Plummer, 2004). As this development progressed, Foucault's seminal theme – how the person constitutes himself or herself morally through sexual experience and how this relationship changes with time – has lost importance in this field of research. Thematically, this article recovers Foucault's concern; conceptually, however, it diverts from his approach in two ways. First, using intergenerational narratives of sexual life as a starting point for the conceptualization of the moral person, I interrogate individuals' relationships to prevailing values and norms that permeate their interpretations of sexual experience. Foucault had the opposite interest; he explored the conformation of discourses that instigated people in different times and places to behave in specific ways, and he showed little interest in how these discourses became part of self-descriptions. Second, my notion of the moral self is wider than that of Foucault. Following the philosopher Taylor (1989), who approaches the study of selfhood through the examination of individuals' moral sources, I consider the question of the relationship between sexuality and self-formation at the level of the values that orient an individual's self-interpretations.

I empirically examine this relationship through intergenerational narratives of Chilean women's sexual lives. This analysis identifies a gradual deactivation of the association between being a 'good woman' and sexual disembodiment. Recent research has shown how, in contrast to traditional approaches, young, contemporary women position themselves as relatively active subjects in their sexual encounters, and conceptualize these actions as configuring an 'alternative', 'transitional discourse' of 'resistance' (Allen, 2003; Jackson and Cram, 2003; Maxwell, 2007; Steward, 1999). My approach reveals that young women are not necessarily resisting a prevailing morality that they oppose; rather, they are composing their sexual accounts with an altogether different notion of selfhood, based on a different idea of the good. This approach complements prevailing views of sexualities (as a field of power relations and as a domain influenced by social movements, for instance), with the idea that there is a shifting relationship between values and notions of selfhood that operates in the backdrop of narratives of sexuality and affects the social conceptualization of the sexual domain. Even if this moral ontology of the self remains largely unspoken and unexplored, it arguably underlies individuals' sexual interpretations and reactions.

The article begins with a critical appraisal of Foucault's normative theory of the sexual self, followed by a discussion of Taylor's moral philosophy in the context of an interpretive moral sociology of selfhood. Subsequently, it provides the research's methodological background and examines intergenerational stories of sexual life that I collected from Chilean grandmothers, mothers and granddaughters. In the context of sexualities studies, the conclusion considers theoretical and empirical implications which follow from the framework proposed.

### **Sexuality and Moral Self-Formation: Foucault's Approach**

For Foucault, morality designated both a set of rules that are operative in a given culture and the behaviour of individuals in relation to those rules. Following this perspective there are several ways to develop a social history of morality:

- 1 A history of moral behaviour (which studies individuals' conduct in relation to those rules and values prescribed in their culture).
- 2 A history of codes (which analyses the different systems of rules and values present in a given society as well as the agencies that enforce them).
- 3 A history of the forms of moral subjectivation (which focuses on the 'practices or technology of the self' through which the person works upon him or herself in order to ensure a particular form of moral self-constitution).

Based on these practices of self-transformation, Foucault examined the sexual domain in terms of the historical configuration of shifting moral discourses. 'Technologies of the self' relate to agency as the creative capacity of individuals

to trace – and thus to personalize – the form of their existence within available conventions. Yet Foucault's oeuvre limits this investigation in several ways. First, it conceives of the self as the result of the discourses to which it is subjected, making it difficult to conceptualize the ways in which moral discourses are appropriated in self-interpretative practices. As Hollway and Jefferson point out, to overcome this determinism 'we have to address the issue of how discursive positions are occupied by subjects' (2000: 136). Moreover, by conflating self and discursive practices, Foucault failed to explain how discourses inform the lives of ordinary people (Hacking, 2004: 278). If, unlike Foucault, we believe that systems of knowledge are porous, elastic and of a polysemous and indeterminate nature (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992; Taylor, 1985c), we grant people the capacity to reflect on how prevalent discourses permeate their self-understanding, (a view long enunciated by Blumer (1986) and Garfinkel (2004[1967])).

A second problem is Foucault's restriction of ethics to the practices by which the person negotiates his or her relation to a set of norms and rules. Technologies of the self were meant to be an ethical alternative for the individual to resist the normalization forces of 'technologies of power' (Foucault, 1988; McNay, 1992; Merke, 2003). As practices of self-direction, ethics were meant to encompass the creative capacity of individuals to trace the form of their existence. In Foucault's oeuvre, however, this capacity remained at the superficial level of an aesthetics of existence. Technologies of the self ended up as self-conscious gestures of stylization for the sake of resistance. This limitation stems from Foucault's undifferentiated theory of truth and from the incommensurability he attributed to successive normative frameworks. Such incommensurability is incompatible with the individual's need for self-interpretation. If normative frameworks cannot be compared with one another, as Foucault believed, the person cannot defend a new principle as better than its predecessor. Eventually, there is nothing upon which he or she can claim value or loss (Taylor, 1985a); hence, the charges of moral relativism (Levine, 1992) against Foucault's work.

Third, Foucault left underdeveloped the analysis of self-imposed practices people perform upon themselves (Deleuze's 'auto-affectation') and the consequences that living through such self-descriptors have for the person's self-identity. Finally, despite Foucault's awareness of the importance of others in the adoption of discursive positions (arguing that the ethical relationship with oneself involves our relationship with others), his framework lacks tools for grasping this influence.

## **Morality and the Good: Taylor's Interpretive Approach**

Despite being largely a history of ideas, Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989) has much to offer to a moral sociology of the person. For Calhoun, it is 'perhaps the best starting point for sociology to recover a strong and crucial understanding of the self as a moral agent' (1991: 232). First, Taylor's framework helps sociologists

to locate processes of self-interpretation not in morally neutral spaces, as in Giddens' (1991) reflexive self, but in spaces of question about the nature of the good that carry specific significance for individuals. If personal identity, or 'what I am as a self', is defined 'by the way things have significance for me' (Taylor, 1989: 34), self-interpretation cannot be separated from the person's notion of the good. Accordingly, moral subjectivity lies at the basis of the sociological study of selfhood. This is not to say that morality precedes the self, but rather 'that the self is constituted in and through the taking of moral stances' (Calhoun, 1991: 233). Second, Taylor's moral philosophy provides a broad notion of morality that is not limited to the mutual obligations between people – as in Tugendhat's (2001) philosophy – nor restricted to the norms and codes that regulate social order – as in Durkheim's sociology; rather it is a philosophy of articulation among goods. Like Foucault, Taylor starts with the argument that any epistemology of the self is embedded in moral sources (what Foucault called 'regimes of truth'). But, unlike Foucault, Taylor's (1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1989) central proposition is that human beings are self-interpreting subjects who are moved by the love or respect of a (historically variable) notion of the good. This basic principle operates as a motivational source by 'empowering' individuals to act in a certain way. It also offers standards according to which actions, desires and motivations can be judged, thereby helping the individual 'to discriminate what is right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower' (1989: 4). Third, Taylor's framework regards individuals as subjects of moral worth who can evaluate the adequacy of their moral sources. This perspective matches the epistemological foundations of the interpretive sociology I develop.

Building on Taylor's proposal for the study of selfhood through the person's moral sources, I suggest an approach that is concerned with how changing notions of the moral self account for shifting concepts of sexuality. This framework is largely ignored in the field of sexuality studies, where changes regarding sexual discourses over time have been examined primarily in terms of behavioural reforms, the influence of social movements (such as feminism), technological changes (such as the medicalization of reproduction or the manufacture of the contraceptive pill), or structural variables (labour, ethnicity, etc.). My approach focuses on individuals' attempts to articulate the 'horizon' that allows each of them to define from place to place and time to time what is good, correct, worthy and meaningful (or what is bad, wrong, superficial or meaningless) in personal sexual experiences. Together with the values orienting the sexual self, this inquiry scrutinizes the available resources and conditions for moral judgement: the norms, classifications, procedures, and languages; the know-how; embodied dispositions; and ways of relating to oneself and others that regulate the sexual domain. This approach also considers how individuals interpret their behaviour in these constricted spaces (how they manipulate and reformulate social discourses of sexualities, for instance) and the implications for relations of self upon self of taking certain moral stances (by studying, for instance, how morality affects the discursive presentation of the sexual person).

MacIntyre (1984), Ricoeur (1984) and Taylor (1989) have emphasized that narratives are a condition for self-interpretation in the substantive terms I stress. They have argued that the moral experience itself has a narrative structure, or, that moral sense-making takes a narrative form. These arguments justify the use of interpretive methods, such as biographical narratives, for gaining access to the moral constitution of the sexual self.

## **The Life-stories of Three Generations of Chilean Women**

An examination of the moral sources of the self underpinning sexual narratives of three successive generations of Chilean women reveals how these narratives are constituted, how they evolve over time, and how they affect women's relationship to themselves and to their discursive self-presentation. This methodological design also allows for a comparison of young, mature and elderly women's sexual narratives. Due to the profound political, economic and cultural transformations in Chilean society over recent decades (Larraín, 2001; Moulian, 1997; Tironi, 1999), the prevailing vocabulary of motives utilized by women to articulate their sexual stories has changed. In the USA and in most Western European countries, the 1960s and 1970s were decades of sexual reform. Like other societies outside Western Europe and the United States, Chile began to address sexual reform issues after decades of delay (around the year 2000); however, unlike most such countries, Chile began to debate sexual issues long after the establishment of other modernization reforms, most notably the neoliberal economic reforms, which were implemented by the Dictatorship in the 1980s and maintained after the return of democracy in 1990. Consequently, Chile presents a unique case in that contemporary Chileans enjoy many economic liberties, yet the space for individual liberties remains restricted (for example, the Chilean Parliament only approved a divorce law in 2004).

In 2003 and 2004, I conducted 30 life-story interviews with grandparents, parents, and grandchildren of 10 families in Chile's capital city, Santiago. Most interviewees experienced a Catholic upbringing, and their socioeconomic backgrounds ranged from lower middle-class to upper middle-class. Each cohort includes five men and five women, and five interviewees adhering to right-wing and five to left-wing political ideologies. The grandparents were born between 1907 and 1930, the parents between 1948 and 1956, and the grandchildren between 1976 and 1985.

The analysis here presented compares the transcripts of the 15 women interviewed (five per cohort). Following a narrative approach (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, 2009; Riessman, 2008), it focuses on the ways that women structured their accounts according to historically specific, referential frameworks and on how their forms of self-presentation related to the narratives conveyed.

## The Decent Woman

The comparative, thematic analysis of grandmothers' narratives reveals that in Chilean society of the 1940s, female sexuality was considered a threat, as it could bring disorder to righteous life by jeopardizing the imperative of 'chastity' that drew the line between decency and corruption. By being sexually available, the 'loose woman' revealed her moral faults, lack of instinctual control and, therefore, poor refinement. A 'lady', by contrast, had to 'care for herself', inhibiting and remaining unfamiliar with her sexual desires. A veil of silence and the punishment of sin and social marginalization obstructed sexual experiences. The community's gaze exerted a pervasive control upon women at a time when female sexuality symbolized family decency. For instance, the grandmothers said they received no information during their youth about sexuality and the sensations attached to it. Recalling a biology class at her Catholic school, Clara explained:

At school they told you that you have a heart, bones, a liver, but did they ever mention that you had a vagina or a uterus? No, they skipped that part. I think that nuns at school didn't know about it anyway! (80 year-old, upper middle-class, retired secretary)

Consequently, girls had to 'internalize' commands from teachers and family about how to behave and how to relate to sexual feelings: 'we shouldn't look at our bodies even when bathing', it was a sin 'if men touched' us, we 'shouldn't allow boys to kiss' us, we 'should punch boys' who approached us.

Through inhibition and internalization of norms, these women cultivated an intense relationship with themselves that, paradoxically, led to the development of a disembodied sexual life. In this generation, being a good woman presupposed the dissociation of self and sexuality, as evident in the process of narrativization of sexual life, through self-portraits of sexually 'ignorant' persons. Before marriage they behaved like sexless, 'poor innocent, little birds'; once married, husbands, priests, doctors and procreation mediated their relationship with their sexuality. It was the sexually active husband's role to initiate and 'teach the wife everything', signalling the end of her virginity and innocence. Ana describes the wedding night of her 50-year marriage:

On my wedding night, I knew nothing and had never seen a man before ... So, it was traumatic, terrible, shocking ... I almost wanted to run away ... He was so horny! I suffered! (80 year-old, upper middle-class, small business)

This social prohibition on sexual experience prevented sexuality from becoming an integral aspect of these women's identity. In her wedding night's story, Ana did not recognize herself as a sexual agent with desires and expectations of her own.

In the grandmothers' narratives of their marriages, sexual activity was oriented towards procreative ends and attached to the satisfaction of male urges. Rosa, a middle-class grandmother, classified sex among her conjugal 'duties', and considered sexual desire as a masculine prerogative. These beliefs were

reinforced by the redefinition of the relationship between female sexuality and a woman's goodness that marriage introduced: a single woman's moral worth depended on controlling sexuality's instincts; but nature was expected to endow the married woman with fertility to enhance her maternal role. Throughout these reports, little space remained for intimacy or emotions like happiness, joy or pleasure. Feelings of self-fulfilment only emerged when the grandmothers evoked the experience of motherhood. As Rosa explained: 'my heart is good, big and beautiful for my children, they mean everything to me'.

Despite this lack of emotional engagement and the claim that sexuality was not a priority in their lives (Rosa, for example, defines herself 'not as a woman but as a mother'), extreme situations, such as infidelity, often instigated the most resolute expression of the grandmothers' feelings. In Ana's story about the extramarital affairs of her husband, Gabriel, her self-portrait – a furious wife emotionally overwhelmed by these events to the point of depression, her determination to recover her husband, and her attack on the other woman's decency – reveals the limits of the sexually disembodied woman's narrative:

[Another woman] got into an affair with Gabriel ... I asked my neighbour. 'Please get this girl away from here' ... I was quite furious ... I forgave him ... Some time passed, some years, and he got involved with another woman ... I did many things to make him tire of her ... One day he told me that he wanted to separate. He started the sentence, 'Ehm, you know,' a bit confused. 'What did you say?' I replied [loud and sharp]. 'No, nothing, I didn't say anything.' And that was it ... She is still alive, the idiot old woman. She had maaaany men ... during her husband's lifetime and after she was widowed ... and he had to go for this old, used woman. So, we had a horrible time ... I had a heavy depression. (80 year-old, upper middle-class, self-employee)

### Listening to the Voice Within

The rhetoric of the restrained 'lady' who controls her instincts through will power also pervaded second generation women's narratives in different ways. At home, second generation women recalled, the nude body 'was not something to be shown', and even less so was sexuality 'the subject of a conversation'. Instead, 'visual signs', 'elusive metaphors', and direct regulation of girls' behaviour (e.g. controlling their dating) were the most common practices through which, they recounted, Chileans addressed the sexual body in middle-class households of the 1960s:

Are you crazy? My father could have never touched on the subject, the poor man would have gotten too confused. Did they tell me this happens for this reason or that? No, zero explanation ... I remember that it came [menstruation] and that I left my stained undies a little bit in view so my mother would realize [it]. (Carmen, 55 year-old, upper middle-class, housewife)

Second generation women said that in their formal education, female sexual prowess was associated with moral and social opprobrium. In schools run by

Catholic congregations, girls were expected to keep ‘clean and immaculate bodies’. Internally, this expectation implied virginity, and externally it implied ‘order’, ‘cleanliness’ and ‘modesty’ in their personal presentation, language, manners and attitudes:

I remember that the nuns used to say to us, ‘Girls, you cannot be like the cake that is surrounded by flies in the bakery.’ I think they wanted to say, don’t date here or there. I imagine it had to do with not having sex. (Paz, 56-year-old, upper middle-class, employee)

It was overall:

...a very *pechoña*<sup>1</sup> education, everything was a sin ... If you wore red undies you were a whore. Any conduct that was a bit garish, and you were considered a loose girl. (Elena, 50-year-old, upper middle-class, manager)

Sexual curiosity was seen as a moral threat, and thus, relationships with boys had to be approached with a ‘healthy’ mind. Like their mothers, second generation women portrayed themselves as being in ‘theoretical and practical ignorance’ at the time of their first sexual experience; however, second-generation women’s narratives also attested to the emergence of new processes. On the one hand, a ‘privatization’ of women’s lives reorganized the meaning of sexuality and its relationship to self-identity. Compared to the previous generation, the context in which sexuality acquired value changed from the formal and public sphere to that of everyday life and elective personal relationships. Social control of girls’ lives shifted from the authority of the community to the authority of the family. These movements disentangled the *pololeo*, the pre-marital relationship between girlfriend and boyfriend, from its formal and public investiture, thereby allowing it to enter the family’s daily life. Also, the *pololeo* gained privacy through the anonymity of new places of youthful encounters outside the family gaze, including discotheques or weekends at the beach. In the grandmothers’ time, courtship was a form of stating the intention to marry, ‘not a process of testing out a relationship by getting to know each other’s inner self’ (Jamieson, 1988: 23), as is increasingly the case in the subsequent generations. On the other hand, second generation women’s stories were characterized by a biographical turning point: as they approached middle age, they began to question the equation of women’s goodness with sexual disembodiment to which they had been socialized. Despite the lack of sexual competence, sexuality in their marriages was progressively disclosed as an affective source of the self and dissociated from the idea that it is the source of woman’s goodness and a wife’s duty. Whereas grandmothers learned ‘from’ their husbands, second generation women learned ‘together with’ their partners. To do so, women needed to experience their bodies and to express their feelings and sexual desires: sex became a source of emotional expression between partners. Gradually, second generation women began to relate to their sexuality and to repatriate it to the bodies and selves where it belonged. The process ‘has been very hard’, with advances and setbacks, such as those demonstrated in the story of Elena, a 50-year-old, upper middle-class manager. Some years ago, in an effort to try something new,

Elena went to a motel with her husband. When she arrived at the door, she was unable to walk in. Her thoughts were in turmoil: 'I was married, so what was the problem if someone saw me there with my husband? It was absolutely legal, but those that go to motels are brothel fadders.' Elena reflected:

I think that the whole generation has the same hang-ups. Religion was too strong, [and] everything was seen from the religious point of view. I have had to do away with many of those hang-ups, of what supposedly was a sin which is not but a natural, normal thing.

In the middle generation's narratives, sexuality called for an inward gaze, so as to get to know where one stood and to use one's critical capacity if social predicaments went against what one thought was right. Second generation women believed that if sexuality was something people were 'naturally' endowed with and if it was experienced in the right context, 'nature' should not be identified as the terrain of uncivilized urges in need of control, as was the view in their mothers' times. Rather, it should be a realm where they could truly experience themselves. 'Tenderness', 'playing', 'caresses', 'pleasure', 'eroticism' and 'intimacy between the couple' defined the meaning of sexuality for these mature women.

### Authenticity and the Limits of Autonomous Deliberation

In the granddaughters' narratives, an individualized discourse framed talks of sexuality and self. This discourse assumed that their judgment remained autonomous from public moral voices. Often, these 20-something Chilean women, university students or professionals, employed a modern rationality of gender politics both to deconstruct the inherited equation between female goodness and sexual disengagement and to argue for the liberation of female sexuality from a 'hypocritical' veil. For decades, they commented, this veil had concealed women's powerlessness with 'moralistic' arguments and the efficiency of social control. A 'revolution of the concept of gender', which gives women and men 'the same possibilities and the same benefits', grounded these claims. For these women, sex was no longer a male prerogative and sex should be enjoyed regardless of social conventions, such as marriage, and separate from procreative ends. In 21-year-old Julia's mind (low middle-class, employee), her sexual initiation depended not on marriage, but on finding 'the person who is worth it'. Those who were already sexually active asserted that a responsible sexual life depends on having 'safe sex', as opposed to utilizing abstinence to guard against indecency. In these accounts, sexuality was a source of self-discovery and self-expression:

Experiencing myself in a couple and discovering myself as a sexual person is something I still have to discover. It only began when I was 20 or 21. Before that time, I was the best friend of my male friends, but now I'm the lover of one. (Matilde, 26-year-old, upper middle-class, professional)

This view demonstrated a stark contrast with the oldest generation, as none of the grandmothers presented herself as a 'lover'. Also, if for the grandmothers, acting morally required sexual disembodiment and ignorance, for the granddaughters, knowledge of oneself as a sexual being was a requisite for acting morally. Unlike the *morality of decency* that organized the grandmothers' narratives, a *morality of authenticity* pervades the granddaughters' stories, conveying value to the inner self.

The granddaughters' discourse was supported by the ongoing process of privatization of sexuality (away from the community's gaze and into family and peer group regulation) and by a new relationship between sexual knowledge and self that allowed them to 'care for themselves' by learning *from* their sexuality. Their biographies recalled parents who addressed their daughters' physiological changes, like breast growth or menstruation, and their daughters' initial approaches to romance, like the first kiss. These experiences gave them the tools to learn from their sexuality as a physical and emotional experience. Among family and peers, the disentanglement of sexual topics and the body from the sphere of the extra-discursive, and the incorporation of such subjects into regular conversations, allowed the youngest generation to experience sexual development as part of a 'normal' relationship with one's self. Recalling her adolescence, Javiera reflected:

My mother walked naked about the house, she showed herself to us. It wasn't like 'Oops! Sorry!' if you entered the bathroom and she was there ... no, it was like 'come in' ... I don't know if we were innocent. I don't think so because we always knew everything. (21-year-old, upper middle-class, professional)

As a 'natural' part of classmates' daily interaction, boys 'laughed' at girls and how ridiculous they looked wearing a bra with tiny breasts, while girls made fun of 'acne-covered, smelly, hairy' boys. If second generation women's testimonies of a 'healthy' interaction with boys that lacked 'naughty thoughts' echoed the still-pervasive sinful morality, their daughters' narratives revealed an awareness of the process of sexual embodiment and an empathic attitude between boys and girls. Within the school curriculum, girls learned about sexual development, procreation and safe sex. Sexuality was framed in terms of human physiological development rather than the moral constitution of womanhood, and educators encouraged responsible behaviour towards oneself instead of an 'innocent' attitude:

I already knew what it was because at school they taught us. I had a lot of friends that had menstruated already ... and we talked about it openly: what is happening? ... Does it hurt? ... And at school they didn't avoid the topic; it was not taboo. (Matilde, 26-year-old, upper middle-class, professional)

Despite these trends, the granddaughters' narratives also evidenced the limits of this individualized discourse. Even if the granddaughters rejected at a discursive level the equation of female 'dignity' with 'chastity', their narratives revealed that in their behaviour this morality of sexual purity was still active. Because they knew that for their parents a sexually active single woman was shameful,

the granddaughters chose to hide their pre-marital sex life and 'lie to their parents'. In doing so, they compromised the value of authenticity that they held with such high regard. They practised pre-marital sexual activity in secret, hiding it from their parents, forcing it to be 'quick', rather than making it 'natural' and 'open':

I didn't feel that it was wrong, however I had to hide it and that was because it was something forbidden. I think that influenced me, because you don't have a place to do it, you have to do it quickly, and you don't have anyone to talk about it with. (Javiera, 21-year-old, upper middle-class, professional)

Also, some of these self-conscious women's narratives also expressed fears that sexual activity would cause them to lose moral worth. In her sexual account, Sofia fluctuated between the right to experience her sexuality, the lack of self-care and value in self-explorative sex and the fear of acquiring too much experience for her boyfriend's taste. This last reflection echoed the 'loose' archetype and the grandmothers' powerlessness to evaluate their moral self-worth:

My boyfriend has been with a lot of girls. He told me, 'One can tell that you have not been with many boys'. It is nice to be told that. For me it is important that he can notice that. But you also say: How can he tell? What is the difference in relation to other girls? (...) My girlfriends, for example, can have sex with three guys and they don't care. They can do whatever they are asked to. For them, the more they can explore the better. (28-year-old, upper middle-class, university student)

The individualized discourse also encountered its limits when new sexual experiences created the need to define criteria of normality. In such instances, these women resorted to the evaluation of other women's practices in order to discern their own standards. Matilde argued that an 'open-minded modern woman' ought to respect each person's moral autonomy, so she should not comment on other people's sexual behaviour. In the following story, however, Matilde evaluated other girls' sexual conduct, and utilized that assessment as a criterion to define her own stance. She related that until she started studying at the university, her social circle consisted of 'girlfriends that were neither saints nor loose women', and parameters of what was normal fluctuated for her within these limits. Her university girlfriends unsettled this view:

It impacted on me that some of my girlfriends were sleeping with a different guy every week. It was something difficult to digest, and furthermore it was hard for me to feel affection for them. The majority of these girls had a lot of experience and had had their sexual initiation at the age of 12, which I found shocking. (26-year-old, upper middle-class, professional)

Othring her classmates (promiscuity is the property of 'other' women) and using this evaluation as an indication for her own behaviour ('it did not occur to me to do anything like what they were doing'), Matilde made evident the limits of the individualized discourse. Imbued with it, however, she failed to recognize the social nature of these demands and the need for the other to act in order for her to discriminate good from bad.

## Conclusions

This article argues that changes in narratives of sexual life over time relate to transformations in the moral orientations of the person. Scholars have interpreted changes in sexual narratives from structuralist perspectives (concerned with the impact of gender, class, age, nation, ethnicity, globalization, etc.), in the context of social movements (feminism, LGBT/queer, post-colonialism, etc.), from behaviouralist approaches, from the viewpoint of reproductive politics and reproductive health, and as expressions of power relations, among other perspectives. The latter viewpoint in particular has affected the emergence of the moral study of sexualities because of its proclivity for reducing questions of morality to dominance and subordination (as in some post-Foucauldian scholarship). The approach offered in this article includes and complements these perspectives. It analyses sexual behaviour in the context of other social practices by describing, for example, processes of privatization of sexuality and intimate relationships over time. It also examines women's strategies to counteract or reproduce structures of domination, including the ways these strategies affect narrative structuring (the tactic of not claiming portions of their own stories at the time of self-presentation, for instance). But most importantly, it relates redefinitions of sexual discourses to changing ideas of the moral self.

In the analysis of sexual normativity, the displacement of focus from discursive practices (Foucault's interest) to individual narratives (my emphasis) contributes to an understanding not only of the conformation of new sexual discourses but also of how these prevalent discourses affect women's relationship to themselves as sexual beings, including their forms of self-presentation. Additionally, it reveals that the taking of moral positions is never an uncritical practice and that it often takes place in a moral space where new and old pre-scriptions coexist.

The intergenerational analysis of Chilean women's narratives incorporates the question of morality into the examination of changing sexual narratives, identifying both a disentanglement of the association of the 'good woman' with sexual disengagement and a process of displacement of moral authority from the community to the person. If, for the grandmothers, morality was a matter of sanctions imposed by others, and being a moral agent hinged fundamentally on the fulfilment of externally defined duties, the granddaughters' narratives attested to a sense of selfhood constructed in the autonomous exercise of deliberative powers. While the former linked the idea of the good life to an attitude of conformity with public morality, the latter associated a fuller life with an ethics of authenticity based on following their inner voice. With this displacement of moral truth, the idea of the development of a sense of inwardness emerged. Inwardness was based on a new ethics of care of the self that encourages self-knowledge, self-expressiveness and love for the self. In the grandmothers' reports, being a good woman required sacrificing oneself for others, especially for one's family, and care of the self and care of others were opposite practices. From the second generation onwards, that oppositional view was

superseded by the notions that self and others were interdependent entities and that care of others presupposed care of the self. To develop this sense of inwardness, being in touch with one's feelings came to be something women have to attain to fully experience their sexualities.

This relocation of the authoritative sources in moral issues, however, did not imply a tendency towards the decline of the social as a moral referent. In all the generations there were others who influenced the moral outlook of the individual, but the interpretation of such influence, this research showed, depended on the dominant morality of the times. In the grandmothers' epoch, an ethics of conformity to public morals prevailed. Consequently, throughout their narratives, the grandmothers accentuated the influence of others in their definition of sexual moral criteria. Moreover, they discredited those instances where they exercised agency in sexual matters and those situations when their actions evidenced a deviation from the norm regulating sexuality. In the granddaughters' generation, in contrast, an ethics of authenticity prevailed; consequently, these women tended to play down the influence of others in the definition of their moral stances, as if their judgment were to be separate from public morality. Nevertheless, in practice, other women's sexual behaviour continued to serve as a key reference by which young women defined personal moral orientations.

## Notes

- 1 Chilean Catholic-rooted expression referring to excessive piety. *Pecho* is the breast and *pechoña* refers derogatively to those who beat their breast in sign of regret. The term refers to those who have a conservative way of being.

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## **Oriana Bernasconi**

Is a lecturer in the Sociology Department of the Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago, Chile, with PhD in Sociology (London School of Economics) and MPhil in Cultural Studies and Sociology (Birmingham University). Her research interests focus on the sociology of the person, the sociology of morality, the sociology of sciences and the theory of qualitative social research. Currently, she is investigating the forms of moral reasoning used in public controversies around legal initiatives aimed at broadening individual rights in Chile (abortion, euthanasia, rights of sexual minorities); the role played by Chilean public sociology in the production of narratives of political transition; and the relationship between gender, the production of scientific fields and working trajectories among Chilean women scientists.

Address: Departamento de Sociología, Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Cienfuegos 46, Santiago de Chile, Chile.

E-mail: [obernasc@uahurtado.cl](mailto:obernasc@uahurtado.cl)

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