Reviewer's report

Title: Muslim adolescents and their views on sexuality. Using Internet forums as a means of qualitative research.

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Reviewer: Keith Horvath

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The manuscript, “An exploratory study on Muslim adolescents' views on sexuality: Implications for sex education and prevention.” is a qualitative study of posts by clearly identified Muslims and non-Muslims to an online sexuality bulletin board in the Netherlands. As noted in the introduction, a dearth of information regarding Muslim-identified adolescents and young adults exists and the present study attempts to fill that gap. The strengths of the study are that it addresses an area that is understudied and uses a potentially novel data source – online bulletin boards. However, there are a number of areas that are lacking in the manuscript that dampen my enthusiasm for the study. Critiques are listed below from most to least important:

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached):

1) Although the study addresses an understudied topic, the public health relevance of the findings is questionable. It appears that the results suggest that young Muslims who respond to an online bulletin board concerning sexuality are more dogmatic, socially conservative, and collective in their views toward sexuality than non-Muslims. These results seem to only confirm what was already known from prior research, as described in the introduction. Unfortunately, it makes me question the ultimate utility of relatively unstructured online bulletin boards as a rich data source that can be used to inform specific research questions. This problem is compounded by the fact that the data used are from persons who would be willing to publicly post their views about sexuality on an online forum, which could be assumed to be the most polarized views.

2) The implications stemming from the results, as described by the authors, do not seem viable given the strong social norms in the Muslim community. The results appear to suggest that Muslims hold conservative and restrictive views toward sexuality that are incompatible with a more liberal view, even when that view is presented by an Imam. The recommendations of promoting a more liberal view of sexuality and condom use and involving parents in the development and implementation of comprehensive sex education do not seem compatible with this world view.

3) A set of research questions should be stated at the end of the discussion or beginning of the methods section.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of
a term, which the author can be trusted to correct):

1) In the abstract, implications of the results should be clearly stated rather than only mentioning that the results will be discussed from the perspective of developing and implementing future sex education programs.

2) There are some areas in the manuscript that need clarification/re-wording. For example, the sentence “As a consequence, sexuality is subject to religion, and social, economic, and public status” in the introduction doesn’t seem to follow from the preceding information. Another example is when discussing Internet research, the manuscript states that “…the Internet has potentially unlimited…possibilities.” This doesn’t seem to make much sense to me. In the discussion section, the 2 sentences that begin with, “Indeed, in Morocco, a youth culture…” seems out of place and is vague (what do you mean by distinguishing between Islamic rules and cultural values?).

3) The rationale for the comparison between Muslim and non-Muslim should be strengthened. How does the comparison add to the findings beyond what could be learned by examining Muslim posts by themselves? The rationale should be incorporated into the research questions.

4) The manuscript states that the website from which the data were drawn targets 14 to 24 year olds. Is there any information about the actual age of the persons who posted to the website?

5) In discussing the coding strategy, the manuscript states that sub-codings were distinguished between positive versus negative instances. I didn’t understand exactly what this meant by the description and I didn’t see how that translated into the results.

6) As noted in the manuscript, it appears that the vast majority of persons who participated in these online bulletin boards were female. In fact, only 3 quotes (2 of which were in the general observations section) were from males. Does this suggest that this study is really a study of female Muslim views about sexuality?

7) Under “General Observations,” the manuscript states, “These misinterpretations are the cause of a lot of uncertainty and confusion among Muslims.” Are these actual misinterpretations (which implies that there is a right and wrong way to interpret them) or just truly different interpretations of ambiguous passages?

8) There were several areas in the results section that belonged in the discussion section (especially the paragraphs beginning with “We also observed several differences…” and “This reluctance to discuss sexuality seems …”).

9) The discussion regarding confusion about the interpretation of specific Qur-anic passages appears to suggest that this confusion is unique to Islam. There are many examples of passages from the Bible that are used to support two sides of an argument, and I suspect this is true for other religious texts.

10) In the Table, it was unclear to me whether the frequencies provided were for the entire forum, or just for the posts that were analyzed for the purpose of this study. If possible, both should be included.
Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore):

1) The word “caveat” seems inappropriate. Perhaps “gaps” would fit better with the meaning of the sentences.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests