

# Romantic views of adolescents from Cuenca (Ecuador)

Their association with *machismo/marianismo*  
and migration



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## INTRODUCTION

In Latin American countries, sexual health indicators about adolescents show high rates of early pregnancy and associated unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual violence, and gender violence (Hunt, Castagnaro, & Monterrosas Castrejón, 2014). Although, during the last decades, Latin American governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations have implemented various initiatives to improve sex education (Darré, Jerves, Castillo, & Enzlin, 2015), statistics on sexual health of Latino adolescents are still worrying (Hunt et al., 2014). Possible explanations for the lack of efficacy of these programs include, among others, a lack of programs that are adapted to Latin American contexts, and a lack of programs that are adjusted to the knowledge and understanding of the target audience. As a result, recently several studies have focused on understanding adolescents' sexual behavior within Latin American contexts (De Meyer et al., 2014; Gaioso et al., 2015; Jaruseviciene et al., 2014; Landry, 2015; Pantelides, 2004; Pons, 1999). While the vast majority of these studies have focused on sexuality and sexual development as an individual characteristic, there is a paucity of knowledge about sexual behavior of and its meaning for adolescents in the context of romantic relationships in Latin America. As romantic relationships are precisely the relational context in which sexual behavior is expected to develop, this lack of studies that focus on romantic relationships in adolescents is remarkable (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011).

In general, the scientific study of adolescents' romantic relationships only started in the early 1990's, when scientists began to focus on the dynamics of romantic relationships within this age-group. The available studies until now have resulted in the recognition that romantic relationships are a central aspect in adolescents' lives and that these are important for their socio-affective development (Furman, Simon, Shaffer, & Bouchev, 2002). This recognition has inspired several scholars to study romantic relationships from different perspectives in an attempt to understand their role and meaning in and for adolescents' development (Berger, McMakin, & Furman, 2005; Collins, 2003; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011; Florsheim, 2003; Jones & Furman, 2011; McMahon & Wilkinson, 2005; Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009; Paulk, Pittman, Kerpelman, & Adler-Baeder, 2011; Shulman & Scharf, 2000; Singleton, Schroffel, Findlay, & Winskell, 2016).

Studies on romantic relationships during adolescence have been guided mainly by attachment theory. Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of early experiences within family interactions with a strong focus on the dyadic parent-child relationship. According to attachment theory, parent-child interactions in early childhood shape cognitions and expectations that constitute representations (i.e., internal working models) of subsequent relationships. Accordingly, Furman and colleagues (1994, 1999) proposed a developmental theory of close relationships in adolescence. Based on attachment theory, cognitive and emotional processes arising from romantic relationships are identified as romantic views. Romantic views include thoughts, beliefs, feelings, emotions, and expectations regarding romantic relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1997). An important characteristic of romantic views is that, apart from being influenced by physical and cognitive features specific to this stage of development, romantic views are socially constructed. The fact that romantic views are socially constructed implies that different (social) experiences of the individual play an important role in the development of romantic views. Here,

not only early experiences with the primary caregiver, but also experiences in ongoing close relationships, and broader sociocultural norms are presumed to play an important role in the development of romantic views (Simon, Bouchey, & Furman, 1998).

First, based on their experiences of early parent-child interactions, individuals develop expectations about interpersonal relationships that endure over time and shape subsequent close relationships (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). In studies based on Furman's theory of close relationships the concept of 'relational styles' is used to explore these representations of close relationships during adolescence (Furman & Simon, 2006). In this context, it is suggested that disruptions in the affective bond between parent and child may hinder the formation of a secure relational style, and, hereby, might influence the development of relational views in later relationships in general but also in romantic relationships (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Second, adolescents' romantic views may be influenced by experiences within ongoing close relationships with parents, peers and romantic partners. Here, Furman and colleagues have proposed a hierarchical model of relational views in order to explain the process through which close relationships of parents and peers have an influence on the development of romantic views (Furman & Simon, 1999; Furman et al., 2002). Finally, during adolescence, social norms and expectations about gender and sexuality are also presumed to play an important role in the formation of romantic views by building idealized conceptions of romantic relationships (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). In fact, it is this insight in the social construction of romantic views that inspired and motivated scholars to study romantic views from a contextual perspective that addresses the role of socio-cultural dynamics in shaping the conduct in and meaning of romantic relationships.

This contextual perspective evidently invites explorations of romantic relationships in different cultural contexts. Here, it is remarkable that within this body of scholarly work, most studies of adolescents' romantic relationships have been conducted either in Europe or North America. This implies that, as yet, little is known about the topic in other cultural settings, including Latin America and in Ecuador in particular. However, Ecuadorian society presents specific characteristics that are likely to have a significant impact on both romantic views and romantic relationships of adolescents. In this doctoral project, we will focus on two specific characteristics of Ecuadorian society: i.e., a strong endorsement of traditional gender role expectations – labelled as *machismo* and *marianismo* – and international migration of parents as a common strategy of economic survival used by a significant proportion of families in Ecuador.

#### ***Machismo* and *marianismo* in Latin America**

For many years, studies devoted to understanding gender role ideologies have referred to *machismo* and *marianismo* as prevailing gender stereotypes in Latin America (Duque & Montoya, 2006; Singleton et al., 2016). While the concept of *machismo* has been used at both a social and scientific level, *marianismo* has only recently been coined and is, as yet, not widely used in research papers. However, it has been pointed out that *marianismo* is probably just as prevalent as *machismo* albeit less understood by Latin Americans themselves, and almost unheard of by persons outside of Latin America (Sequeira, 2009).

*Machismo* refers to a complex set of beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors that delineates how men should behave. *Machismo* makes that men and women have a clear and distinct understanding of their gender roles both at home and within the broader social fabric (Sequeira, 2009). *Machismo* defines a man's role as being virile, promiscuous, aggressive and authoritative (Sequeira, 2009) implying that men's main characteristics are aggressiveness – demonstrated in authoritarianism, aggression, and dominance towards both women and other men (Ingoldsby, 1985, 1991) – and hyper-sexuality – i.e., the constant conquest of women and pursuit of several sexual partners (Duque & Montoya, 2006; Hardin, 2002; Sequeira, 2009).

The counterpart of *machismo* is *marianismo*. That is, while *machismo* defines gender role expectations for men, *marianismo* describes gender role expectations for women. While not merely limited to religious practice, female gender roles are – according to *marianismo* – closely related with religious beliefs. In fact, the term *marianismo* is derived from the idealization of the Virgin Mary implying that women are considered to be semi-divine, and both spiritually and morally superior to men. As such, to keep their value, women are expected to be dependent, and submissive; to sacrifice themselves for motherhood; to endure their partners' violence and adultery; and to maintain their virginity until marriage (Sequeira, 2009). These stereotyped gender roles expectations for men and women have a clear impact on partner selection, romantic relationships, and sexual behavior. Moreover, when taken together, *machismo* and *marianismo* clearly contribute to the sexual double standard in Ecuador. Indeed, these gender role descriptions assume greater freedom for men than for women in terms of premarital sex, having multiple sex partners, sexual initiation at a young age and engaging in sexual activity without emotional commitment (Sierra, Rojas, Ortega, & Martin-Ortiz, 2007).

#### International migration in Ecuador

International migration is a complex phenomenon that occurs in several countries on different grounds and for different reasons. Here, Ecuador is not an exception (Jokhan, 2008; Pribilsky, 2004). Over the last decades, Ecuador has become the country with the highest percentage of migration in the Andean region (Torres, Amezcua, Rojas, & Valle, 2006). In fact, international migration has been used as a common strategy to cope with and overcome the economic crisis in Ecuador. A peak in emigration to the USA and Europe started in the late 1990s, but in 1999 a severe economic crisis triggered a massive wave of transnational migration from Ecuador. During this peak of migration, apart from the increase in the number of people who left the country – up to about two million Ecuadorian citizens –, there was also a significant shift in the typical migrant's profile (Borrero, 2002; Herrera & Carrillo, 2009). First, the majority of migrants came from urban areas and not from rural districts, as has previously been the case in migratory tradition. Second, these migrants were young people, mainly women with levels of education that were above the national average and belonging to diverse social groups. This change in profile of the typical migrant also implied a change in the structure of families whose members had migrated (Carrillo, 2006; Herrera & Carrillo, 2009). As a result, children with migrant parents constitute an important subgroup within Ecuador's youth population. This is especially the case in certain cities such as e.g., Cuenca, where – due to the fact that international migration is mainly an irregular phenomenon in Ecuador –, there are no exact figures regarding the number of adolescents whose