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Introduction

In the recent history of the United States, the issue of civil rights for social minorities has been hotly contested on all manner of political stages. Since the 1960s, women and LGBT citizens have been campaigning for social equality, and as of this writing, some positive strides have been made (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998). Yet consequences do exist for women who venture too far beyond the domestic role attributed to them by society, and LGBT citizens still face discrimination for openly acknowledging their sexual/gender identity (Gayoso et al, 2009). On an even smaller scale of defying gender norms, women are criticized for promoting independence, undergo "slut shaming" for their clothing choices, and for fighting against sexual abuse. On the other hand, men who openly display their emotions or who display any sense of femininity are criticized as being "weak" or "gay." This shameful phenomenon takes place in all corners of the world, as every culture develops its own norms of gender roles and sexuality. The purpose of this research is to explore the origins of modern stereotypical gender and sexual norms, examine how global society embodies these norms using country/region level case-studies, and to identify the source of societal conflicts regarding gender and sexuality.

The Origins and Evolution of Gender and Sexual Norms

In today's struggle for social equality, perhaps the greatest opponent of women and LGBT citizens is organized religion. Though most Western nations designate a separation of church and state in their constitutions, religious organizations remain powerful lobbyists and set political agendas in various States around the globe. Christian fundamentalists use passages from the Bible to prevent women and LGBT citizens from obtaining equal rights under the law; passages such as "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (I Timothy 2:11-14, King James Version), and "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it

is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22, King James Version). Fundamentalist Christian lobbyists (such as Focus on the Family), use these harshly worded passages to fervently argue against social equality. Interestingly enough, they make no mention of following neighboring passages which deem it a sin to wear clothing made of multiple fabrics, eat shellfish, or for a woman not to marry a man who forcibly rapes her. This hypocritical interpretation of Christianity does not merely consist of ignoring more "nonsensical" commandments, but also does not acknowledge explicit sexualities in the Bible. According to writer Todd Melby of *Contemporary Sexuality*, the Bible makes sexuality something to be praised and experienced, and modern religious leaders harm individual growth by condemning or refusing to acknowledge consensual and committed sexual relationships between same-sex couples or outside the confines of marriage. "We know who had sex with who and some-times how often, there are stories on incest, aphrodisiacs, falling in love, surrogacy, sex and aging, harassment and rape" (Melby, 2011, pg 1). Furthermore, most contemporary Christians refuse to acknowledge sexual undertones in the relationships between Ruth and Naomi, and David and Jonathan, in the Old Testament. Yet, despite these rampant contradictions, religion still defines gender norms in many societies.

Similar practices of extremist prejudices against women and LGBT citizens are noted in the history of Islam and Judaism (Dialmy, 2010), and in the Middle East and predominantly Muslim areas of Europe. Historically, Islamic texts promoted the rights of women long before the developing societies of the Western world. The radicalization of Islam has significantly altered Islamic societies by severely limiting the rights of women, and eliminating discussion of any form of alternate sexual orientation (Dialmy, 2010). However, we note that in regions of the world untouched by early Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, such as China and Japan, historical art and literature depict homosexuality (albeit primarily male relationships) in a very positive way (Gayoso et. al, 2009).

However, a revolutionary change in societal norms regarding women took place during World War II. In the United States and Europe, women suddenly found that they were able to enter the labor force in professions previously designated as "male only," while the majority of the male workforce had enlisted in the military (Valocchi, 2012). Ever since that point, women have been combating the ever present social norm which defines women as wives, child-rearers, and homemakers.

The social norms regarding sexuality also began to change in the aftermath of World War II, albeit at a much slower rate. Prior to the mid-20th century, homosexuality was rarely acknowledged by society or politics. It was viewed as a selfish, immoral, and lust-driven act which caused men to become unstable and effeminate, and it only took place behind closed doors (Valocchi, 2012). However, with the advance of biological and psychological research on human gender and sexuality, science began to slowly combat the archaic understanding of sexuality depicted by religion. Much progress has yet to be made, as society still innately views homosexuals as theatrical, overly effeminate or masculine (regarding gay men and women, respectively), and unhealthy.

Another origin of gender and sexual norms, which has become increasingly influential over time, is the conglomeration of mass media and Hollywood. In the early 20th century, Hollywood had a light-hearted entertainment value, but now pop culture and film have incredibly powerful influences on social norms. Actors and actresses often have as much mobilizing power as state politicians, and a fictional character on a television show can become a role model for the rest of society (Gayoso et al, 2009). Women have made the greatest strides in this area, going from mere housewives and objects of sexual desire in the 1950s-1970s to capable, versatile, and independent heroines who often prove themselves entirely equal to men. Naturally, this is not a perfect trend, as many portrayals of women in media today are still objectified to the highest degree (Gayoso et al, 2009).

The depiction of LGBT individuals in the media has undergone a much more prominent shift over the past few decades. In the early days of Hollywood, gay men and women were rarely depicted, and when they were, the roles were often unflattering. Lesbians were often depicted as prostitutes and sexual objects, in order to entertain a predominantly male audience. On the other hand, gay men were depicted in a variety of ways, as effeminate comedic characters, as suicidal and mentally disturbed individuals, and as socially offensive drag queens and spreaders of AIDS. This, in turn, greatly inhibited the ability of LGBT individuals to disclose their sexuality and be accepted by the general public (Gayoso et al, 2009). However, after the Civil Rights movements of 1960s-1970s, American and European media began to portray homosexuality in a more positive light.

> Stereotyped images of homosexuals as psycho-killers, drag queens, funny and frivolous continued to thrive in the 1980s but this period also began showing diverse characters of gay people in different professions and homosexuals in loving relationships. Dubbed as the "Great Hollywood Gay-Movie Caper," films during the start of the 1980s attempted to represent lesbians, gay men, and even transgendered characters in a more realistic, sensitive way (Gayoso et al, 2009, pg 40)

This new portrayal of LGBT citizens in mass media helped to bolster public opinion regarding the LGBT community, and reduced public hostility (decreased numbers of protests, and steadily decreasing violent hate crimes) against openly gay individuals. And this boost has continued well into the 21st century. According to Valocchi (2012), part of the reason why homosexuals were so stigmatized by Western society during the mid-20th century is because they had no role models to look up to, and no way to express their desires. Heterosexual high school students were able to openly discuss their desires, and had innumerable media icons to support them, while gay high school students had to remain silent and covert. This

stigmatization defined the LGBT community until the 1980s, when young people first were able to express their sexuality and find some small measure of acceptance (Valocchi, 2012).

The turn of the 21st century showed an increasing number of modern gays and lesbians, not only desiring equal rights, but also wanting traditional marriages and families. As such, most films now portray homosexuals neither as effeminates or as simply ridiculous or humorous characters but as someone who desires a relationship and intimacy (Gayoso et al, 2009, pg. 40)

However, this is far from a perfect victory. Harmful stereotypical portrayals of the LGBT community still resound throughout the American and European media, and in Asian and Middle Eastern "hollywoods", the dangerous portrayals are the only portrayals of the LGBT community that exist, and these portrayals define sexual norms in these regions of the world.

Religion, pop culture, and the development of society have all defined gender and sexual norms throughout history. These norms have changed over the years, in many ways for the better, but the negative and oppressive social norms still exist. As we look at how gender and sexual norms impact the lives of women and LGBT citizens of specific countries, we must remember that gender and sexuality are social constructs. According to Schwartz and Rutter (1998), biological sex is the only natural aspect of the norms placed upon men and women in today's modern world. The rest of traditional gender norms are constructed by society, which embodies men and women as separate and having to display certain physical and psychological characteristics in order to be accepted. These constructs fundamentally limit individuals from expressing themselves freely, finding fulfillment and happiness, and inhibit social equality. Gender and sexual norms are often argued to be the most "natural" definitions of how people should act, but in reality, they are entirely unnatural (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998).

The United States of America - A Heated Social Battleground

The United States was once held as the shining example of democracy and liberty, offering equal opportunities for all, and founded on the principles of freedom. Alas, as pleasant as this notion of American exceptionalism is, the reality is quite different for women and LGBT citizens. Currently, in the United States, women are denied equal pay (with maternity leave cited as the primary justification), face incredible political opposition regarding reproductive rights, and struggle to break out of the "homemaker" social norm (Schwartz and Rutter, 1998). During the global economic crisis of 2007-2009, gender roles became highly contested in many lower and middle class American families. According to Sherman (2009), the job loss in the manufacturing and labor sectors was not what economically crippled lower-middle class families. Instead, "sheer assertions of male privilege" arose in many households when married women suggested that they try entering the job market along with their husbands. In many cases, these assertions of gender roles lead to hostile and predatory relationships (Sherman, 2009).

Women's rapid entrance into the workforce has not been fully accepted by men, leading to a "stalled revolution," which creates tensions that lead to the re-trenchment of the traditional breadwinner/homemaker divide, or resistance to marriage itself. Traditional gender roles and norms often become the most rigid and unshakable at exactly the point where circumstances require them to be the most innovative and flexible, leading to marital and family tensions that exacerbate economic strain (Sherman, 2009, pg. 602).

Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not limited solely to the lower-middle class of American citizens. Perhaps the most telling example of gender inequality in the United States can be found within the highest levels of the federal government. In terms of representation of women in the legislative/parliamentary branch of government, the United States only ranks at #61 in terms of fair representation, with 15.2% seats in Congress belonging to women (Baldez et al, 2006). Unfortunately, this trend does not appear to be approaching any meaningful turning point.

The current political context in the United States does not appear to be a propitious one for forwarding measures to promote women's rights—at least not for promoting the rights of American women. The current administration has done much to promote the rights of women in Afghanistan and Iraq, but...the Bush administration appears to consider the establishment of gender equality in the United States a fait accompli (Baldez et al, 2006, pg. 108).

For the LGBT community, the battle for equal rights has been an equally arduous struggle. Since the early 1970s, there has been an ever-growing movement to obtain marriage rights and benefits for same-sex couples in the United States. However, unlike many other civil rights movements of the 1960s-70s, same-sex marriage received little political support or attention. In 1996, the movement was essentially put to a halt when President Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act into law.

This law, known as 'DOMA', explicitly establishes the federal definition of marriage as a legal union between 'one man and one woman'. It provides that no state, territory, possession or native American tribe is required to accord full faith and credit to a marriage license issued by another state, territory, possession or tribe if that license relates to a relationship between persons of the same sex (Smith, 2001, pg. 308).

While this act did not explicitly ban same-sex marriages in the United States, and although the constitutionality of the act has been questioned, it still frames current policy towards same-sex marriage in the United States. There is not a federal policy which legalizes or bans same-sex marriage. Rather, the issue is presented through a wide range of policies developed and implemented at the state level.

The key factor in achieving equality for the LGBT community in the United States is public opinion. Most of the victories already won for LGBT rights have taken place as a result of referendums and ballot proposals in individual states. Over the past two decades, public opinion

has slowly been shifting towards favoring gay rights. However, any political movement in this direction still faces intense opposition. Conservative Christian lobbyists still attempt to portray homosexuality as an immoral choice or a mental illness, while mental health professionals have acknowledged homosexuality as predisposed for two decades (Herek, 2002). A 2002 public opinion study reveals the power of gender norms in public opinion. According to Herek (2002), male and female respondents are far more likely to view gay men as immoral and mentally ill than lesbians, and are far more willing to promote partnership and adoption rights for lesbian couples. The most monumental finding was that, although heterosexual men are generally quite supportive of lesbian couples, they provided the most negative responses regarding rights for gay men, with over 74% of male respondents believing that gay men were mentally ill and probably child molesters. Again, we see the conflict caused by masculinity as a socially reinforced gender norm.

Despite the negative responses of this study, it is necessary to point out that in the ten years since this research was published, nine state governments have legalized same-sex marriage and banned employment discrimination based on gender presentation or sexual orientation. Nine additional states have granted civil union status to same-sex couples, and the Defense of Marriage Act, as well as a state law banning same-sex marriage, are to go before the U.S. Supreme Court in the summer of 2013. The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law was also struck down, and now LGBT citizens can openly serve in the U.S. military. The United States, after decades of social inequality, is about to reach a pivotal decision point. The final result remains to be seen.

Latin America - Political Action, Social Rejection

In Latin America, we find a collection of countries that in many ways seem to be a world apart from the United States. Most Latin American countries are marked by extreme income inequality, with levels of poverty greatly exceeding levels found in the United States

(Encarnacion, 2011). We see the rise of economically corrupt governments such as those in Columbia and Paraguay (both engaged in illegal drug trade), a complete lack of a social safety net for the poor, low literacy and high infant mortality rates, and poor disease control. Yet, despite these appalling social conditions, the region of Latin America has made one significant social gain compared to the United States. On the political stage, equality for women and LGBT citizens is a veritable non-issue (Encarnacion, 2011).

In countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, the rights of women are not contested on the political or social spectrum. Many of the norms regarding gender roles in Latin America are similar to those in the United States, but there exists a much greater degree of flexibility. Women enjoy the inalienable right to education and are able to seek employment fairly alongside men. Furthermore, there exists a much higher degree of fair representation of women in politics, particularly in Mexico. There, and in other countries, a gender quota policy exists within the parliamentary system, ensuring that a certain percentage of seats are filled by women (Encarnacion, 2011).

Furthermore, equality for LGBT citizens is seen as a profoundly non-issue in the political spectrum. Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, and Peru have all decriminalized homosexuality, and taken significant steps toward legalizing same-sex civil unions (if not marriages). Considering the powerful influence of Catholicism in Latin America, the lack of political opposition to these reforms is somewhat surprising. Encarnacion (2011) argues that this success is related to the way the issue of LGBT rights has been presented in Latin America.

Promoting gay rights as human rights in Latin America predated the acceptance by the international community of the popular argument that "gay rights are human rights." This view holds that gays are entitled to freedom from discrimination by virtue of being

human; accordingly, what is being advanced with gay rights is humanity rather than a "gay agenda" (Encarnacion, 2011, pg 106).

Despite these political victories, Encarnacion also warns that the future of LGBT rights in Latin America is rather uncertain. "Because gay-rights gains in Latin America have rested largely on innovative politics and strategic alliances rather than on the broad acceptance of homosexuality, it remains to be seen whether gay rights will prove viable in the long term and how much they will do to deepen democracy" (2011, pg. 114). This is a valid point, because while national governments in Latin America have approved rights for LGBT citizens, the same sentiment is not as prevalent among the rest of society. It is uncertain whether this discrepancy is due to strong Catholic roots or some other social factor, but negative attitudes towards homosexuals remains disturbingly high in many Latin American countries. Furthermore, violent crime rates against gay men and women are rising in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. It is an almost unheard of political phenomenon, where the law appears to have outpaced social attitudes (Encarnacion, 2011). However, there is some hope for social equality to become commonly accepted. In Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, Pride events are gathering more and more international support and attracting larger crowds each year. Violence and negative attitudes may be on the rise, but they are not breaking the resilience of the LGBT community in Latin America.

Europe - A Community of Nations for Social Equality

Like the United States, Europe is a veritable "melting pot" of cultures, ethnicities, and political structures. There are the predominantly secular nations in Scandinavia, and the Mediterranean countries historically identified by their strong Catholic roots. Western Europe is defined by modernization, democratization, and capitalist structures, while Eastern and Northern Europe are associated with a strong sense of nationalism, and emphasis on Socialist democracies (Voicu, 2009). Within each country, you have boundless ethnic minorities and a constantly

changing social structure. Yet, despite these differences, many factors remain the same. The formation of the European Union created a political and economic bond which connects the entire continent, and much to the surprise of this researcher, many of the social and political norms are uniform throughout Europe.

Regarding gender norms, Europe and the United States are very similar. Both founded their societal gender roles on the principles of religion, and these roles have changed considerably over the past few decades. Voicu (2009) notes that the decrease of social importance of gender roles has occurred at the same rate as a decrease in religiosity among many European countries. In every European Union member state, it was found that society has become more egalitarian regarding gender roles, allowing women to abandon the stereotypical role as homemakers to pursue education, work, and political positions without violating any social norms. Voicu (2009) concludes that this change in European society has a occurred largely as a result of secularization, which has caused individual value systems to become fragmented. Thus, religion has lost its coordinating role in social policy. One has only to look at political leadership in Europe in order to recognize these shifts. From Great Britain's renowned former Prime Minster Margaret Thatcher, to Germany's current Chancellor Angela Merkel, we note the greater representation of women in the highest structures of authority in European society. Comparatively, the United States has very poor representation of women in politics, despite shared Western democratic values.

Regarding equality for Europe's LGBT community, there exist political tensions similar to those in the United States. However, we find that the centralized government of the European Union has, as of 2010, made equality for the LGBT community a primary social focus. Like the policies developed in Latin America, this push for social equality revolves around the philosophy of human rights, and that all citizens deserve fair treatment under the law (Graham, 2004). As of this writing, eight European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, the

Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden) have legalized gay marriage, three countries are proposing legalization (Great Britain, France, and Germany) and all European Union member states have passed anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation, as well as laws allowing civil unions for same-sex couples.

At first glance, these assortment of countries appears insignificant, but in reality, there is a great deal of political diversity (Graham, 2004). Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden are known to be predominantly secular countries which embrace social liberalism, and so equality for the LGBT community in those countries is no surprise. However, Spain and Portugal have embraced conservative governments and social norms are deeply rooted in the traditions of Catholicism. How have these countries managed to push forward an agenda which would seem radical to citizens of the United States? Graham (2004) argued that the key is in public opinion. While the general public in these countries does display a great deal of religiosity, they do not let religious views impact the rights of a social minority. In the eyes of the youngest voting generation, the very idea of encroaching on human rights is appalling.

Two decades ago, Europe's position on LGBT rights was very similar to the position of the United States. However, the spread of secularization has (and will likely continue to) reshaped the social norms of European society, from Spain to Sweden. As religion has become displaced from the political stage, social equality has been promoted in Europe with little backlash from the general public. While complete social equality has yet to be realized, the streamlined authority of the European Union, and a younger generation demanding equality for all citizens under the law, European society has become a model for equality that the rest of the globe should willingly emulate (Graham, 2004).

Japan - Defying the Social Impact of Globalization

In Japan, there exists an interesting co-development within society. Japan is a country that has experienced unprecedented economic growth during the second half of the 20th century,

and now stands as one of the most advanced countries in Asia. It bolsters a uniform high standard of living, a liberal democracy, and strong relations with the United States and the rest of the Western world (North, 2009). However, it is also a country of tradition, and these traditions have dictated Japan's social norms without being impacted by the power of globalization. Japan's culture embraces a strong notion of patriarchy, which dictates the roles of men and women in the household, and in the workplace. These strict social customs also have a severely limiting impact on LGBT citizens, as "deviant" sexual expression is not actively encouraged within Japanese culture (Lunsing, 2005).

According to North (2009), "the argument that industrialization and higher rates of female employment close the gender gap holds in most OECD nations. But despite advanced economic development, the Japanese gap yawns" (pg. 40). This is due to the overwhelming power of Japanese traditions, which are not based in any specific religion, but rather in a patriarchal social structure. This patriarchy insists on the "natural rights" of men as breadwinners and the dominant authority, and the obligations women have to serve their husbands as docile wives and homemakers. Age plays a significant role as well in Japanese culture, as older Japanese women can defer all tasks to daughters or daughter-in-law. The first born son in a family is regarded as the future head of the household, and so is rarely disciplined or burdened with responsibilities, nor is he obligated to see his mother as an authority (North, 2009).

Shockingly to some, this system is not likely to change anytime in the near future. Japanese traditions have withstood the power of globalization and modernization, without conflicts or political debate. This is largely because Japanese men and women both emphatically support the patriarchy system, or fear to deviate from it and risk a more challenging life. Social liberals from the Western world may frown on this patriarchal system, but for the Japanese, it functions perfectly, and gender equality has never been viewed as necessary.

A similar situation exists for the Japanese LGBT community, which has also gone unnoticed by the power of globalization. Sexuality is not a topic of discussion in Japan, either politically or socially (Lunsing, 2005). The lives of gay couples are not actively promoted, but neither are they actively condemned. They simply are not acknowledged by law or society. Japan has made no move to pass anti-discrimination laws or laws allowing same-sex marriage. This decision is not made because homosexuality is viewed as immoral, but rather because discrimination is such a rare occurrence in Japanese society. The LGBT community, while active in Japan, does not campaign for marriage equality. Instead, its efforts are focused on education. "The increase in written sources on homosexuality, transgender issues, and sex in general has made life much easier for younger individuals with feelings or interests that divert from monogamous heterosexuality...media coverage has familiarized most Japanese to some extent with gay, lesbian, and transgender issues in a positive and supportive manner" (Lunsing, 2005, pg. 148).

To the social liberal, Japan's views on gender and sexual equality can be either positive or negative. The fact that social equality is not even perceived as an issue by Japanese society, and the fact that discrimination and conflict are incredibly rare, are excellent reasons to praise Japan's society. However, some might question whether or not Japan's stoic embrace of patriarchal traditions limits women and the LGBT community from expressing themselves fully. Is there a lack of dissent because society is truly a happy one, or because the people know of no other alternative? One cannot know for sure.

Africa - A World Without Social Structures

Africa is a continent of incredible diversity. To the average Anglo-American, it is easy to define Africa as a continent simply due to the skin color of its inhabitants. However, within Africa lies a countless number of ancient tribal groups, which cross over country lines and

intersect with other tribes. Each tribe has its own culture, with its own traditions and social norms. It is a land of conflict, and a land heavily exploited by the Western world (AFP, 2011).

As a result of Africa's rich cultural diversity, it is nearly impossible to identify specific gender norms adhered to by citizens of African nations. Colonialism has had some impact in certain countries, where Christianity and Islam have some social influence. However, we mostly find that the roles of women are incredibly diverse. In more modernized regions, there is a clear gender gap in employment and opportunity. However, tribal customs place women in a variety of social roles (from tribal matriarchs to revered idols), based on the geographic region. (AFP, 2011)

Regarding the LGBT community, one can establish a more clear position of social equality, or the lack of which thereof. South Africa is the only nation in the African continent to legalize same-sex marriage and to pass anti-discrimination laws based on sexuality. However, discrimination against the LGBT community in South Africa still runs high, and while the government takes a very strong stance against hate crimes, sexual assault and homophobia are deeply embedded in South African society (AFP, 2011).

The rest of the African continent, however, has made far less progress towards social equality. In many African countries (Algeria, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and many others), homosexuality has been declared illegal by law, and can be punishable by heavy fines, years of jail time, or even life imprisonment. Members of the LGBT community and vocal activists are routinely discriminated against, murdered, or imprisoned by various State governments (AFP, 2011). Perhaps the most extreme example of aggression against the LGBT community can be found in Uganda, where the government introduced a "Kill the Gays" bill in 2009. The law would make homosexuality illegal and punishable by the death penalty, without trial. Revisions to the law would also make it illegal to jail and administer the death penalty to individuals who test positive for HIV (AFP, 2011). Despite pressure from the United States and other Western

nations to kill the bill, the Ugandan parliament is intent on making the bill law, and will go forward with parliamentary review in the summer of 2013.

The Middle East - A Theocracy of Social Oppression

The Middle East is a region torn asunder by conflict, and the Western world views it with a critical and oppressive gaze. In the United States, it is almost impossible to read a media reference to the Middle East that does not contain some link to terrorism, or the Israel/Palestine conflict. In order to fairly understand the cultural norms of the Middle East, it is first essential to understand the nature of the major religion, Islam. The politics of Middle Eastern countries are defined by the Islamic texts, and the religion governs the day to day life of men and women. Islam was, in generations past, a peaceful religion, but the radicalization of Islam in the 20th century lead to a society which actively oppresses women and the LGBT community (Dialmy, 2010).

In Middle Eastern countries with radical Islamic factions, women have little to no political rights. They are devoid of reproductive rights, the right to work, and the right to seek education. When women are in public, under Islamic law, displaying any visible skin or wearing clothing which reveals the shape of the body is forbidden. Women are simply forced to care for their families and their husbands (Dialmy, 2010). Women who attempt to break free from this oppressive social structure are met with extreme violence and capital punishment by the state. The death penalty for such offenses is not uncommon.

Homosexuality is viewed with a similarly critical gaze. It is not discussed politically, and any LGBT activists are either sentenced to years in prison, or are killed. Historically, homosexual acts were common in Islam, but the radicalization of Islam has eradicated those practices from historical Islamic texts (Dialmy, 2010).

It is important to mention that Israel remains the only Middle Eastern state to not be governed by Islamic law, and promotes total social equality for both women and the LGBT community. Israel is also the only Middle East country to legalize same-sex marriage.

Conclusion

In order to achieve social equality throughout the world, it is vital that we understand what causes social conflicts. In other words, what factors cause people to oppose the redefining of social norms, especially in reference to gender and sexuality? In a study performed by Bos et al (2011), a group of students from multicultural schools in the Netherlands were interviewed and tested for their feelings on sexuality and gender nonconformity, in order to determine if ethnicity and cultural upbringing had an impact on how the children would view gender and sexuality. In the end, the authors found that children's ethnicity has a strong association with views towards gender and sexual norms.

Compared to children with a Dutch background, children with non-Western backgrounds had less positive attitudes. Children with non-Western backgrounds also felt more strongly that children with gender-nonconforming behavior should adjust in order to be accepted by their peers, and they felt more pressure from parents to conform to traditional gender norms. Perceived parental pressure to conform to one's gender was found to account for part of the differences in children's ethnicity on attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. (Bos et al, 2011, pg. 1090)

These findings raise an interesting question: is multiculturalism the cause of social conflict? If democracy demands that everyone be treated with equality under the law, and multiculturalism demands respect for all customs and beliefs, does that mean that we must accept the Islamic and Christian judgement of women and homosexuals? Many American exceptionalists believe that multiculturalism undermines democracy and Christian traditions.

Beckett and Macey (2001) argue that multiculturalism has incredible value to add to

society, but that like any social construct, it has its dangers as well. If society is made of rational actors, all working for social equality and the common good, then multiculturalism can only add to that goal. However, Beckett and Macey continue to claim that the positive efforts of multiculturalism are corrupted by the oppression of religion on women and social minorities. They argue that there is no legal or philosophical argument to deny rights to women and the LGBT community, except for those arguments based on religious principles.

The conditions of social equality for women and LGBT citizens varies greatly throughout the world. Equality has been embraced by the European Union, is being struggled for in the United States, is not viewed as an issue in Japan, and is punishable by death in Africa and the Middle East. How then should the international community move forward in promoting social equality? How can long-standing gender norms be redefined in order to allow for equality under the law? One could argue that as religion is the primary source of this conflict, religion itself should be regulated or possibly abolished from the political stage. However, it is difficult to rationally argue for the banning of religion in any context apart from a separation of church and state.

In the majority of the countries and regions analyzed in this paper, we have found that attitudes toward social equality have grown more positive over time. This generational effect is the key to redefining social norms, and it will hopefully continue into the future, as citizens of the global community take these issues to heart. "Transformation at the institutional level is easier to achieve, but we need effective measures to bring about a similar transformation at the personal level, a concrete attitudinal change in individuals" (Baldez et al, 2006, pg. 128).

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