|  |
| --- |
|  |
| Homosexuality and Religion |
|  |
|  |
| **Abigail Fenn** |
| **1/23/2012** |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Abstract:

Religion and homosexuality have become opposing forces in a way. Over-zealous religious groups have used hateful and violent actions to spread the word of their religion. However, are these groups correct in their words? Through direct translations it can be concluded that these groups are correct, but in modern interpretations they do lose their credibility. Another question is, are they a correct representation of the modern religion as a whole? This information was obtained through interviews and direct study of the religious texts. Keeping in mind the original texts, the laws of countries with a high concentration of that religion were examined, which were overwhelmingly in favor of homosexual rights. Thus it was concluded that the groups are not a correct representation of the whole religion. So, thus, in conclusion, while these groups are backed by texts they are not backed by the majority of the religion.

Introduction:

Early morning. Thursday, October 8, 1998. A cyclist is passing through the fields that surround the small town of Laramie, Wyoming. He sees what he thinks is a scarecrow, fallen to the ground. When he goes to move it back in position, he finds that it is no scarecrow but actually a young man. He is tied to the fence and badly beaten. He is in some sort of comatose and near death. Later the name of the young man is discovered, Matthew Sheppard. He attends the local college, University of Wyoming, where he is involved in the Gay Straight Alliance, himself being openly gay. Then four days later, Sheppard died. (“Matthew’s Story”) At his funeral, a religious group called the Westboro Baptist Church protests with signs with gay slurs and words of encouragement towards his murderers. Even to this day the church goes on about Sheppard’s death saying things such as, “He lived a satanic lifestyle. He got himself killed trolling for anonymous homosexual sex in a bar at midnight.” They paint a picture in the minds of the non-religiously affiliated population in the world of all religious groups. This picture depicts hate, cruelty, and rejection toward homosexuals.

This paper is based around this essential question, religiously speaking, what is wrong with being gay? What do the religious texts say? And do the centers for these religions support or denounce the belief in how they form their policies centered around gay rights?

What is revealed in these next pages might come off as a sort of shock. Yes, some religions are adamant about how they believe that homosexuality is wrong and their texts may even support their voices. In the same respect, there are religions that do support homosexuality, or at least parts of the life style. It is saddening to think that the true meaning of these religions has been lost. A meaning which might actually hold peace and love instead of violence and hate. This should be enough to send a perpetual shiver down humanity’s spine.

Guilt vs. Shame Culture:

Since the religions that will be discussed are all derived from different cultures, the ideas of right and wrong are perceived differently. There are two common categories that most cultures fall into. These categories are shame and guilt.

A shame culture is defined as a culture in which the way society views an action is highly important. If an action is considered “wrong” by the person doing it, but not by the society then the person committing the action will feel intense guilt and shame. If the action is considered “wrong” on both sides, then punishment ensues. If the action is considered “right” on both sides then nothing happens. Finally, if the action is considered “wrong” by the person doing it but the society does not see it happen, then it has no effect on the person’s psyche. This suggests that secretive wrong doings are supported by this type of culture. ("Shame-Culture and Guilt-Culture.") Examples of shame cultures include Judaism, Islam, and most eastern cultures.

On the other hand, a guilt culture is the same in two respects. If what the person doing the action is considered wrong on both sides, punishment ensues, if the actions I considered right, nothing happens. If the person doesn’t believe it is wrong but society does, they are supposed to protest their innocence. If the person does believe it’s wrong but society doesn’t, then they are supposed to feel guilt anyway. Examples of these types of cultures are more western cultures.

It is important to know the difference between a shame and a guilt culture are, because when looking at the religion’s view of homosexuality a lot of what they believe is in how they would punish known homosexuals. The effectiveness of the punishment does relate back to whether or not the main culture is shame or guilt. In a shame culture, if society outcasts you that is the worst punishment. In a guilt culture, the worst type of punishment is that of self hate and knowing that what the person doing the action was wrong. ("Shame-Culture and Guilt-Culture.")

Judaism’s View of Homosexuality:

In the western world, Judaism is often regarded as the oldest religion, dating as far back as the Bronze Age. The Jewish book, the Torah, was written in the early years of the Common Era. This was a time in which the population was still at a low peak and children were needed to be used for labor purposes. This fact is something to keep in mind while the Torah is being examined.

In the Torah, Leviticus 18:22 states, “Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is abhorrence.” This passage states the Jewish belief on male homosexuality, calling it an abhorrence which alludes to it being rejected by society (“Abhorrence”), but does not mention lesbianism. However, Jewish law states that “Women who have sex one with the other are forbidden to marry a Kohen.” ("Homosexuality and Jewish Law - My Jewish Learning") According to David Weiss, an Advanced Placement Psychology teacher at Tallwood High school and a practicing Jew, a Kohen, which is relatable to a priest in the Catholic faith, can be a man or a woman. (Weiss)

It makes sense that lesbianism is much more accepted than male homosexuality in the words of the Torah and Jewish law. The reasoning behind this is how the world looked in the time that the Torah was written. As stated previously, the world’s population was in a critical state. Jerry Callander, gay activist in Virginia Beach, says “The need for a population increase relates to homosexuality in that the men hold the seed that will grow the future but the seed needs the proper field in which to grow. The field in this case is the woman.” (Callander) A man and a man cannot produce offspring so thus to society was useless. This leads one to believe that the Jewish faith is based on shame culture values. So thus, in religious terms, homosexuality is wrong because society has no use for it.

However, while the religion may believe that homosexuality is wrong, the modern capital of the Jewish faith, Israel, is perhaps one of the most liberal countries when it comes to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender rights, or LGBT rights. In Israel, gays are permitted to marry, gays are allowed to hold offices in parliament and serve openly in the military. These rights are more advanced than even one of the most influential countries, the United States. ("LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East.")

Christianity’s View of Homosexuality:

When looking at the issue of homosexuality and religion, for most Christianity comes to mind. There are a plethora of churches that stem from the main sect of Christianity that use this religion as a spring board for their religious beliefs. They use this religion to promote their own agenda of hate and violence.

In the Old Testament, the book directly states what the stance is on homosexuality. In Leviticus 18:22 it quotes “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (Bible on the Web) Also, in Leviticus 18:29, the Bible states “For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people.” Leviticus 20:13 reads as “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” This directly states that homosexuals, if identified, shall be put to death. (believersweb.org) This proves that the Christian faith is somewhat of a shame culture. The punishment is only applicable if found out by the church. So, thus this is promoting in some way, secretive wrong doings.

In the New Testament Romans 1:26 tells us that “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into which is against nature.” “And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”. In Corinthians 6:9-6:10 “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionists, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” This provides evidence that the Christian faith is also a guilt culture. This is so because, people who are not allowed into the kingdom of God are to feel guilt for not following God, because whether or not society knows about the wrong doing God always knows.

In the Christian based country of Italy, there is no allowance for same-sex partnering. Even so, the government does grant a series of other rights like military rights and health care rights to partners. There are several bills going through the government now that are hoping to amend the partnership law. (Monday, Joan On.)

The Various Pagan Religions’ Beliefs on Homosexuality:

Paganism in itself has fought for its own equal footing within the religious community. This religion as a whole has been undermined and the word “pagan” in itself has become synonymous with words such as “heathen” and “infidel”. Also, it has somehow derived the meaning of sexual deviant. In all actuality, this is farthest from the truth. Paganism is more of a general sect of religions instead of its own entity. Some of the religions included under the title of pagan are those such as Hindu, Native American religions, Buddhism, and generally anyone that does not fall into the categories of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. These religions are all derived from nature and a polytheistic belief. In these religions, the main gods are one male and the other female. This shows that men and women hold equal footing in society. From the main god and goddess strains many different gods and goddesses that each represent different cycles of life and nature. This is another thing that separates Christianity, Islam, and Judaism from Paganism is that the three main religions hold a linear way of looking at life. A definite beginning and end. While in the Pagan faith the way of looking at life is more cycled. The life is a cycle which is repeated over and over again until perfection is reached.

Now, Hinduism does not address homosexuality as such, but instead as the term third-sex. This term transcends the homosexual definition in that it also includes transgender and intersex, or hermaphrodite, people. The third-sex is included with in the typical male and female genders; this is because in the Hindu religion sex is not defined by biological differences alone. Other factors of the gender are psychological body and the procreative status. Third gendered citizens are considered to be an equal part of the whole. These people are treated just like a full male or female would be within the society. The Vedas has defined that third genders should be treated as such. ("Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association, Inc.")

Before the year 2009, India had kept the British law that made homosexuality illegal. The amending of the Indian constitution was meant to include homosexual sex into the law that stated “any persons over the age of 18 may consent to sexual intercourse.” Also, the anti-discrimination law was amended to say “on grounds of sexual orientation, religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.” ("Victory for Gay Rights in India.") These changes to the law began to show off the religious beliefs of some 755,135,000 Hindus that inhabit India.

The entire Buddhist faith can be summarized in the Eightfold Path. This is as important as the Ten Commandments in the Christian and Jewish faiths. This bases the religion in every decision that one makes to make it to Nirvana, or the enlightened state. ("A Basic Buddhism Guide: Introduction to Buddhism") The different sectors of the Eightfold Path include the Four Noble Truths, the Three Treasures Precept, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Great Precepts. The one section that this paper will focus on is the Ten Great Precepts. These include: “I will refrain from killing, I will refrain of stealing, I will refrain from abusing sexuality, I will refrain from speaking untruthfully, I will refrain from selling the wine of delusion, I will refrain from speaking against others, I will refrain from being proud of myself and belittling others, I will refrain from holding back in either Dharma or wealth, I will refrain from indulging in anger, I will refrain from defaming the Three Treasures.” (MacPhilliamy)

These ten statements give prime examples for why Buddhism does not indicate whether or not it supports or condemns homosexuality. In the third precept “I will refrain from abusing sexuality” is explained by Rev. Daizui MacPhalliamy as abusing someone with homosexuality. So, this is described as rape, molestation, and even prostitution. And thus, the only way that homosexuality would not bode well with Buddhism is if there was a rape committed by a man against a man or a woman against a woman. (MacPhilliamy)

Thailand population consists of 95% Buddhists, making it the Buddhist capital of the world. ("Adherents.com: Buddhism.”) Thailand does support homosexuality as country. Homosexuals do have the right to marry with in the country and are invoking change in pre-existing laws such as the ability to serve openly in the military. On the other hand, discrimination still exists and ironically enough it is mostly by the Buddhist population. (2007, 6. July.) Thailand is a great example of a religion going against what the religious texts have laid out for them to follow, in that they do not support something that their religion does.

Conclusion:

In the thirteen years since Matthew Sheppard’s death, it has become more and more evident that LGBT rights are becoming common in religious based countries such as Italy, Thailand, India, and Israel. These countries are separating from their religions, to separate themselves from the stereotypical hate and violence. This shows how through time and education peace and understanding can be reached.

It is imperative to understand that religion may say one thing in the way of homosexuality, but the followers of the religion do not necessarily follow the exact wording. These religious texts were written in a time in which the population was in a critical condition. A high population was desperately needed. It was needed for not only the survival of the humans but also the survival of the culture. As previously stated, obviously, homosexual intercourse cannot produce offspring.

The views of religion are being tainted by over-zealous groups, such as the Westboro Baptist Church. These groups use the words of the religion as literally as possible and do not apply it to current time and needs. They use this to discriminate the homosexual population. Unfortunately, the religious people that are apart of these groups cause people who are not religiously affiliated to lump all religious people with these extremists.

As the human race evolves more and more the equality and understanding is increasing. It will take time for a majority of the religious groups to accept homosexuality, but in the same respect, not everyone’s mind will change. It is unrealistic for one to believe that everyone’s mind will change. This situation is relatable to the black civil rights struggle in America. In the 1960’s black’s fought the opinions of others for their rights. The majority of people’s minds changed, but obviously not all minds did. This is obvious in today’s culture with the continued existence of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Also, there are still hate crimes targeting blacks. The same thing will happen with homosexuals.

Patience is the key. If people wait it out, eventually rights will be evenly distributed. Through education people’s minds will open. Education should not be focused on only the homosexuality side. It is imperative for education to spread over to the religion side. In order to fully understand an argument one must be knowledgeable on both sides. This is key in making an educated argument.

In the current world, homosexuality is emerging as a front runner of the world’s issues. Inequality is unacceptable in a world where violence is an everyday occurrence in parts of the world such as the Middle East and Africa. The world’s resource issues are of more importance and the population needs to realize this. It is extremely saddening that people are more concerned with the private lives of free people than the well-being and safety of people in need. What this world needs is to get its priorities in order and find out which is of more importance, a straight world or a world free of fear and hunger.

Works Cited

2007, 6. July. "UNHCR | Refworld | Thailand: Situation and Treatment of Homosexuals, Transsexuals and Transgender Persons; Whether the Government Updated the Constitution to Provide Rights to Homosexuals, Transsexuals and Transgender Persons (2005-2007)." *UNHCR Welcome*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,IRBC,,THA,47d6547d28,0.html>.

"Abhorrence | Define Abhorrence at Dictionary.com." *Dictionary.com | Find the Meanings and Definitions of Words at Dictionary.com*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/abhorrence>.

"Adherents.com: Buddhism." *World Religions Religion Statistics Geography Church Statistics*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com\_buddhist.html>.

"BBC - Religions - Judaism: History of Judaism." *BBC - Homepage*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/history/history\_1.shtml>.

"Bible on the Web Search." *Bible on the Web - Online Bible Church*. Web. 14 Dec. 2011. <http://www.bibleontheweb.com/Bible.asp>.

"Bible Verses Dealing with Homosexuality Bible Verses Dealing with Homosexuality. Believersweb.org." *Believersweb*. Web. 14 Dec. 2011. <http://www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=809>.

Callander, Jerry. "Homosexuality in Foreign Countries." Personal interview. 6 Jan. 2012

"Homosexuality and Jewish Law - My Jewish Learning." *Judaism & Jewish Life - My Jewish Learning*. Web. 14 Dec. 2011. <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Sex\_and\_Sexuality/Homosexuality/Homosexuality\_and\_Halakhah.shtml>

"LGBT Rights in Israel and the Middle East." *Standwithus.com*. Web. 2012. <http://www.standwithus.com/booklets/LGBT/files/search/searchtext.xml>.

MacPhilliamy, Rev. Daizui. *The Eightfold Path of Buddhism*.

"Matthew’s Story." *Matthew's Place*. Web. 21 Jan. 2012. <http://www.matthewsplace.com/learn/matthews-story/>.

Monday, Joan On. "Italy: Gay Rights and Recent Decisions." *EurOut - European LesBian News in Media, Technology and Politics*. Web. 23 Jan. 2012. <http://eurout.org/2010/04/05/italy-gay-rights-and-recent-decisions>.

"Shame-Culture and Guilt-Culture." *Angles on Learning and Teaching at College, University and Professional Levels*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://www.doceo.co.uk/background/shame\_guilt.htm>.

"Victory for Gay Rights in India." *Legal Service India - Law, Lawyers and Legal Resources*. Web. 22 Jan. 2012. <http://www.legalserviceindia.com/article/l348-Victory-for-Gay- Rights-in-India.html>.

Weiss, David. "Jewish Faith and Lesbianism." Personal interview. 14 Dec. 2011.

 "Westboro Baptist Church's Perpetual Gospel Memorial to Matthew Shepard."*Westboro Baptist Church Home Page*. Web. 21 Jan. 2012. <http://www.godhatesfags.com/memorials/matthewshepardmemorial.html>.

"What Do Jews Believe?" *Judaism 101*. Web. 20 Dec. 2011. <http://www.jewfaq.org/beliefs.htm>.