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Gender and Sexuality in Nepal: The Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minorities in a Rapidly Changing Social Climate

Sophia Greene

SIT Study Abroad, sgreene13@yahoo.com

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Gender and Sexuality in Nepal:
The Experiences of Sexual and Gender
Minorities in a Rapidly Changing Social Climate

Greene, Sophia

Academic Director: Onians, Isabelle

Project Advisor: Coyle, Danny

Carnegie Mellon University

Psychology

Kathmandu, Nepal

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality in current day Nepal is at the crux of a societal revolution, as the deeply ingrained patriarchal society framed against the emergence of new ideas results in a shifting social climate in which old and new clash. As modernization and economic development permeate Nepal, they bring with them individualistic ideals which gradually infiltrate society, altering long held social attitudes toward marriage, gender, and sexuality. However, despite societal change and even changing legislation for the rights of women and members of the LGBTI community, both of these minorities still face overwhelming discrimination and prejudice in Nepali society. Sexual and gender minorities in particular face a deeply rooted stigma and obstacles in virtually every arena of their lives. This study explores the life experiences of sexual and gender minorities, with the aim of understanding their daily struggles as well as investigating how society has changed in recent years in regards to social attitudes toward gender and sexuality. The study was conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, primary methodology being interview, with the hopes of gaining a clearer look into the lives of the LGBTI community and reaching an understanding of Nepal's changing social climate.

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Thank you to those Nepalis in the LGBTI community who shared their stories with me, despite their personal and intense nature. Thank you to Patrick for making the comment in the first few weeks of the trip which sparked my interest in gender and sexuality in Nepal, as well as for your kind nature and support. Thank you to Isabelle for always challenging us and believing in us, and in the end, for your compassion and understanding when the earthquake hit. Thank you to Rinzi for your (terrible) jokes and magic tricks in Chung-Chung and for never ceasing to make us laugh. Thank you to Tenchoe and Phurwa for your support and advice. Thank you to all other program staff and coordinators for facilitating an experience which has changed my life forever and in ways I cannot even understand yet; I cannot even articulate how grateful I am. Thank you to Danny Coyle for your incredible help and input during my ISP; although I left a great deal unfinished, everything I did accomplish would not have been possible without your support and advice. Thank you for inspiring me and for giving me so much to think about; I hope I can return to Nepal one day to finish what I have started.

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I. Introduction

Nepal is a country with a rapidly changing social and political landscape, as modern ideas infiltrate an age-old traditional lifestyle which has structured society for centuries. Some of the most controversial of these ideas are those which challenge social norms, specifically gender roles and traditional family structure. An examination into the lives of women as well as sexual and gender minorities demonstrate the incredible hardships they must overcome due to discrimination and stigma. Women face challenges of harassment for working, expectation of marriage, and the rigid gender roles and behaviors which they are expected to conform to. Meanwhile, sexual and gender minorities struggle against intense social stigma, the core of which is rooted in their rejection of gender norms of a heterosexual, patriarchal society. The experiences of these minorities overlap in many ways, as both must fight for equality and rights in a country deeply set in its ways. However, as globalization brings individualistic ideals and examples of other lifestyles, social attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities as well as women are gradually changing. All in all, this project serves to explore life experiences of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal and to examine the relationship between changing legislature and changing lives.

II. Women, Patriarchy, and Inequality

Because the lives of LGBTI women in Nepal are defined by two identities- that of being a woman and that of being a part of the LGBTI community, it is impossible to discuss women's experiences of homosexuality without first understanding the effect the patriarchal society has on women. Nepali society systematically controls all areas of women's lives, from hindering women's abilities to work, enforcing societal expectations of marriage, and the policing of women's sexuality. Social expectations of traditional society create a reality in which "social roles for women emphasize their obligations but fail to establish or uphold their rights, or establish gender equality or reciprocity", creating a cycle of inequality that is difficult to escape.¹ This cycle is most apparent in the workplace, where women experience insurmountable discrimination and harassment on a regular basis. Simply by working, women can be judged by their families, communities, and by people in the workplace. Much of this is because "social value systems surrounding a families' and a woman's honor (*ijjat*) constrain women's mobility, so women who work and travel away from their houses are scrutinized".² A study done on women's insecurities in the workplace found that 53.8 percent of women employees report personal experiences of sexual harassment, causing many women to quit their jobs and suffer family problems. In addition to experiencing discrimination in the workplace, many women

¹ Forum for Women, Law, and Development, Study Report Publication No. 138. (August 2007) 21, 21

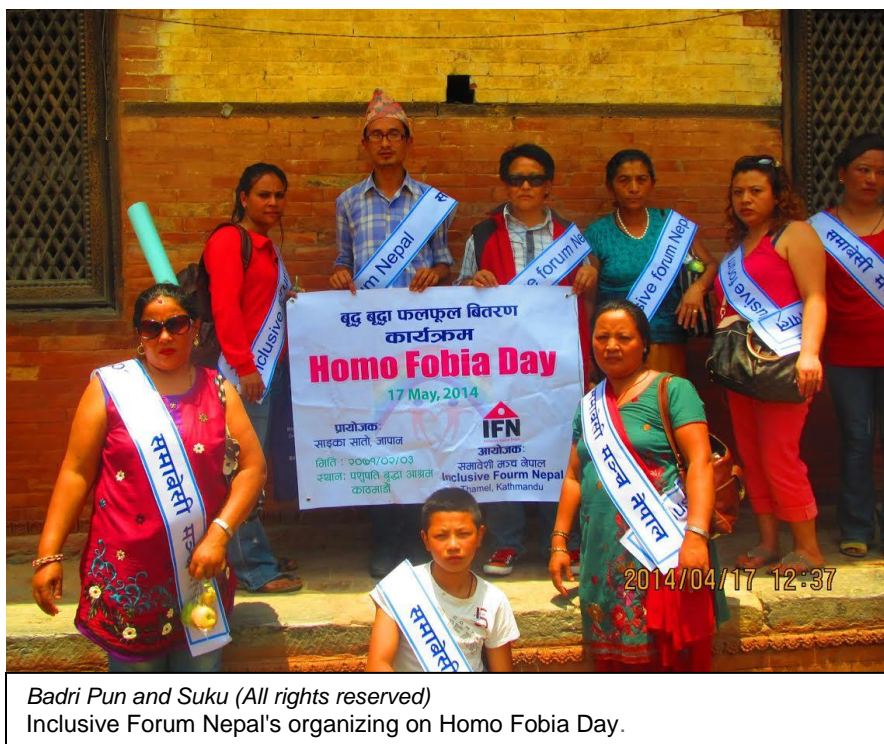
² Coyle, Danny. Women's Insecurities and the Workplace in Nepal. (February 2014) 7, 13, 7

report problems of harassment when taking public transport, mostly consisting of inappropriate touching by men on crowded buses.² All in all, “working women face different types of insecurity at home, on the way to and from work, and at the workplace – from mistrust and pressure by family and the community to sexual harassment and threats at work”, making it difficult for women to work at all, in turn reinforcing women’s financial dependence on men.² Women’s lack of independence is additionally kept in place by the policing of their sexuality and controlling of mobility. Patriarchy in Nepal demands that women’s sexual behavior be tightly controlled, revolving around the idea that a woman’s sexuality is inferior to that of a man’s. The key distinction made by Liechty explains that “cultural values hold that sexual freedom, desire, and pleasure are necessary and natural for men and unnatural for women”.¹ This distinction between men and women’s sexuality is what distinguishes women’s sexuality as a matter of character and moral essence. Because women’s sexuality is a personal attribute, women must follow behavioral expectations in order to protect their purity and their honor. These include dressing and acting in a modest fashion, deferring to men and to their families’ authority, following cultural codes of restricted mobility, and getting married at an appropriate age to a spouse chosen by the woman’s family. Women who break any of these norms face social isolation and other more dire consequences. Girls approaching a marriageable age face the conflict that “the path that protect[s] family honor would lead to an arranged marriage and departure to an unknown place, whereas flirtation, elopement, and disgrace would give them some control over their own destinies, though at the cost of estrangement from their parents”.³ The reality that a woman must risk social disgrace in exchange for a degree of agency in her future exemplifies the lack of freedom women face in Nepali society. It is clear that women encounter obstacles in virtually every arena of their lives, in both public and private settings, and that this adversity is rooted in age-old patriarchal values which pervade Nepali society, manifesting themselves in the discrimination of working women, the suppression of women’s sexuality, and the inescapable expectation of marriage.

III. Discrimination faced by the LGBTI Community

The deeply rooted patriarchal and traditional society not only makes women’s lives difficult, but it also results in incredible challenges for sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. Individuals in these groups experience hardship from all sides, from harsh social repercussions to the serious risk of violence in retaliation against their rejection of social norms. In order to fully grasp the framework for this mistreatment, “it is necessary to understand Nepal’s social context wherein sexual and gender minorities are often perceived as a social *vikriti*- a state of deterioration that can connote disease, degeneracy, deformation and malformation”, a perception which pervades

³ Ouattara et. Al. *Forced marriage, forced sex: The Perils of Childhood for girls*. Gender & Development, 6:3, 27-33. (1998) 10



Badri Pun and Suku (All rights reserved)
Inclusive Forum Nepal's organizing on Homo Fobia Day.

Nepali society and creates a powerful stigma against those who identify as sexual and gender minorities.⁴ Members of the LGBTI community in Nepal have been marginalized and discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity for most of the country's history. Much of the

stigma against this community is rooted in a lack of understanding which stems from traditional ideas about gender roles and sexuality. In Nepali society, there tend to be “very strong views on biological sex as natural and other identity categories or expressions as unnatural”, an orthodox judgement which causes a “strong tendency to reject non normative (or non-binary) gender roles”, manifesting itself in intense discrimination against these minorities.⁵ This occurs in many forms, ranging from manageable (albeit very unpleasant) social exclusion to extreme human rights violations. Often, discrimination begins at a young age. Many LGBTI children are unable to complete their studies, due to “threats, bullying and neglect from fellow students and teacher alike”, and some even engage in self harm as a response to “frustration, anger, and helplessness due to stigma, scolding, teasing and other social pressures”.⁵ These same individuals are frequently only beginning a lifetime of adversity as their attempts at employment are met with prejudice that begins directly at the job recruitment process. Employment discrimination against those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity is rampant, and many lose their jobs once they expose their true identities.⁶ Some are indirectly forced into sex work because they find themselves unable to attain any other jobs, moreover this is perhaps the only profession in which they are able to be open about their sexuality or gender identity. Boyce explains that “when sexual and gender minority people are presented with a choice between pursuing emotional or psychological fulfilment to the detriment of their economic wellbeing, they engage

⁴ Boyce, Paul and Coyle, Danny. *Development, Discourse and Law: Transgender and Same-sex Sexualities in Nepal. Sexuality, Poverty, and Law.* (July 2013) 13, 21, 9, 19, 8, 29

⁵ Sharma, Mahesh. Building the Evidence Base for Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) Children in Nepal; *Save the Children.* (May 2012) 36, 5, 5, 20

⁶ Sunar, Dhan Bahadur. *Segregates LGBTI from the Social Fabric? A sociological study of the Nepalese sexual and Gender Minorities Against the Normative Social Life.* Research Report (2012) 18

in a difficult balancing act, where either option exposes them to a range of problems”.⁴ Members of this minority are often forced to choose between being open about who they are and being accepted in society, a predicament in which either option connotes heavy sacrifice. However, discrimination can take a much more severe form, due to the fact that “since even many educated Nepalis believe that homosexuality is a psychological condition and a curable disease, lesbians are sometimes subjected to “corrective rape”; additionally, “men who feel threatened by woman identifying as males are often rape perpetrators, punishing these women who dare to break out of oppressive gender binaries”.⁷ Members of sexual minorities are disproportionately at risk of violence and forms of ill treatment simply because they fail to conform to socially constructed gender expectations. Shockingly, violence often comes from police forces, as many sexual and gender minorities report verbal abuse, indiscriminate body searches, and severe beatings at the hands of police, as well as harassment and arbitrary detainment on grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity .⁸ In a court appeal for greater protection of the LGBTI community, a document asserted that “neither the existence of national laws, nor the prevalence of custom can ever justify the abuse, attacks, torture and indeed killing that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons are subjected to because of who they are or are perceived to be”.⁹ An openly gay man with whom I spoke remarks on the experience of being homosexual in Nepal. He chronicles his daily struggles of harassment, consisting of discriminatory comments from family, neighbors, friends and strangers asking him “Why don’t you marry?” and cruelly teasing “You are sexless, can I see your dick? You have or not? You are so like a eunuch!” He tells of how his friends ostracized him once he revealed his sexuality, telling him “We can’t have you as a friend because then our children will know that you are gay”, and of his inability to get a job due to his unmistakably gay presentation. After narrating the social isolation from friends, lack of acceptance from his community, and ongoing harassment, he encapsulates his experiences with the powerful statement “We are nonexistent, so invisible. Our lives are so invisible. I am invisible; no one wants to know my struggle”.¹⁰ All in all, members of the LGBTI community face a myriad of obstacles, from discrimination in the form of mistreatment by security forces, sexual assault, harassment, physical violence, physical and psychological threats to emotional trauma such as exclusion from their families and from society .¹¹

⁷ Desouza, Nicola. *Open Global Rights*. Focusing on Women and Transgenders in LGBT Rights. (October 2014) 1, 1

⁸ Blue Diamond Society and Heartland Alliance. The Violations of the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Persons in Nepal. *Heartland Alliance Global Initiative for Sexuality and Human Rights*. (June 2013) 9, 60

⁹ Decision of the Supreme Court on the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex (LGBTI) People. *NJA Law Journal*. (2007) 20

¹⁰ Personal Interview, Kishor.

¹¹ Report to the Regional National Human Rights Institutions Project on Inclusion, the Right to Health and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. National Human Rights Commission of Nepal. (October 2012) 3

IV. Emotional Repercussions

Daily prejudice faced by members of the LGBTI community leads to serious emotional and psychological repercussions. The confusion and pain of leading a split life or dual existence combined with experiences of harassment and discrimination merge together to create an immense burden.¹² A

study done on lesbians showed that “social exclusion and discrimination may bring many psychological disorders for lesbians”, documenting “anger, depression, sleeplessness, nightmares, flashbacks, sleeping disorders and uncontrollable

crying”.¹² Indeed, rates of depression and suicide are significantly

higher among lesbians and other members of the LGBTI community. One gay man recounts that he has now lost 10 of his gay friends to suicide, a tragic and unfathomable statistic.¹⁰ The social rejection and harassment is difficult to overcome for many, as a study on lesbian experience reported that about a third of lesbian women face violence when they disclose their sexual orientation, from family members, friends, and neighbors.¹³ A lesbian woman telling the story of dating her teacher in secret (although her teacher is married to a man and has a child), wonders sadly “am I doing bad??? To her and her families?”, unable to shake her feelings of guilt and internal conflict caused by dating a married woman as well as by engaging in a relationship that is considered wrong by her society.¹⁴ Before facing a harsh and unwelcoming world in which discrimination can be expected, the struggle begins years earlier in the internal turmoil of



Badri Pun and Suku (All rights reserved)
Badri with Anjali Lama (Nepal's 1st transgender model) and friends celebrating the Teej festival at the Inclusive Forum Nepal office.

¹² Pathak et. Al. Gender Identity: Challenges to Accessing Social and Health Care Services for Lesbians in Nepal Global Journal of Health Science Vol. 2, No. 2. (October 2010) 2, 6, 3

¹³ CREA. *Count Me In: Research Report. Violence Against Disabled, Lesbian, and Sex-working Women in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal.* 102

¹⁴ Personal Interview, Sumintra.

confusion and helplessness of LGBTI children. This especially applies to Nepalis who grow up in rural areas, in places where possibly no one has heard of homosexuality, or if they have, it is a subject that is not openly discussed. Kishor explains his struggle as a boy growing up in a village. He describes how, starting at the age of five, he began to look at boys differently. He tried to suppress his feelings throughout his childhood and adolescence, asking “Why me?”, and lamented “there’s no internet, there’s no education, there’s no information centers, it was so difficult to understand”.¹⁰ He remained in a state of depression for much of his young life, and even thought about committing suicide many times, until one day he found a book in a bookstore called *Men in Love*, a discovery which changed his life forever. He now describes himself as the most openly gay man in Nepal, and asserts that after many years he accepted his sexuality as natural and not wrong, and tells of his realization that “sexuality- you cannot make. You are what you are”. He is now recovering from a recent period of depression and describes his feelings of empowerment. He proclaims “I am so fearless, because I felt that I have suppressed my feeling for so long, I went through so much trauma with this society. I thought *I don’t give a damn, this is my life*. Even if I die, I speak up the truth”.¹⁰ As incredibly difficult as Kishor’s life has been thus far, his closing statement speaks to immense strength and resilience, which I have observed in every member of the LGBTI community with whom I spoke.

V. *Societal Expectations of Marriage*

As previously illustrated, the powerful system of patriarchy that pervades Nepali society restricts women’s freedom and happiness to an overwhelming degree, while the traditional family structure and rigid gender norms are the greatest causes of stigma against members of the LGBTI community in Nepal. But where is the intersection between these two minorities? It is generally found in the social expectation of marriage which is imposed from patriarchal values onto members of the LGBTI community, causing immense conflict and distress, especially during adolescence. The considerable tension that arises from these individuals’ aversion of traditional marriage is a catalyst for the deterioration of family relationships, and often even causes LGBTI children to run away from home.⁵ It is important to understand that “marriage is one of the strongest social constructs; almost all members of society see it as a destiny. The expectation of marriage is not only a matter of concern of the children, but also a source of worry to many families, particularly for those who already know that their children have a sexual orientation or gender identity that is non-heterosexual or non-binary”.²⁰ Many LGBTI children cite the expectation of marriage as the single reason for running away from home, a consequence that is both sad and dangerous, as it puts these children at a high risk of exploitation and trafficking. It is incredibly unfortunate that these individuals who are most in need of family support are unable to benefit from it, as they are distanced from their families because of their refusal to marry. A study done on lesbians found that most stated that “they rarely go to their

(parents') home for fear of being forced to get married, which often results in a dispute among family members. They also revealed that when the parents discover their daughter to be a lesbian, they force her to get married to a man and live in a heterosexual relationship".¹² Women who are forced into heterosexual marriages through intense familial pressure face a lifetime of suppressed identity and internal turmoil.⁷ One gay man with whom I spoke summed up the phenomenon of marriage pressure with the term 'conditional acceptance'. This refers to the idea that a family can accept their child as gay *if* they will still consent to getting married and following a traditional lifestyle.¹⁵ In this respect, it is apparent that the majority of discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities' stems from their rejection of traditional gender roles, rather than simply homophobic ideas (although these are present to a certain degree). In assessing the life experiences of LGBTI women in Nepal, it is shown that in most cases, the discrimination they suffer "derive[s] from their 'failure' to conform to heteronormative and patriarchal expectations regarding women in Nepali society, not necessarily a result of identifying as lesbian women *per se*"; in fact, given the low levels of awareness regarding same-sex sexualities, "there is significant overlap between the discrimination and harassment female-bodied sexual and gender minorities and women in general face since other people are not necessarily likely to make the distinction between the two- only that gender roles and sexual norms have been transgressed".¹⁶ All in all, it is apparent that Nepal's traditional and strongly patriarchal society generates difficulty for all individuals who do not fall into prescribed norms of behavior and lifestyle.

VI. *Changing Legislature vs. Changing Lives*

Despite intense discrimination against sexual and gender minorities, Nepal has a surprisingly progressive legal standpoint in respect to the rights of these minorities. Legislative changes in recent years include the 2007 Supreme Court decision in the case of Pant vs. Nepal, which guaranteed 'non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity', the legal establishment of a third gender category and agreement to provide gender variant people full recognition as citizens on official documentation, and formation of a committee to address the issue of instating same-sex marriages.¹⁶ A key point of interest in the legal discourse used during this case is the assertion of sexual and gender minorities as "natural"; and therefore deserving of rights and citizenship. The legal term used by the Supreme Court to characterize sexual and gender minorities, *prakriti*, is "often understood as a natural state of being that is normatively correct", suggesting "connections between sexual normativity and a 'state of natural being'".¹⁶ The proclamation of these minorities as natural is a rejection of their characterization

¹⁵ Personal Interview, Prakash.

¹⁶ Boyce, Paul and Coyle, Danny. *Sexuality, Poverty and Law*. Same-sex Sexualities, Gender Variance, Economy and Livelihood in Nepal: Exclusions, Subjectivity and Development. (February 2015) 28, 27, 16, 13, 8

as ‘unnatural’ by society and thereby not deserving the same equality as ‘natural’ persons, a commonly held distinction the Supreme Court case strove to negate. The significant legal progress regarding the equal rights movement for the LGBTI community has occurred in the context of a rapidly shifting social climate. The end of the Civil War and the consequent signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 established aspirations to “reconfigure the contract between people, law and policy”, which have “created spaces within which ‘new’ discourses of sexuality and rights have emerged”, allowing sexual and gender minorities to lobby for rights and visibility.¹⁶ These processes have followed the existence of previous political reform and social change that have taken place over the course of Nepali history. The ending of the absolute monarchy in 1990 was the first catalyst for opening up social spaces and creating opportunities to discuss issues of sexuality, gender identity and ethnicity that had previously been suppressed. Although impressive legal reform has occurred, this is somewhat removed from society and therefore does not necessarily cause discernible change in the lives of these minorities. As explained by Waldman and Overs, “promoting the rule of law and appropriate legal structures is not, in itself, sufficient to guarantee that people will not be marginalized or discriminated against because of their sexuality”.¹⁷ As discussed previously, although Nepal does not have high levels of overt homophobia, there is incredible social pressure to follow a traditional, heterosexual lifestyle. In fact, “what makes Nepal an interesting case study is the many ways in which sexual and gender minority peoples have been able to advance a progressive legislative agenda and reform the state’s gender and sexual policies despite the prevailing conservative social environment regarding attitudes toward sexuality and gender ‘difference’”.⁴ Social attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities remain complex, and many of these individuals are far more marginalized than current legislation might suggest. A prime example of the lack of discernible change despite legislation is the treatment of the third gender in Nepal. Although the 2007 Supreme Court case promised the assignment of third gender citizenship to all who felt that they fit this category, only a few individuals have been able to obtain these certificates. Without these citizenship certificates, third gender individuals are not recognized as persons before the law and consequently lack the tools necessary to fully participate in public life in Nepal. Individuals are “blocked from government jobs and pensions, driver’s licenses and passports, as well as government-run programmes like secondary school exams and health services. Bank accounts, land inheritance, and the right to vote are also out of reach”.⁸ Here it is clear that basic human rights have been violated; as the Yogyakarta Principles define legal definition before the law based on one’s self-defined identity as a fundamental right.¹⁷ As eloquently explained by Boyce and Coyle, “any understanding of Nepal as a progressive legal example of same-sex sexuality and transgender activism must also consider the social realities, prevailing prejudices

¹⁷ Waldman, Linda and Overs, Cheryl. Evidence Report No. 49 *Sexuality, Poverty, and Law*. Sexuality and the Law: Case Studies from Cambodia, Egypt, Nepal and South Africa (January 2014) 18, 13

and the persistent of harassment and violence toward sexual and gender minority persons”.⁴ It is clear that although changing legislature is a step in the right direction, social attitudes toward sexuality and gender must undergo much more dramatic change before these minorities can feel that they have reached equality in Nepali society.

VII. Conclusion: the effect of globalization on sexuality and gender

All in all, gender and sexuality are highly complex issues in Nepali society, especially in today’s social climate, as traditional cultural values conflict with the influx of new ideas due to development and modernization. Boyce and Coyle capture the current societal shift in the statement that “contemporary social changes are characterized by the waning of pre-capitalist political-economic forms, the growth of a market economy, democratization and associated new forms and freedoms for individualistic self-expression”.⁴ Growing ideas of individualism have affected society in a multitude of ways, not least of which being social norms regarding gender, sexuality, and marriage. As previously discussed, women experience discrimination in many spheres of their lives, from harassment for working and the inescapable expectations of marriage to a general lack of freedom. However, increased levels of literacy for women and societal exposure to modern ideas regarding lifestyle and marriage practices are gradually changing cultural values and creating opportunities for greater social power and agency for women. These changes are exemplified in a variety of ways. A historical example of gender inequality between women and men has always been mobility; the distinction between men’s ability to move about freely as compared to women’s oppressive behavioral codes which constrain women’s freedom of movement. However, due to societal change, Brunson notes an increase in women’s autonomy as exemplified by the prevalence of women owning and riding scooters, as “scooters afford independence from male escorts, an escape from the informal policing that happens at home or in one’s own community”; indeed, scooters have become “a symbol of freedom and mobility” for women”.¹⁸ Just as gender expectations regarding mobility have changed, so have ideas regarding sexuality and marriage practices. Exposure to modernization and ‘western’ ideals of marriage causes greater emphasis to be placed on obtaining a woman’s consent to marriage, as “traditional ways of regulating and controlling sexuality decline”, shifts which are most clearly shown by “a rapid collapse in the last 30 years of arranged marriages in favour of marriages entered into through the free choice of the couple concerned”.¹⁹ As women become empowered through higher levels of education and greater knowledge about the world, they gain agency over their futures, giving them more of a choice in both who they marry as well as when. These changes are not isolated, as “shifting norms in heterosexuality and traditional gender roles in Nepal will

¹⁸ Brunson, Jan. ‘Scooty Girls’: Mobility and Intimacy at the Margins of Kathmandu, *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* (2013). 14

¹⁹ Altman, Dennis. *Sexuality and globalisation*, Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity. (2004) 3

increasingly play a role in facilitating the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities”.⁴ As new possibilities for family life and changing marriage expectations emerge, new social and cultural possibilities for same-sex sexual lives, rights and self-identity have been seeded in society. The women’s rights movement served as a catalyst for the LGBTI rights movement, as society’s shifting values created space for both discourses. Globalization and socioeconomic changes “have been associated with the emergence of queer social spaces and ‘LGBT’ identities’ in Nepal particularly because such ways of experiencing the world in terms of sexual self-identity are often correlated to new forms of individualism that emerge through economic transitions and consumerism”.¹⁶ The growth of individualistic values leads individuals to assert their rights and to fight for more agency over their futures.

Methodology

My primary methodology for this research was interview, seeing as my intended research design was a narrative-based, biography driven project based on individuals' life experiences. Because the community I needed to infiltrate is somewhat of an underground community, I found it initially very difficult to find contacts. I began by contacting current LGBTI rights organizations in Nepal, such as CORE, Mitini Nepal, Nepal Inclusive Forum, etc. and asking if it would be possible to set up interviews with members of these organizations who are a part of the LGBTI community (or are knowledgeable about said subset). Other strategies included joining the Nepal Lesbian's Facebook Group and going to commonly known 'gay' places in the hopes of finding subjects to interview. My advisor, Danny Coyle, was extremely helpful in advising me on how to find contacts, as well as personally putting me in touch with a well-connected member of the LGBTI community who was then able to connect me with more research subjects. All in all, finding contacts to interview was by far the most difficult part of this project. Of course, had my research not been abruptly halted due to the earthquake, I believe I would have been able to complete my project with an acceptable amount of field research and interviews.

Danny Coyle graduated from Michigan State University with a BA in International Relations in 2008 and shortly thereafter first went to Nepal on a Fulbright Grant to research the politics of cultural heritage conservation. Since then, he has worked on several research projects related to community security and gender. In 2013, Danny began working on a research project exploring the legal context of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. He currently lives in Nepal and is planning to enroll in a PhD program to continue his research and work.²⁰

Appendices

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

LGBTI: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex

Appendix II: Interviews

1. Kishor; gay man; April 20, 2015, 3 pm*
2. Prakash; gay man; April 22, 2015, 3:30 pm*
3. Sumintra; lesbian; May 12, 2015, 10 am*

*Names have been changed

²⁰ Frisbee, Chad et al. *Pride Climbing Higher: Stories by LGBT People from Nepal*. *Creative Nepal*. Spring 2014

Post Script: Reflections on a life changed by Nepal and by an earthquake

When I decided to study abroad in Nepal this spring, I knew I was in for an experience. I'd spent months deciding which country I wanted to explore. One by one, I crossed Thailand, Indonesia, Morocco off of the list...until I was left with a place I knew absolutely nothing about- Nepal. I told myself I'd do research on Nepal before I departed, that I would watch documentaries about its culture and be prepared in some way, but life happens, as it tends to do, and before I knew it, it was February 1st and I was getting on a plane. Scared, excited, but ready to be thrown into a new reality which would hopefully cause me to question what I knew about the world. The first weeks in this new universe went by slowly, as each day was filled with revelatory experiences and wonderment, self-exploration and acceptance of a new way of life. It is funny how quickly a place can become home. Soon, I felt well-accustomed to a lack of toilet paper, showering only about once a week, and the shortage of electricity (I started to think of load shedding as 'power onages', rather than power outages, since it felt like more of a novelty when the power was on rather than off). Little by little, I fell in love with the land of Nepal and its people, the bright colors of kurtas and chupas, occasional monkeys in the road, dusty, crowded streets, comical but sweet interactions with my host family who knew little English, and the friendliness and genuinity of every person I met. During my ISP, I delighted in becoming best friends with every taxi driver and finding it impossible to work in cafes because friendly Nepalis in Thamel would inevitably sit beside me and ask me about my life. I felt so passionately about my research topic on gender and sexuality in Nepal, a subject which has meaning to me personally but also one which would allow me to get to know Nepalis and talk to people about their lives. Something about giving a voice to those who are voiceless sounded like an incredible experience. Halfway through my ISP, I was progressing on my research slowly but surely, and was in such a state of happiness it was hard to imagine I would be leaving Nepal in a few weeks. Life in Nepal was going on as usual until the morning of Saturday, April 25. My friends and I were eating a late breakfast at Electric Pagoda, one of our favorite restaurants in Thamel, when the earth below us began to move violently, a moment which would shake Nepal to its core. The days that followed seemed out of a story that belonged to someone else. My friends and I, along with virtually every person in Kathmandu, spent the next minutes, hours, and days in a constant state of fear. Sleeping outside in parks with hundreds of locals, searching for food and water, staying away from buildings which could topple due to the slightest aftershock. It was the closest thing to what I would imagine a zombie apocalypse to feel like. The once vibrant and crowded Thamel had turned into a ghost town overnight. The 7.8 magnitude earthquake of April 25, 2015 had not only changed the course of history, but it had changed my life. I cannot comprehend how lucky I was to be sitting in a structurally sound outdoor café, rather than in one of the myriad of buildings that collapsed on the people inside. The collapse of the entire city had sent me into immense physical discomfort and fear for my life, but the emotional trauma of having to leave

Nepal was almost more shocking to me than the earthquake itself. Torn from the country I had so grown to love, unable to complete my research (I had 6 interviews scheduled for the week after the quake), and unable to say goodbye to my friends, my host family, and Nepal itself, I felt thrown into an emotional earthquake of sorts. Coming home to my comfortable life in the United States when all of Nepal was in turmoil seemed like the greatest betrayal I could imagine. However, as Isabelle eloquently pointed out, as horrific as the earthquake has been, it forever bonded me to Nepal. The abrupt departure leaves a lingering discomfort at the lack of closure, but I will be back. Thank you, Nepal, for changing my life and teaching me more in 3 months than I think I've learned in a lifetime. I can't wait to see you again.

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