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EDUC 6380  
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June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Week 4 – Discussion: Minority Viewpoints

**What do you see as the strongest forces (e.g. religion, law, cultural norms, public opinion) that determine what is (or is not) taught in schools or generally held to be right and wrong in our society? Do you think minority views are adequately represented in these determinations? Why or why not?**

While I think there is some overlap regarding what we teach in schools, and what society deems as right or wrong, I do not believe these are the exact same. Mainly because right now, we live in a turbulent period, where many long-held values have been changing or challenged in just a few short decades. For hundreds of years, religion was something that dictated many peoples' lives. Research has shown however that over the last few years, this is drastically changing, especially in the U.S. (Cox & Jones, 2017). In 1976 for example, white Christians accounted for 81% of all Americans; today that number is ~43%, having dropped by about half (par. 2, 2017). In just 7 years (from 2007-2014), the growth of those that are not affiliated with any religion grew from 16% of all American adults to 23%, and this group increasingly doubts the existence of any god (Lipka, par. 5, 2015). These differences also divide further when you consider different generations, with younger adults (ages 18-29) at a whopping 38% unaffiliated to any religion, whereas their parents' generation (ages 50-64) sit at just 18% unaffiliated (Cox & Jones, par. 18, 2017).

America is becoming much more diverse, and very quickly. The youngest and most religious Americans are non-Christians, such as Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists (par. 11, 2017). All these changes certainly affect culture, and eventually schools, though traditionally, schools are quite resistant to such changes. Even so, despite this lag time, I have seen changes in my own school coming quickly. While changing demographics due to immigration is a factor in all of this, one that I think is even more important is **public opinion**. Regarding LGBTQ+ rights for example, acceptance has changed rapidly since I began entering the educational field at the university, about 10 years ago. Gay marriage had only been democratically voted on by 11 states by the time of the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Case (2015) that ruled that gay marriage was a constitutionally protected right, and yet today, just 4 years later, 83% of Americans polled now believe that gay marriage should be legal. In 1996, this same question only garnered 27% support (Salam, par. 3, 2019). I believe a large part of this social change is driven by the technological interconnectivity that the internet, smartphones, and social media have brought about, which are truly revolutionary.

So, with all these changes sweeping across American society, are these views represented in society today? Undoubtedly, but I think schools are just a bit behind, though they are rapidly catching up. This is quite remarkable, especially when we consider LGBTQ+ rights specifically, because they make up a mere 4.5% of the overall American population, and yet are also represented by about twice that same amount of regular actors on television in most recent shows ("Where we are", p. 6, 2019), which is not including minor characters, roles, or references. Though things aren't perfect, I would say that we are making significant progress towards becoming a more inclusive and accepting country overall.

## Resources:

- Cox, D., & Jones, R. P. (2017, September 6). *America's Changing Religious Identity* (Rep. No. 1). Retrieved June 20, 2019, from Public Religion Research Institute website: <https://www.prii.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/>
- Lipka, M. (2015, November 3). 5 key findings about religiosity in the U.S. – and how it's changing. Retrieved June 20, 2019, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/03/5-key-findings-about-religiosity-in-the-u-s-and-how-its-changing/>
- Salam, M. (2019, June 18). Americans' Shifting Attitude on Gay Rights. *The New York Times*. Retrieved June 20, 2019, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/18/us/americans-lgbt-opinions.html>
- Where We Are on TV [Annual Report] (Rep. No. 23). (2019). Retrieved June 20, 2019, from Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation website: [https://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT\\_GLAAD\\_2018-2019.pdf](https://glaad.org/files/WWAT/WWAT_GLAAD_2018-2019.pdf)