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## Cultural Dichotomies: Navigating the Complexities of Sexual Norms in Pakistan and United States of America

**Adnan Jamshaid**

Scholar PhD English Linguistics

Northern University Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

[tagweemadnan@gmail.com](mailto:tagweemadnan@gmail.com)

**Tariq Mehmood Khalid**

Scholar PhD English Linguistics

Northern University Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

[tarigmkhalid@gmail.com](mailto:tarigmkhalid@gmail.com)

**Iftikhar Ali**

Scholar PhD English Linguistics

Northern University Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

[ielts8hazro@gmail.com](mailto:ielts8hazro@gmail.com)

**Syeda Urooj Farheen**

Scholar PhD English Linguistics

Northern University Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

[syedauroojfarheen46@gmail.com](mailto:syedauroojfarheen46@gmail.com)

**Muhammad Saqib**

Scholar PhD English Linguistics

Assistant Professor, Govt. Graduate College Attock

[sakikhhan417@gmail.com](mailto:sakikhhan417@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Judith Butler believes in the social construction of masculine and feminine roles instead of their biological fixation. According to Zora Voyce the sexual pleasure happens within instead of inside of partner's genitals. To further enlighten the scholastic strata this research aims to study complexity of interplay among socio-political, religious, ideological and cultural contexts with specific consideration to Pakistan and the United States of America (USA). The study has utilized a comparative approach which examines the discussion of topics related to sexuality for their policing and celebration within the respective countries. The patriarchal values and Islamic traditions are deep rooted in Pakistan that considers the subject of sexuality as a taboo as the societal expectations constrain the discussion of basic sex education and LGBTQ+ issues for religious interpretations and legal restrictions. Burning issues like sexual repression, gender-based violence and honor killings are exacerbated due to limited media representation and formal sex education. On the contrary, USA's paradigm is liberal taking sexuality as a facet of freedom and personal identity supported by inclusive laws, media normalization, educational reforms and societal support. Discourse encourages and consent is available for sexual minorities for sexual health and gender identity. Openness faces contradiction as well as there exist conservative voices within the American society who resist inclusive reforms and advocate abstinence-only education. The approach of this research is multidisciplinary which draws from*

*gender studies, sociology, religious studies and psychology. The research aims to highlight shaping of sexual ideologies through cultural values; assessment of sexual discourse dependence on the law and religion; and proposing of solutions for inclusive, cultural and ethically sensitive sex education. In a nutshell, the research will bridge literature gaps for culture, mutual understanding, enhanced reason for educational reforms and global sexual equity.*

**Keywords:** *Dichotomies, Sex Education, Gender Identity and Sexual Ideologies.*

## **Introduction**

Sexuality is a universal aspect of human experience. Regardless of superficial appearances or attitudes, individuals from all walks of life grapple with their sexual desires and how to express them. This study aims to highlight the salient cultural factors contributing to deal sexuality and to offer recommendations for cultural sensitivity as well for an ethically sound sexual education and awareness in bridging the extensive cultural division between Pakistan and America.

Pakistan and America are two countries with unique cultural identities shaped by their distinct histories, values, beliefs and their lifestyles. As far as the major cultural differences of both the countries are concerned, religion stands tall. Pakistan is an Islamic republic with approximately Ninety-Six percent of the population identified as Muslims (Ahmad, 2023) whereas America is a broader diversity state with Christianity being 66%, the largest population (Corrigan, 2018).

The family structure in Pakistan is a collectivist culture with strong family ties and respect for elders where familial intuitions are highly prioritized over individuals' desires and pursuits (Afzal, Ahmad & Hasan, 2024). In America, there is an individualistic culture with emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy. The concept of familial ties is kept aside as per the cultural stipulation. In America culture, every individual is liberal to live as per her/his own choices and desires (Zabeau, 2011).

Similarly, there is a colossal difference between Pakistan and America in term of social etiquettes. Pakistani culture is rich with emphasis on modesty and respect for traditions. The conservative society of Pakistan is closely tied with its rites and customs (Haleem, 2013). Social etiquettes typically pinpoints the caring of others and especially the elders of the society. On the other hand, America's liberal society emphasizes on personal expression and individuality (Shaw, 2015). The social etiquettes of America is almost in tussle with the social etiquettes of Pakistan. However, both the countries are justified in their own social etiquettes.

The education cultures of Pakistan and America are incomparable. Pakistan has an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics whereas America is in the pursuit of promoting critical thinking, creativity and globalization. Consequently, there is a gigantic gap between the educational cultures of both the countries (Akhtar, 2007).

The preceding discussion underscores the vast cultural disparities between Pakistan and America, spanning religion, family structures, social etiquette, education, and sexuality. This project endeavors to delve into the distinct approaches to sexuality in both cultures, with the primary objective of pinpointing areas for improvement and proposing solutions to combat the mistreatment of sexuality. By navigating these cultural differences, this study aims to contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of human sexuality in both Pakistani and American contexts.

## **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

- investigate shaping of sexual norms of both the countries in consideration to religious, socio-cultural, and political factors.

- compare sexuality in both countries for public attitudes, media representations, and educational practices.
- explore feasible strategies to implement inclusive cultural sensitive sex education programs in conservative society of Pakistan.

### Research Questions

The research questions are:

- How do sexual norms and behaviors are influenced by the religious and cultural and religious values in both countries?
- What is the differentiation between the approach of both for sexual discourse, LGBTQ+ rights, and sexual education?
- What are culturally sensitive tools that can bridge need for inclusive sexual health and conservative sexual ideologies for societal education?

### Research Methodology

The design of the research is qualitative which has employed comparative academic content analysis that includes secondary sources such as academic literature, cultural texts, legal documents, educational policies and media narratives from both countries – Pakistan and USA. The interpretive paradigm of the research is hermeneutic in nature which helps in understanding the minute and nuanced meanings of sensitive topics such as sexuality within their societal and cultural frameworks. The sources of data collection include reports by the NGOs and government, peer-reviewed journals, educational practices and media portrayals. Study has performed narrative and thematic analysis on the purposeful culturally relevant sampled case studies and texts validated through triangulated cross-referred data.

### Theoretical Framework

The research is grounded in Intersectionality and Foucauldian discourse theories reflecting upon nuanced notions of sexuality as discourse and bio-power. Michel Foucault explains that how these notions explain to us the institutionalized regulation of sexual behavior. Kimberlé Crenshaw has employed overlapping of gender identity, religious identity and national identity in Intersectionality theory for their influence on sexuality in the setting of diversified contexts. The influence of cultural narratives and power structures for shaping individuals' freedom and sexual norms helps us to understand the whole concept of sexuality under these frameworks.

### Conceptual Framework

Tabulated below are the three major domain develop the conceptual framework of this research:

Domain	Pakistan	USA
Legal Framework	The influence of Sharia and Hudood Ordinance	Constitutionally protected freedoms, secularistic perspective
Cultural Norms	Collectivist, modesty-driven and honor-based	Liberal, individualistic and self-expressive
Media Representation	Censored, minimal sexual and stereotyped discourse	Educative, diverse, inclusive, and liberating
Public Attitudes	Stigmatized and shame-oriented	Normalized sexual expression and open discourse
Education System	Biology-specific; tabooed sex education	Complete sex education that includes consent and LGBTQ

**Table:** Division of conceptual frameworks across various domains

### **Sexuality in Pakistan: Understanding the Complexities**

Addressing sexuality in Pakistan is a formidable task due to the country's rigid cultural and social norms, which often stigmatize open discussions about sexual health and well-being. The prevailing cultural mindset considers sexuality a strictly private matter, making it a taboo topic for public discourse, and leading to a lack of awareness and understanding among the general population, particularly regarding the risks associated with the maltreatment of sexuality. This cultural reluctance to discuss sexuality openly has far-reaching consequences, including limited access to accurate information and education on sexual health, stigma and shame surrounding sexual experiences and identities, increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse, poor sexual health outcomes, and perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes and power imbalances. It is a highly conservative cultural value and consequently, most of Pakistani's highly educated adults are unaware about sexuality that is one of the most important aspects of human life (Greydanus & Pratt, 2016).

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the complex and sensitive topic of sexuality in Pakistan, exploring the cultural, religious, and societal factors that influence perceptions and experiences of sexuality. It highlights the challenges and opportunities for promoting sexual health, rights, and inclusivity in the country. Although the education system in Pakistan covers modules on population, family planning, and reproductive biology, there is a notable absence of a formal curriculum dedicated to sex education, which remains a stigmatized and taboo topic in the country (Hennik, Rana & Iqbal, 2005).

Human sexuality, a basic and essential aspect of life, is surprisingly treated as a forbidden and unspoken topic in Pakistan. The country's patriarchal society, Islamic values, and colonial legacy have shaped a complex landscape where sexuality is often suppressed, stigmatized, or politicized. This study aims to understand the intricacies of sexuality in Pakistan and identify ways to promote a more inclusive and equitable society. At the 2018 Aurat March in Pakistan, the slogan "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi"<sup>1</sup> ("My Body, My Choice") emerged as a double-edged sword - simultaneously the most critical and contentious slogan. By proclaiming ownership and control over one's body (particularly female), this phrase ignited a firestorm of debate, converging the country's sexual safety crisis, #MeToo fervor, and cultural unease around sexual politics (Cheema, 2023).

One of the most disturbing aspects of how sexuality is handled in Pakistan is the practice of honor killings, which claims the lives of both men and women. Sanctioning honor killings perpetuate chaos and lawlessness in society, posing a significant threat to the very fabric of Islamic society (Muhammad et. al., 2012). Honor killings can be triggered by a wide range of activities, making it challenging to pinpoint specific causes. Any perceived transgression, whether legitimate or illegitimate, can spark the desire to defend family honor. In some cases, honor crimes are motivated by financial gain, such as property, inheritance, or monetary benefits, particularly when there are fewer successors to divide the ancestral assets. Additionally, women may be killed for being labeled as "Kari" with a wealthy man, leading to financial compensation for the

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1. Mera Jism, Meri Marzi" ("My Body, My Choice") is a feminist slogan in Pakistan demanding bodily autonomy and protesting gender-based violence, popularized at the annual Aurat March (2018) on International Women's Day.

family. In some instances, the accused "Karo"<sup>2</sup> is expected to pay a penalty to save his life, regardless of the validity of the charges (Hongdao et. al., 2018).

Talks on sexual health, contraception and LGBTQ<sup>3</sup> rights may be stigmatized or considered taboo in Pakistan. Even the students of Genetic Studies feel hesitant to discuss these as their course topics. Moreover, the teachers avoid sexual topics and consider them taboo (Zafar, Kaukab, Baby, & Ahsan, 2023). Discrimination, violence, and legal barriers marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals in Pakistan, denying those basic rights and protections. Initiatives are needed for legal reforms and social acceptance to promote LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity. Common people cannot even think to have a fruitful discussion on sexuality related issues in their surroundings. If very rarely someone talks on sexual topics, she/he is considered vulgar and bad-mannered without considering her/his social status. Even medical doctors are reluctant to discuss sexual issues with their patients openly.

Pakistan's cultural and religious norms emphasize modesty, chastity, and heteronormativity, limiting discussions and expressions of sexuality. These norms are deeply ingrained in society, making it challenging to address issues related to sexual health, rights, and inclusivity. These norms impact individuals, particularly women and marginalized communities (Priola & Choudhary, 2021). Similarly, patriarchal attitudes perpetuate gender-based violence, restrict women's autonomy, and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. These dynamics have severe consequences for individuals, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. It is to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality to create a more inclusive society (Jamshaid & Ayyaz, 2022).

Religion plays a profound role in shaping attitudes and laws related to sexuality in Pakistan, where Islamic beliefs influence the legal system, societal attitudes, and individual behaviors. Shariah law governs aspects of sexuality, including marriage, divorce, and sexual behavior, while the Hudood Ordinance<sup>4</sup> criminalizes extramarital sex, adultery, and other behaviors deemed immoral (Imran, 2005). This leads to conservative attitudes emphasizing modesty, chastity, and traditional gender roles, stigmatizing discussions around sexuality and limiting education and awareness. Unfortunately, this also perpetuates discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals and restricts women's autonomy and rights. To address these challenges, it's essential to promote progressive Islamic interpretations, comprehensive education, and inclusive policies that protect the rights of all individuals, fostering a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Sex education talks about the provision of knowledge about body development, sexuality and relationships. It also provide opportunity to young people in making educated decisions about their sexual health. Comprehensive sex education is nowhere given in Pakistan and consequently, it has become a country with a high rate of sexually transmitted diseases (Rauf, 2021). Sex is considered as a restricted field of study particularly for young people who badly need it in today's world. The lack of comprehensive sex education, access to contraception, and

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2. Karo-Kari is a brutal practice of honor killing in rural and tribal areas of Sindh, Pakistan, where women are murdered for suspected pre-marital or extra-marital relationships, deemed to have brought shame to their families.
3. LGBTQ+ is an inclusive term representing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Plus (+), representing additional identities with the community.
4. Section 7 of Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, 1979 provides that a person guilty of Zina or Zina-bil-Jabr (enforced intercourse), if he was not an adult, would be punished with imprisonment of description for a term which could extend to five years.(Enacted by General Zia-ul-Haq).

stigma around sexual health services contribute to high rates of unintended pregnancies, STIs<sup>5</sup>, and HIV in Pakistan. Pakistan needs inclusive sex education and accessible healthcare services to promote sexual health and well-being.

The media plays a significant role in shaping societal attitudes towards sexuality in Pakistan, with both positive and negative contributions. On the one hand, media has raised awareness about sexual health, rights, and inclusivity, broken taboos around previously unspoken topics, and amplified marginalized voices. However, media also sensationalizes sexuality, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing harmful attitudes, censors discussions of sexual topics, and misrepresents or underrepresents marginalized communities. To move forward, media should adopt responsible reporting practices, strive for inclusive representation, and prioritize education and awareness, contributing to a more informed and inclusive conversation around sexuality in Pakistan (Chandra-Mouli et. al., 2018). The internet and social media have revolutionized the way people in Pakistan explore, express, and learn about their sexuality. Despite societal taboos, online platforms have created safe spaces for individuals to access sexual health information and resources (websites) like "The Sex Talk"<sup>6</sup> and "The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center"<sup>7</sup>, connect with others sharing similar experiences and interests (social media groups) like "Pakistani LGBTQ+ Community"<sup>8</sup>, express themselves through art, literature, and activism (online publications) like "Truly Pakistan"<sup>9</sup> and "The Feminist Times"<sup>10</sup>, and engage in online activism and advocacy for sexual rights and inclusivity (campaigns) like "#MeTooPakistan"<sup>11</sup> and "#PrideInPakistan"<sup>12</sup>.

The dark sides of dealing with sexuality in Pakistan are deeply entrenched and far-reaching. The country's patriarchal society, fueled by rigid religious and cultural norms, perpetuates a culture of silence and shame around sexuality. This leads to a lack of education and awareness, causing widespread ignorance and stigma. Women's bodies are policed and controlled, with their autonomy and agency severely restricted. LGBTQ+ individuals face persecution and violence, forced to live in hiding or flee the country. Sexual violence and harassment are rampant, with perpetrators often going unpunished. The Hudood Ordinances and other laws perpetuate victim-blaming and punish victims of sexual assault. Honor killings and forced marriages are also common, with women and girls often sacrificed for family "honor". The denial of sexual rights and freedoms has severe consequences, including mental health issues, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. Overall, Pakistan's approach to sexuality is marked by repression, oppression, and violence, necessitating urgent reform and a shift towards inclusivity and empowerment.

Pakistan, like many countries, prohibits homosexuality, yet male same-sex relationships are still observed in different parts of the country, revealing a gap between the law and the complex

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5. STIs—also commonly referred to as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—are infections that are spread from person to person through sexual activity, including anal, vaginal, or oral sex. They are caused by bacteria, parasites, and viruses.
6. <https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/features/sex-talk>
7. <https://www.northwestern.edu/gsrc/>
8. <https://www.instagram.com/pakiqueers/?hl=en>
9. <https://trulyPakistan.net/arts-culture-of-pakistan/>
10. <https://www.thefeministtimes.net/>
11. <https://metoopakistan.pk/>
12. [https://www.reddit.com/r/pakistan/comments/14nr51t/pride\\_in\\_pakistan/](https://www.reddit.com/r/pakistan/comments/14nr51t/pride_in_pakistan/)

realities of human relationships. Pakistan enforces strict laws against homosexuality, imposing harsh penalties that include whipping, imprisonment, and even death. Nevertheless, a disturbing pattern of exploitation has emerged in rural areas, where older men prey on young boys, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and trauma. Many of these boys eventually escape to urban centers, only to become entrapped in sex work. This issue, although widely recognized, is largely disregarded by Pakistani society, including law enforcement and the families of those involved. Conversely, female homosexuality remains veiled in secrecy, obscured from public view due to the rigid social isolation of women in Pakistan. While absent from official records and research, Pakistani literature and poetry subtly reference female same-sex relationships, hinting at a more intricate reality (Nath, 2005).

### **Sexuality in American Culture: Attitudes, Values and Beliefs**

Sexuality in America is regarded as a culture of acceptance, sustenance, and inclusivity. The country has made significant strides in promoting sexual health, wellbeing, and diversity, with a focus on LGBTQ, sexual health services, sex education, diverse sexual representation, and legal protections (Ford et. al., 2017). America is a global leader in LGBTQ rights with legalized same-sex marriage, adoption and gender recognition. Comprehensive sexual health services are widely available and accessible. Similarly, comprehensive and inclusive sex education is mandatory in schools, covering sexual orientation, gender identity and assent (Reiss, 2014). In America, media, specifically television, is used as one of the main source for providing sex education because television has an immense and frequently overlooked influence on the lives of children and adolescents, with estimates suggesting that by the time they reach 70, they will have spent nearly a decade of their lives exposed to its content, highlighting the need for responsible media representation and parental guidance (Strasburger, 2005). Furthermore, the concept of 'modern sexuality' represents a paradigm shift in the understanding of human sexuality, characterized by a twentieth-century redefinition that prioritizes personal fulfillment, pleasure, and autonomy, decoupling it from its traditional association with reproduction and embracing a more expansive and individualized expression of sexual identity. (Ullman, 2023).

The America's inclusive and diverse culture fosters a supportive and accepting environment, empowering individuals to freely express their sexual orientation and gender identity without fear of discrimination or prejudice, and allowing them to live authentically (Parker, 2009). In American society, sex is widely viewed as a natural and healthy part of human experience, and is increasingly seen as a sensual pleasure to be enjoyed responsibly and consensually. The attitude towards sex is reflected in an open and honest sex conversation. In a broader term, sexuality is a natural and essential part of being human, encompassing a complex array of biological, psychological, and social factors. It includes the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system, as well as an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to sexuality. Additionally, sexuality involves roles, identity, personality, and relationships, making it a multifaceted and dynamic entity that influences and is influenced by various aspects of life. This holistic aspect of human life encompasses the intricate relationships between our bodies, minds, and social connections, making sexuality a fundamental and integral part of our overall well-being. (Haffner, 1995). By framing sex as a sensual pleasure, American society encourages healthy attitude towards sexuality, relationships and consent, fostering a culture of mutual respect and enjoyment. However, a notable trend has emerged over the past fifty years, characterized by a marked rise in the number of teenage girls who are sexually active before marriage, reflecting a shift in the cultural and social norms surrounding adolescent sexuality. (Moore & Rosenthal, 2007).

The concept of women's sexuality is not extensively heeded in America rather, a common sexuality regardless of gender, is taken in consideration. A model of contraceptive sexual adaptability in needed that incorporates a wider range of sexual aspects, experiences, and influences (Higgins & Smith, 2016). However, there is another debate of differentiating gender and sex in a human rights discourse in America. It is frequently asked in the social scenario of America whether or not gender will become an adequate substitute for sex. Feminists emphasized this distinction because they wanted to demonstrate that differences between women and men which were widely assumed to be natural (Cowan, 2005).

Dr. Mary Calderone<sup>13</sup> (1904 – 1998), a pioneering figure in sex education, founded the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)<sup>14</sup> in 1964. As a national nonprofit organization based in Washington D.C., SIECUS has been instrumental in advancing comprehensive sex education through advocacy, policy development, and coalition building. The organization develops, collects, and disseminates information to promote informed decision-making about sexuality and advocates for individuals' rights to make responsible choices about their sexual health. With its comprehensive approach, SIECUS has become the leading authority on sex education, pioneering programs and shaping the conversation around this critical issue in America.

In America, sex education is prevailed at elementary level where the students of fifth and sixth grade are taught sexuality. A research reveals that a substantial majority incorporate sexuality education into their upper elementary grade curricula. Notably, 56% of fifth-grade teachers and 64% of sixth-grade teachers report teaching sexuality education at their respective grade levels. This translates to nearly three-quarters (72%) of the surveyed teachers covering this critical topic in either fifth grade, sixth grade, or both, demonstrating a widespread commitment to providing students with essential knowledge and skills in this area (Landry, Singh & Darroch, 2000).

Sexuality in America remains a deeply divisive issue, perpetuating harm and inequality due to lingering societal attitudes and policies. The nation's puritanical legacy and ongoing cultural conflicts have cultivated a sex-negative climate, stifling healthy sexual expression (Cole, 2022). Disparities persist in access to comprehensive sex education, reproductive healthcare, and LGBTQ+ rights. Conservative forces often prioritize abstinence-only education, restricting vital information and resources. This fuels cycles of shame, misinformation, and health risks that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Racial and socioeconomic factors intersect with sexuality, exacerbating existing power imbalances. Women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals face intensified scrutiny and discrimination. The criminal justice system disproportionately targets marginalized groups, entrenching systemic oppression. To address these issues, America needs comprehensive sex education, inclusive policy reforms, and cultural shifts. This requires acknowledging the complexities of human sexuality, promoting consent, and dismantling harmful norms. By prioritizing inclusivity, empathy, and evidence-based approaches, America can create a more equitable society (Garoutte, 2022).

Many Pakistani-American families find themselves in a cultural limbo, navigating the complexities of sexuality in American society while still being rooted in traditional Pakistani values. Pakistani-Americans' insights and attitudes toward sexuality are designed by a complex

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13. Mary Steichen Calderone (1904-1998) was a multifaceted American trailblazer who made significant contributions as a physician, public speaker, author, and a public health advocate of reproductive rights and comprehensive sex education. She is called 'Mother of Sex Education'.

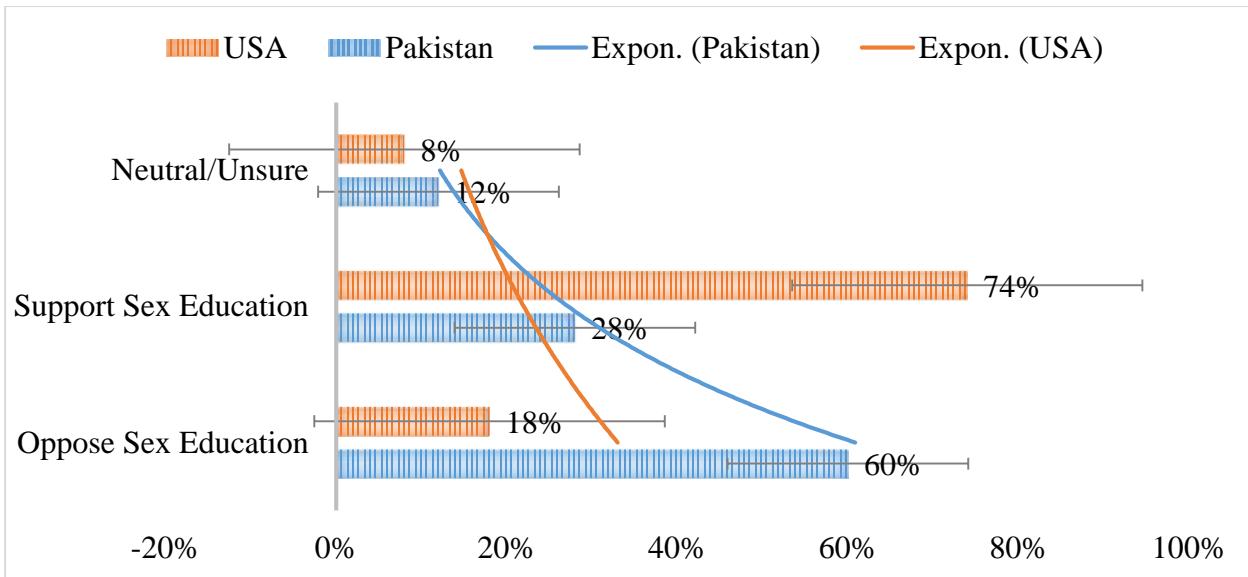
14. Formed on July 1, 1964 by Dr. Mary Calderone, working for comprehensive education about sexuality in almost 50 states of America.

interplay of cultural, social, and religious factors. Traditional values accentuating modesty, chastity, and the importance of marriage are often justified, particularly among first-generation immigrants. However, generational differences and the assimilation of American cultural values can prompt Pakistani-Americans to re-examine and re-define their attitudes toward sex and relationships. The Islamic faith, a visible emblem of Pakistani-Americans, also plays a vital role in shaping attitudes toward sexuality, with changing interpretations of Islamic teachings on modesty, chastity, and extramarital sex. Pakistani-Americans are subject to a complex process of religification, which encompasses the regulation of various aspects of life, including the rigid control of sexual behavior through 'sexual policing' (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2012). In spite of these complexities, there is a rising trend toward more open discussions about sexuality and relationships within Pakistani-American communities, with improved representation in literature, art, and activism, as well as the emergence of support networks and online forums. Pakistani-Americans frequently encounter cultural contradictions regarding sexuality, including the tension between modesty and liberalism, arranged marriages and dating, and sexual silence and openness. These contradictions can lead to conflicts between traditional Pakistani values and the more progressive American cultural landscape. Immigrants and their children often engage in boundary-making to establish a sense of belonging in America. Second-generation Americans, particularly women, face a unique challenge: balancing parental expectations with personal choices that may conflict with ancestral traditions. This study explores how second-generation South Asian American women's pre-marital sexual behaviors shape their construction of ethnic boundaries, addressing a gap in existing literature that has primarily focused on married women and the cultural significance of virginity (Bacchus, 2017).

Aspect	Pakistan	USA
Contraception Access	Restricted	Accessible
LGBTQ+ Rights	Not recognized	Recognized, legalized
Sex Education	Biology-focused, Rare	Mostly mandatory
Homosexuality	Criminalized	Legal nationwide

**Table:** Comparison of legality of sexual status between Pakistan and USA

Country	Perception on Sex Education		
	Oppose	Support	Neutral/Unsure
Pakistan	60%	28%	12%
USA	18%	74%	8%



**Table:** Hypothetical survey data about public perception about the sex education

Metric (TV)	Pakistan	USA
<b>Open Discussions</b>	Restricted	Normalized
<b>LGBTQ+ Inclusion</b>	Minimal	Frequent
<b>Sexual Health Campaigns</b>	Rare	Common

**Table:** Media representation of sexuality in both the countries

#### The Complexities of Sexual Norms in Pakistani and American Culture

In Pakistan, Islamic values and cultural traditions significantly influence sexual norms. Women's bodies are often perceived as inherently sexual, reducing their identity to their sexuality. This omnipresent sexualization is viewed as a destructive force, capable of sparking fitna (disorder or chaos) (Jafar, 2005). The emphasis on modesty, chastity, and family honor shapes attitudes towards sex and relationships.

In contrast, American culture promotes individualism, self-expression, and sexual freedom. Societal expectations and rigid rules severely limit individual choices regarding gender roles, sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and lifestyle in Latin America (Inglehart & Oyeserman, 2004). While cultural and religious influences are important, they should not supersede universal human rights and dignity. Sexual freedom and autonomy are fundamental human rights, regardless of cultural context. The repression of sexual desires and identities in Pakistan can lead to mental health issues, social stigma, and even violence (Punjani, 2022).

Education about sexuality is limited in Pakistan, contributing to misconceptions and myths about sex. Comprehensive sex education is not widely available in Pakistan, leading to a lack of knowledge about sexual health and well-being. While, sex education is widely available in America, covering topics like consent, sexual health and relationships. The media also plays a role in reinforcing traditional values and stereotypes. Netflix's Sex Education Show is providing solutions for sexual health issues on American televisions (Aruah, 2021).

#### Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the onset of sexuality is a culturally charged and deeply contested issue in both Pakistan and USA – the ways of expression also vastly differ. Pakistan in comparison to USA

exhibits patriarchy, stigmatized sexual expression, religious governed norms, diversity and education. Conversely, the USA, exhibits progressed inclusivity, open sexual discourse, legal protections and a conservative approach to sexuality. The dichotomies are evident and observable. These dichotomies are not just geographical but epistemological which reflect divergent moral approach, bodily rights and autonomy. The examination of the cultural binaries, the study poses an urgency for the cross-cultural exchange, reform and dialogue to bridge the gap by using a sensitive and nuanced approach. These nuanced and sensitive approaches must respect the tradition, morals and values. These must advocate informed consent, human rights and sexual health. Major and key steps to achieve this include responsible representation in the media, reformation in the discriminatory laws and inclusive sex education. Eventually, it is pertinent that human sexuality must not be taken as moral threat rather vital to an individual's health, freedom and identity.

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