

Teaching about Human Rights: Female Genital Mutilation in America

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Abstract

Increasing immigration from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East has enhanced cultural diversity in the United States. The wide array of foods, languages, customs, and unique historical experiences associated with immigration have contributed to the political, social, and economic fabric of a multicultural democracy. However, immigrants may also bring certain cultural practices that violate American constitutional law and various state laws. Moreover, these practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), are incompatible with American ideals of equality, social justice, and human rights. Recent research indicates that an increasing number of girls and women in the United States have undergone or are at risk for various forms of FGM. Over 200 million females have experienced FGM and 513,000 females in the United States are at risk of FGM. This practice is also a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by the United States in 1948. The research methods include a historical analysis of FGM, a quantitative and geographic description of the nature and extent of FGM, and a discussion of the relevant American and international laws that prohibit FGM. Furthermore, the article employs a rationale for teaching about FGM in social studies courses. This includes a description of viable methods and activities based on National Council for the Social Studies Standards (NCSS). This article will describe the nature, causes, and consequences of FGM on females. This may stimulate student activism, a major goal in social studies. A primary purpose of this study is to increase educators' awareness of this illegal practice, improve education about human rights, and help educators assist female students at risk of FGM. Furthermore, the article will describe the legal and professional responsibilities teachers must take if they have students at risk of FGM in their classes.

Key words: *Human rights, democracy, female genital mutilation, law, equality*

Introduction

According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), "Human Rights Education, in both its civil and humanitarian aspects, is a necessary element of social studies programs and should be integrated throughout the educational experience of all learners from early childhood through advanced education and lifelong learning (NCSS, 2015, p 161). This major educational goal is, of course, compatible with the core ideals—freedom, equality, social justice, the rule of law, and individual rights—that constitute the foundation of American law and democracy. These democratic ideals, while often broached in history and practice, are the moral force compelling the United States to eliminate all forms of discriminatory behaviors

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based on race, ethnicity, religion, national origins, language, and sex/gender (Huntington, 2004; Marger, 2015; Schlesinger, 1998). America's political and legal principles are articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution; simultaneously, numerous judicial and legislative acts protect human and civil rights. Because most social studies courses do not discuss FGM/C (an emotional and controversial topic) this conceptual, historical, and legal study will contribute to the social studies literature. Preservice teachers are seldom knowledgeable about FGM/C and its effects on students. Moreover, FGM/C is a crucial human rights issue relevant to secondary social studies education.

Teaching about human rights is a core social studies responsibility, especially in an era of increasing migration and continued atrocities—torture, rape (as an instrument of war), genocide, slavery, human trafficking, and female oppression—in many countries (NCSS, 2015, p.161; Shuttleworth, 2012). Secondary social studies courses are the appropriate venue to teach about human rights abuses that are a violation of America's commitment to social justice, individual liberty, and equality. Furthermore, secondary school students find human rights issues relevant because they have a strong moral component that compels students to become engaged in expanding human rights, an issue that teachers can correlate with history, geography, economics, and government/civics.

Moreover, in 1948, the United States signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), an epic United Nations document designed to protect the natural human rights of all people (General Assembly, 1948). These rights include political and civil protections (freedom of expression and religion; democracy; equality before the law; and the right to liberty and due process), and social, cultural, and economic rights (the right to food, education, work, travel, and marry). Additionally, the UDHR prohibits slavery, discrimination, unjust detainment, and torture. Of course, protecting human rights for all people remains extremely difficult in a world ripe with competing notions of morality, immense religious and cultural diversity, numerous political systems, and different historical experiences. This is true in the United States, where immigrants, who bring many positive attributes to the United States, including unique experiences and a strong work ethic, may bring specific cultural practices that are a violation of American federal or state laws (Burrage, 2016; Nyangweso, 2014). In some cases, these practices are anathema to the core values of American democracy and law and may warrant criminal prosecution, even though the practices may have support from various groups based on

the principle of cultural autonomy and tolerance for diverse cultural practices. These practices include child marriage, child labor, honor killings, human trafficking (labor, sex, and organ harvesting) and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), still a common practice in many countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East, is increasing in the United States, primarily because of increasing immigration from developing countries (Anderson, 2013; Burrage, 2016; Department of Homeland Security, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2013; Mishori, 2017; Nyangweso, 2014; Population Reference Bureau, 2017; Population Reference Bureau, 2016). Globally, over 200 million girls and women have experienced FGM/C in 30 countries and 4 million females are at risk each year (Hui, 2018). Experts believe that over 500,000 females in the United States are at risk or have undergone FGM/C (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). Often, the relevant immigrant populations are afraid to talk about FGM/C (the penalties for talking about the procedure are harsh, including death in some cases) and it is difficult for law enforcement and medical personnel to obtain data (Nyangweso, 2014). However, more girls and women are starting to describe their experiences to government officials and doctors (Burrage, 2016).

Thus, it is imperative that all educators acquire knowledge about FGM/C and are able to recognize students who may be at risk of this procedure; this is especially true for educators in school districts with large numbers of immigrant children from North Africa and the Middle East. Teachers have a legal and professional obligation to report child abuse. Of course, educators must approach this controversial and emotional topic in a scholarly and sensitive manner implementing appropriate methods. FGM/C is an appropriate topic for secondary school students; indeed, these students may find FGM/C is a compelling moral, political, and cultural issue that inspires them to become engaged in stopping this illegal act.

However, many Americans are unaware of this illegal practice, including the nature, causes, types, and consequences of FGM/C on females (Population Reference Bureau, 2016; Mishori, 2017). This is not surprising given the topic is very alarming, controversial and is rarely discussed in public forums (Mishori, 2017). Some teachers and school officials may be hesitant to discuss the issue because it could provoke accusations of cultural bigotry (defenders of FGM/C may assert that there are religious reasons for the practice, immigrant populations are entitled to cultural autonomy, and it is ethnocentric for American law to prohibit the practice) and stir controversies in the classroom.

Nevertheless, it is a crucial human rights issue and should be discussed in social studies courses in secondary schools (NCSS, 2014); the most appropriate venue for discussing controversial topics (the issue may not be appropriate for elementary and middle school students; teachers should exercise good judgment when teaching about all controversial issues). It is important students understand this issue; some of their classmates could be at risk and FGM/C is a crime and violation of female's rights. Furthermore, girls under age 18 make up one-third of all U.S. females who are at risk of FGM/C (Population Reference Bureau, 2016), and teachers, especially in major immigrant destinations, may have these girls in their classes. Thus, all educators should understand this issue to carry out their professional and legal responsibilities. If they become aware that any student is at risk for FGM/C, they must report it to the authorities. Human rights education is central to social studies education and "students must understand fundamental principles of human rights and humanitarian law to appropriately exercise their civic responsibilities and take their place in the world at large" (NCSS, 2014). FGM/C is a highly controversial and emotional issue with powerful moral, political, and cultural implications; therefore, it is a viable topic for secondary social studies education and the development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.

However, the most viable way to eliminate this human rights violation in the United States is via education and increasing public awareness. The social studies profession must address this issue and educate all students that sex/gender equality is a legal mandate in America and abolishing FGM/C is consistent with our commitment to individual liberty, the rule of law, and equality. Teaching about FGM/C will allow students to confront one of the most contentious debates in international politics and multiculturalism: Are human rights universal (they apply to all human beings based on natural law principles) or are they determined by specific cultures or nation-states (each culture or country has the right to establish their own human rights ideals and laws)? Educators can examine all of the competing arguments and students can learn how to construct and defend a position based on evidence and their political, religious, and social values.

Teaching about FGM/C give students the opportunity to engage the didactic (facts, data, and statistics), the reflective (critical thinking, logic, and problem-solving skills), and the affective (emotions, values, and beliefs) domains. FGM/C is a complex moral issue rooted in cultural patriarchy (Burrage, 2016; Nyangweso, 2014) and has the potential to induce outrage, especially for American students nurtured in a society committed to sex/gender equality, basic

human rights, individual freedom, and social justice. Moreover, this issue may inspire students to become actively involved to stop this illegal practice; active student participation in civic affairs is a primary goal of social studies education and a mark of a healthy democracy.

This article will examine the nature, extent, causes, types, and consequences of FGM/C and explain how this practice is a violation of American law and international human rights law. Second, the article will analyze why FGM/C is increasing in the United States and how the federal and state governments are responding to this trend with more forceful law enforcement, education, and outreach programs. Additionally, schools and teachers can help at risk students; for example, a Gambian girl in the United Kingdom told her teacher that she was going to be “cut” and the teacher prevented this by notifying the appropriate authorities (Nyangweso, 2014). Third, the article will discuss some of the major implications for social studies and propose some strategies that educators can implement in their courses that are pedagogically defensible and comport with NCSS Standards for teaching about controversial issues, such as FGM/C, and academic freedom (NCSS, 2016).

Methods

This article is a theoretical and conceptual analysis of Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C), a major human rights issue that affects millions of women worldwide. The primary research methodology was historical research on the origins, causes, extent, and consequences on women and affected societies. In addition, there was a brief literature review, which incorporated historical and contemporary sources on FGM/C across the globe. Furthermore, the article relied on several legislative acts—based on American law and international law—to describe and explain the provisions of laws that prohibit FGM/C and provide for punishments under the appropriate laws. Finally, the article relied on empirically based social studies methods and activities for teaching secondary school students about FGM/C. Additionally, the article describe how students can become actively engaged—a core goal in social studies education—in abolishing this practice.

The Types, Causes, and Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

The collective term given to several traditional practices that involve the cutting of female genitals is FGM/C. The procedure is commonly performed between the ages of four and 12 as a rite of passage and can occur a few days after birth or prior to marriage or after the first pregnancy (Population Reference Bureau, 2017). In communities where FGM/C is prevalent,

there is enormous social pressure for females to undergo the procedure for social acceptance. FGM/C is a rite of passage into womanhood and “purifies” girls, making them much more attractive for marriage (Nyangweso, 2014). Since FGM/C is illegal in almost all countries, parents (usually mothers), aunts, and grandmothers perform the procedure on babies and toddlers and there are efforts to avoid detection and arrest (Nyangweso, 2014). This silence exacerbates efforts to stop the practice as well as hinders law enforcement in their attempts to arrest and prosecute perpetrators. Teachers may find that at-risk students are afraid to tell anyone, even though they desperately wish to avoid FGM/C.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified FGM/C into four major categories, which range from the least harmful to the most harmful. The first type of FGM/C is clitoridectomy and involves the partial or total removal of the clitoris, or in some rare cases, the practitioner removes only the prepuce (fold of skin surrounding the clitoris). The second type is excision and involves the partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora; this may also include the excision of the labia majora. This type accounts for 80% of all FGM/C incidents globally (Nyangweso, 2014). The third type is referred to as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening by cutting and moving the labia minora or labia majora, thus forming a seal. The fourth type refers to all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, such as piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterizing the genital area (World Health Organization, 2017). All forms of FGM/C cause pain, ranging from mild to excruciating, depending on the type of FGM/C and the conditions (anesthesia is seldom used, the instrument used to mutilate or cut the genitals, and the skill of the performer) during the procedure (Nyangweso, 2014).

Female genital mutilation has its roots in the historical inequality between men and women (World Health Organization, 2017). Medical and historical evidence—Egyptian mummies verify the practice, and Herodotus noted it in the 5th century BCE—date the practice of FGM/C to 4,000-5,000 years ago (Nyangweso, 2014). Furthermore, FGM/C was justified in England as a medical treatment to cure women of their “vexing mental disorders” and in the United States as a cure for excessive masturbation and lesbianism (Nyangweso, 2014, p. 31). Thus, FGM/C has a long and storied history regarding the purposes of the practice, and its centrality to cultural identity. This is a current issue in the United States as some people justify the procedure to validate cultural autonomy and view opposition to FGM/C as a form of Western

imperialism (Nyangweso, 2014). This is part of a much larger discussion on whether human rights are universal or culturally specific; this issue has generated enormous disagreements among social scientists, academics, medical personnel, and the public (Blanton and Kegley, 2017).

Defenders of FGM/C will argue it is necessary to control to women's sexuality (the practice often eliminates any sexual desire) and the practice validates their cultural identity. The procedure increases the chances of marriage for girls and women. Moreover, some people erroneously claim that some religions requires FGM/C. However, no religion sanctions FGM/C but it is a cultural practice in Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities in Africa and the Middle East (Nyangweso, 2014; Suleman, 2017). Since the practice occurs in many Muslim countries, some people have falsely implicated Islam in sanctioning FGM/C. Educators should take this opportunity to inform students of this fact to abolish myths about Islam. FGM/C is a manifestation of male patriarchy and its primary purpose is to exert control over women; it is an extreme form of discrimination and violence against women (Burrage, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2016; World Health Organization, 2017; Suleman, 2017).

FGM/C ensures premarital virginity and martial fidelity and "purifies" females of unclean and unfeminine body parts (World Health Organization, 2017). There are no medical reasons for FGM/C; there are no benefits and a plethora of physical and psychological harms for girls and women who have experienced this procedure (Burrage, 2016; World Health Organization, 2017). It is a violation of females' human rights and there is a growing international effort to abolish this practice (World Health Organization, 2017). FGM/C is not analogous to male circumcision; there are specific health benefits to male circumcision unrelated to cultural values.

There are numerous, and very serious, short-term and long-term consequences of FGM/C on females. The risks increase with the severity of the procedures described by the World Health Organization. Practitioners use unsterile razor blades, broken glass, scissors, and knives when performing FGM/C; typically, anesthesia is absent during the procedure (Nyangweso, 2014; World Health Organization, 2017). This results in severe pain, excessive bleeding, fevers, infections, painful urinary problems, swelling, cysts, scarring, shock, sepsis, and even death (Burrage, 2016; Population Reference Bureau, 2017; World Health Organization, 2017). The long-term consequences include serious urinary tract infections, agonizing sexual intercourse,

vaginal infections, and higher risk for HIV/AIDS, higher infant mortality rates, higher infertility rates, and painful menstrual problems (Nyangweso, 2014; World Health Organization, 2017). Furthermore, many females experience a wide range of psychological problems resulting from FGM/C. For example, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and low self-esteem are common and women typically do not have access to mental care or refuse to seek help because of the pervasive social acceptance of the practice in the community (World Health Organization, 2017).

FGM/C is a social norm that is often unquestioned in practicing communities and some medical personnel and powerful community leaders—religious and political—uphold the tradition (World Health Organization, 2017). Even if medical personnel perform the procedure, FGM/C is still a medically unwarranted practice that causes great harm to females (World Health Organization, 2017). Not surprisingly, many women, conditioned to support the practice, often perform the procedure on their daughters or other relatives. Abolishing FGM/C will take concerted efforts, such as education, outreach programs, medical services for victims, and an increased focus on human rights. Moreover, as more Africans migrate to Europe and North America (Attoh, 2010), these regions will have to take several steps to prevent the practice.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Extent and Spatial Patterns

FGM/C is an ancient practice that continues today in Africa and parts of the Middle East. Additionally, as African immigrants migrate to Europe, the United States, and other developed countries, they transport the practice to their new countries. Between 2000 and 2013, the foreign-born population from Africa more than doubled, from 881,000 to 1.8 million (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). Entrenched cultural beliefs and practices are difficult to eradicate, and passing restrictive laws and enforcement are not enough to change centuries-old attitudes and behaviors. Globally, according to international organizations, at least 200 million girls and women have undergone some form of FGM/C (Department of Homeland Security, 2017; World Health Organization, 2017). Girls 14 and younger represent 44 million of those who have endured the practice and in some countries, such as Somalia, 98% of females aged 15-49 have been cut. The practice is also common in Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sudan, Kenya, and Djibouti (Population Reference Bureau, 2017).

In the United States, about 507,000 females have undergone FGM/C or are at risk of the procedure; this is more than double the number in 2000 (228,000) (Population Reference Bureau,

2016). About 97% of U.S. females at risk are from African countries, only 3% are from Asia. Three countries—Egypt, Ethiopia, and Somalia—accounted for 55% of all U.S. females at risk in 2013 (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). This is significant because FGM/C is very high in these countries and they send, relatively speaking, many immigrants to the United States. In fact, some estimates place the African population in the U.S. over 900,000 (Attoh, 2010) and these immigrants hail from patriarchal societies where women experience several forms of sex discrimination (Attoh, 2010). Many of the females are cut in the United States, and others are sent abroad to undergo the procedure (Department of Homeland Security, 2017).

Historically, immigrants have settled in specific regions or urban areas for numerous economic and cultural reasons, such as the availability of jobs, family reunification, and finding locales that have similar geographic and cultural attributes to their homeland. In 2013, about 60% of all U.S. females at risk of FGM/C lived in just eight states: California, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Virginia, and Washington (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). These states are magnets for immigrants; they are culturally diverse (perceived as more welcoming of immigrants), economically vibrant, offer many types of employment, and some offer generous welfare programs. Minnesota, even though it has not been a major immigrant destination like New York or California, has a large Somali population (31,000 in 2013) that is at higher risk for FGM/C (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). It is important to note that most FGM/C victims are usually under age 18 and will be attending public schools; teachers should be aware of students' backgrounds and be prepared to help at-risk students.

As immigrants have migrated from the traditional immigrant destinations, states like Ohio and Georgia, are receiving new immigrants that are at greater risk of FGM/C. For example, as of March 2018, Ohio is debating Senate Bill (SB) 214 which would ban FGM/C in Ohio, a state that has a significant Somali population. In fact, Columbus, Ohio has a Somali population of 50,000, the second largest in the United States after Minneapolis, Minnesota (Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee, 2018). According to the Population Reference Bureau, the number of females at risk in the United States will increase soon, as more Africans migrate and have families. Thus, ending FGM/C in Africa will have a positive impact on immigrant families across the globe. Furthermore, daughters of women with some education are less likely to undergo FGM/C compared to daughters of women with no education; educating females—abroad and in the United States—is a very effective method to protect women's human rights

(Population Reference Bureau, 2017). Social studies, more than any other school discipline, can instill into all students that sex/gender equality is a moral and legal obligation in the United States.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: International Law and American Law

In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that banned the practice of FGM/C across the globe (General Assembly, 2012). The 194-member organization adopted the resolution and demonstrated the nearly universal efforts by the international community to ban a practice that deemed violent discrimination against females and is a violation of their human rights. This resolution, which was preceded by other United Nations resolutions designed to protect the rights of children and women, was the result of a difficult effort to forge a global consensus and create language that was clear and acceptable to all countries (Blanton and Kegley, 2017; General Assembly, 2012). Moreover, this resolution called for the elimination of other human rights abuses, such as child marriage (usually, children under 14 who do not have the power to refuse marriage) and female infanticide. In fact, abolishing FGM/C by 2030 is one of the United Nation's objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals Program. It is part of a larger effort to eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence (UNICEF, 2017).

In addition, while the criminalization of FGM/C is crucial to ending the practice, it will fail unless there are sustained efforts aimed at changing the underlying discriminatory attitudes and cultural beliefs that remain dominant in some countries and immigrant communities in the United States and Europe (Suleman, 2017). A concerted campaign—employing social media, government agencies, advocacy organizations, education, and the medical community—to end FGM/C is just as important as law enforcement, which is experiencing significant failure in procuring arrests and convictions for cultural reasons (Suleman, 2017). Educational efforts, including in the United States, must emphasize the moral and legal equality between males and females and strongly condemn any form of violence or discrimination against all individuals. Moreover, victims of FGM/C must have access to high quality medical care, such as medications to fight infections, surgery that can repair some of the damage, and counseling therapy (Cruickshank, 2017).

In 1996, the United States Congress passed the Federal Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, making it illegal to perform FGM/C on any female younger than 18 years of age

(Goldberg et al., 2016). Additionally, this law required the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to acquire “data on FGM/C and engage in educational programs and outreach for relevant communities.” Congress ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to provide information on the adverse health effects of FGM/C and the legal consequences for violating this law to all immigrants issued U.S. visas (Goldberg et al., 2016). In 2013, Congress passed another law, the Transport for Female Genital Mutilation Act, which made it a crime to transport a girl out of the country for undergoing FGM/C; this reduced the practice of families sending their daughters to their home countries for the procedure (Goldberg et al., 2016). Many families believe that it would be easier for their daughters to undergo FGM/C in countries and communities where the procedure is ubiquitous and laws that may prohibit FGM/C are seldom enforced.

This law holds parents or legal guardians responsible and they may be subject to arrest even if they did not perform the procedure; of course, any person—including medical doctors—who perform the procedure are at risk of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. In early 2017, the police arrested Dr. Jumana Nagarala, a Detroit, Michigan emergency room physician, for performing FGM/C on two 7-year old girls (Global Woman Peace Foundation, 2017). The girls were told by their mothers that they were going to travel from Minnesota to Detroit for a “special girls’ trip” and instructed the girls not to tell anybody about the trip. The police also arrested Dr. Fakhruddin Attar and his wife, Farida Attar, and charged with conspiracy, FGM/C, and aiding and abetting in the commission of a felony. The doctors in this case are from the Dawood Bohra, a Shiite Islamic sect based in India, where FGM/C is common (Raja, 2017). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigated the charges, interviewed the girls, and believed that the doctors have performed FGM/C on about one hundred girls since 2005 (Global Woman Peace Foundation, 2017). Indeed, medical exams verified that both girls had undergone FGM/C and they received medical treatment for their wounds. However, on November 21, 2018, United States District Judge Bernard Friedman ruled the federal law prohibiting FGM/C was unconstitutional because Congress lacks the authority to regulate crimes, such as FGM/C, that are within the jurisdiction of states and not the federal government (Belluck, 2018). The judge dropped the charges against the doctors; this ruling, while constitutionally sound, will hinder efforts to stop FGM/C in the United States.

In addition to the now unconstitutional federal law, 26 states have laws prohibiting FGM/C (Goldberg et al., 2016). The state laws mirror the federal law, but there are some differences. For example, Minnesota, Tennessee, and Rhode Island prohibit the practice even on consenting adult women (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2004). Furthermore, many anti-FGM/C groups are advocating for all states to ban FGM/C and engage in education and outreach programs in relevant communities. The U.S. government is working to abolish FGM/C across the globe; progress made in Africa and other regions will reduce the number of immigrants who support the procedure (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). According to U.S. laws, FGM/C in any form is a gender-based human rights violation rooted in notions of male dominance and ending this practice is a major goal of the government, especially the Department of Homeland Security.

Educational institutions, including American public schools, must teach about FGM/C and its horrifying effects on girls and women (Burrage, 2016). In addition, teaching about FGM/C in a professional and ethical manner that is scholarly is crucial; however, teachers have the law on their side: FGM/C is a felony in the United States. Without intervention, up to 63 million more women across the globe could undergo FGM/C by 2050 (Burrage, 2016). Educators can implement several strategies and activities in social studies courses to assist in the abolition of an appalling human rights abuse that is a betrayal of American ideals of liberty, personal responsibility, and equality before the law.

The Rationale for Teaching about FGM/C in Secondary Social Studies Education

Human rights education is a major theme in global education—an umbrella term encompassing international politics, population, world cultures, ethnic conflicts, economic interdependence, migration, war, and other issues—because of globalization (Blanton and Kelley, 2017; Chapin, 2015). Modern technologies (the Internet, social media, advanced communication and transportation systems, international trade and investments, migration patterns, and cultural diffusion) have created an increasingly interdependent world. These changes have compelled social studies education to focus on vital global issues to prepare students to live in a high-tech global economy and culturally diverse world. Human rights education is a central issue in contemporary social studies education and infusing it into all social studies disciplines is prudent. In fact, the NCSS (2017) is encouraging the federal government to

support human rights education in public schools by honoring human rights treaties and international human rights law.

Teaching about FGM/C in secondary social studies classes, like discussing any controversial issues, requires that educators follow the First Amendment decisions by the Supreme Court (frequently, controversial issues involve religion and freedom of expression) and the guidelines established by the National Council for the Social Studies concerning academic freedom (NCSS, 2016, p. 186). In fact, the NCSS offers a strident defense of academic freedom by asserting that teachers and students have a right to discuss controversial issues without any fears of censorship or retribution. The NCSS (2016) position paper, *Academic Freedom and the Social Studies Educator*, states that “Academic freedom for social studies educators and students includes the right and responsibility to study, investigate, present, interpret, discuss, and debate relevant facts, issues, and ideas” (NCSS, 2016, p. 186). This is a prerequisite for finding truth and informed decision-making in a democracy; avoiding controversial issues is a disservice to students and the country. Additionally, students who receive a high-quality civic education are “more likely to vote and discuss politics at home, to volunteer and work on community issues, and are more confident in their ability to speak publicly and communicate with their elected representatives” (NCSS, 2013a, para 5).

Therefore, studying about FGM/C, as well as other controversial issues, is educationally legitimate and comports with American laws. Of course, teachers must be prudent in their approach to these issues, ensuring that all viewpoints are welcome, information is accurate, dissent is a hallmark of a healthy democracy, and civility characterizes all class activities. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that no right or liberty is absolute; there are constitutional limits that educators and students must adhere to in public schools. Teachers should exercise caution when teaching certain issues—FGM/C, poverty, war, crime, abuse, and so forth—because they may have students in class who have experienced these issues.

Moreover, studying about FGM/C is interdisciplinary and involves the core social studies topics of history, government/civics, economics, and geography. Additionally, educators can incorporate themes from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and international relations, as well as from the humanities and the medical sciences. It also provides students the opportunities to engage in analytical research, recognize the role of bias, propaganda, distortions, and omissions in the literature, and make rational decisions based on knowledge and a commitment

to democratic ideals (NCSS, 2016). FGM/C has a compelling moral and social justice component that students will find fascinating and the issue has the potential to stimulate student activism outside of the classroom, a major, albeit difficult, goal in social studies education.

Teaching about FGM/C: Strategies, Activities, and Resources

Planning to teach about human rights and FGM/C is crucial to producing a rich, challenging, and rewarding educational experience for students. It is important for educators to establish clear goals, objectives, activities, resources, and assessment measures for meaningful learning. Educators' lesson plans should reflect NCSS or state standards, this is important to justify the topics, objectives, and activities. While there are, of course, numerous approaches to teaching about FGM/C, one viable approach would be to utilize "The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History" (NCSS, 2013b). This is an inquiry-based curriculum that emphasizes the importance of compelling and supporting questions, research (based on the structure of each social studies discipline), collaboration, communication, and activism. FGM/C is an excellent topic for an inquiry-based project; there is an abundance of scholarly materials, research articles, and organizations dedicated to human rights education and abolishing FGM/C.

The C3 Framework requires intense preparation but offers students superb educational experiences. Teachers can assist students with developing a compelling question (one that is enduring, complex, intellectually challenging, and interesting to students) and supporting questions in history, government/civics, geography, and economics. In addition, while educators act as facilitators, guiding students to ensure on task behavior and assisting with research and resources, the onus is on students to create a viable project. Teachers many wish to review the C3 Framework (NCSS, 2013b) and decide if this will work given their specific needs (time considerations, ability level of their students, and state and school district requirements for standardized testing). Other viable options include writing essays detailing the origins and purposes of FGM/C, readings followed by class discussions, interactive lectures, short videos (available at the Population Reference Bureau website), mock trials (this would be excellent for analyzing the legal and moral issues associated with FGM/C), and debates.

Regardless of the specific approaches to teaching about FGM/C, it is important to teach students the facts about FGM/C. Students need to know the causes, types, and the consequences

of FGM/C, on not only females, but also the entire community. They need to know that the procedure is illegal in the United States and international law, and it has no support from the United States government, major international organizations, or the U.S. medical community. Many of the resources used in this article, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the United Nations (UN) provide empirical data, statistics, and research on FGM/C. These resources can help teachers design a pedagogically sound curriculum based on American law and NCSS Standards.

Furthermore, it is important that educators inform students that various groups support FGM/C and in relevant immigrant communities; these defenders may assert that there are historical, religious, and cultural reasons to continue the procedure. This is analogous to informing students that other controversial issues throughout history, such as slavery, segregation, and prohibiting women's suffrage have had significant support from several constituencies. Indeed, for most of human history, slavery was not controversial; it was a universal practice (often unrelated to race until the 15th century) that was accepted throughout the world (Klein, 2014). This fact, of course, does not imply slavery, segregation, or FGM/C are morally correct. However, it is vital students understand that there are contrasting views and some people will take positions that students find morally repugnant and indefensible.

Human rights are controversial because individuals and cultures exhibit some profound differences in beliefs, values, historical experiences, geography, religion, and politics. Some countries may reject the international definition of human rights; others may argue that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is essentially a Western document without input from non-Western nations, such as India, China, and Egypt; still, other countries may disagree over the relative importance between individual and community rights (Blanton & Kegley, 2017). However, these challenges make teaching about human rights interesting, though provoking, and stimulate debates, discussions, dissent, and compromises.

An effective starting point for teachers may be readings (excerpts from documents, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution are excellent resources) and discussions on the development of democracy and human rights. Additionally, having students read the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the Preamble and thirty statements) and discuss the philosophy undergirding these rights

will help them understand the premise of the United States (liberty, equality, social justice, the rule of law, and limited government) and current international law.

For example, Article I contends “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” (General Assembly, 1948). Article five states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (General Assembly, 1948). Article 7 affirms, “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination” (General Assembly, 1948). Article 12 proclaims, “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks” (General Assembly, 1948). Thus, these political ideals condemn FGM/C, which is torture, sex discrimination, and invasion of privacy, as a clear violation of human rights. The UDHR, based on natural law and influenced by Western democracies, is an excellent primary source for teaching about FGM/C and other controversial issues. Students who acquire a command of the literature on human rights will be able to articulate a reasoned opinion on a variety of issues—poverty, freedom of expression and religion, child marriage, due process of law, and others—that are central to a comprehensive social studies education.

Teachers may wish to produce a PowerPoint presentation that incorporates the relevant facts and statistics (definition, causes, types and consequences of FGM/C, legal citations banning the procedure). Moreover, the presentation can include maps showing the spatial distribution of the procedure globally and in the United States. This could provoke a discussion on cultural differences among nations and immigration patterns that explain why and where FGM/C is common. Incorporating charts, graphs, videos, music, and political cartoons with vital information and opinions also teaches students how to interpret and assess the validity of information and statistics; teaching them to have a healthy skepticism about authority, facts, and statistics is constructive. Students could interview FGM/C victims or doctors to gain factual knowledge or personal insight on the procedure. This would be feasible in cities like New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Washington DC, and Columbus, Ohio that have large at-risk immigrant populations. They need to vet sources, look for contrasting evidence, hear diverse

views, research issues, and think for themselves. Therefore, asking excellent questions—thought provoking, complex, nuanced, and open-ended—is important in social studies.

Civic education should not be a passive endeavor; student engagement—solving problems, community service, actively seeking social justice and equality—motivated by a passion for knowledge and civic responsibility and promoting democratic ideals is the primary goal in civic education (NCSS, 2013a). As immigration from Africa and other nations increases, experts believe, and current data supports their claims, that FGM/C will increase in the United States unless there is a concerted effort to abolish this practice, abroad and at home (Population Reference Bureau, 2016). Thus, prosecuting individuals who allow or commit FGM/C is imperative to abolishing FGM/C. Additionally, education and outreach programs are crucial to bring widespread awareness to a barbaric and anachronistic practice that is an affront to human rights and democratic ideals (Burrage, 2016; Population Reference Bureau, 2016; General Assembly, 2012; World Health Organization, 2017).

Social Studies education, by teaching all students, including the immigrant children at risk of FGM/C in their classrooms, that all human beings are equal and free, can play a major role in abolishing FGM/C in the United States and protecting human rights for all people in accordance with American law. Unlike most countries, Americanism is not rooted in blood (to whom born) or soil (where one is born) but on the democratic ideals of a common humanity (Huntington, 2004; Schlesinger, 1998). If all social studies teachers incorporate human rights into their curricula (of course, it must be age and maturity appropriate), the profession cultivates young citizens who will work towards the abolition of FGM/C and other human rights abuses (Shuttleworth & Kirkland, 2012).

Conclusions and Implications

The international community, via the United Nations, has passed laws prohibiting FGM/C, a procedure that had affected 200 million females across the globe. FGM/C is an ancient practice rooted in cultural traditions regarding female purity, fidelity, and viability for marriage. No religion sanctions FGM/C and it continues to be ubiquitous throughout Africa and parts of the Middle East, as well as Indonesia, Pakistan, and other Asian countries. There are over 500,000 females at risk in the United States owing to increasing immigration from developing world countries. Federal law in the United States prohibits female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and it is illegal to transport a female out of the country to undergo FGM/C

(Burrage, 2016; Nyangweso, 2014). It is imperative that all fifty states pass laws prohibiting FGM/C, this is crucial in light of the November 2018 judicial decision declaring the federal law unconstitutional.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting is a major human rights issue and FGM/C is a violation of women's rights to equality, privacy, and choice regarding their bodies. Research indicates that the most effective methods to abolishing FGM/C include strong laws with severe punishments for violators, international cooperation, and increasing efforts to educate people about FGM/C and the actions they can take to stop FGM/C in their countries or communities. The social studies profession can have a profound impact on FGM/C and other human rights issues by incorporating them into the core curriculum. Human rights issues are important to secondary students and they will be interested in ways to become engaged in civic participation—the ultimate goal in social studies education. FGM/C is a powerful moral issue that can spawn passion that motivates students to expand the ideals of personal freedom and equality to all individuals.

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