

Sexuality and Sexual Relationships

All religions

While different faiths may have similar views about sex, there's a bigger divide among views on homosexuality.

Islam, Christianity and Judaism have Similar Attitudes to Sex

- 1) **Traditionally**, all three religions teach that the only correct context for sexual activity is within marriage — sex outside of it is seen as a sin. This means cohabitation (living together unmarried) isn't approved of.

In Judaism, Maimonides' list of mitzvot says sexual relationships shouldn't happen without a ketubah and kiddushin (p.33) — see Sefer Hamitzvot no. 355.

Qur'an 23:7 states that "whoever seeks beyond [marriage] then those are the transgressors".

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says "Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman" (2360). 'Conjugal' means 'within marriage'. It also says that sex is 'unitive' and 'procreative' — to bring married couples together as one and for having children.
- 2) Christians, Muslims and Jews are urged to keep sex within marriage for positive reasons as well — marriage is believed to make sex more special. All three religions stress the importance of enjoying sex. The Song of Solomon in the Bible and Ketuvim contains poems celebrating sexual desire and relationships.
- 3) 'Strict' members of all three faiths think the principle of only having sex within marriage still applies. More liberal members might see this as outdated, although they still tend to see marriage as the ideal.
- 4) Promiscuity (having multiple sexual partners) is often seen as wrong in all three religions. But many British people think it's acceptable, especially now contraception (see p.38) is widely available — though a large number of sexual partners is seen more negatively.
- 5) Atheists and humanists tend to accept sex outside of marriage. Humanists accept it as long as it causes no harm to anyone. Generally, sex outside of marriage is considered normal in British society.

Homosexuality is a Disputed Topic

The first same-sex marriages in the UK took place in 2014 — see p.39-41 for different religions' views.

Homosexuality is attraction to members of the same sex. Heterosexuality is attraction to the opposite sex.

- 1) Many people in British society consider both heterosexuality and homosexuality to be natural and normal.
- 2) The Christian, Muslim and Jewish scriptures seem to say that homosexual sex is wrong — though the relevant bits are interpreted differently by some. They only condemn sex between men, not between women, which is hardly mentioned. (Though it's often frowned upon because male homosexuality is.)

The story of Sodom (see Genesis 19:3-25) is used by Christianity, Islam and Judaism to argue against homosexuality. The city's destroyed after the men in Sodom demand sex with two male angels God sent, which some people use to show that homosexuality's wrong. The angels say God sent them to destroy the city because of sin, so others say he was going to destroy it anyway and it wasn't because the men wanted sex with them.

- 3) The texts don't condemn people who have homosexual feelings but don't act upon them. This means some people who are homosexual and religious opt for celibacy (they don't have sexual relationships).
- 4) Some argue that as the scriptures were written in a different cultural context from ours, we can't apply their standards today. Generally, the religions condemn homophobia and they're becoming more accepting of homosexuality, but it isn't seen as ideal and many see homosexual sex as a sin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says "Under no circumstances can [homosexual acts] be approved" (2357). It urges homosexual people to stay celibate but says they shouldn't face any discrimination.

The Anglican Church is split on the issue. There are some openly gay clergy in the Church of England, but conservative members don't approve of homosexuality. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 suggests it's a sin.

Progressive Jews usually accept homosexuality. Homosexual people can become Progressive rabbis. Orthodox Jews tend to be against it — homosexual sex is forbidden in Leviticus 18:22 NIV, which calls it 'detestable'.

Many Muslims think the Qur'an bans homosexuality, due to the Sodom story (e.g. Qur'an 7:81 "you approach men with desire, instead of women ... you are a transgressing people"). Some Muslims disagree and argue that these teachings should be reinterpreted.

Within each religion there are different views...

...e.g. Orthodox and Progressive Jews differ when it comes to homosexuality. You often have to give two views in the exam and you get marks for the level of detail, so learn them well.

