

HOMOSEXUALITY

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Homosexuality is one of the 21st century's *hot* topics. The issue of gay marriage is being debated around the world. Strangely however many people do not understand what the word homosexuality means nor do they understand what Islam says about the issue. In this article we will define the term, look at scientific evidences related to homosexuality, discuss the view of other religious groups and finally see just what Islam says about the issue.

Homosexuality is the manifestation of sexual desire toward a member of one's own sex or the erotic activity with a member of the same sex. (The Greek word homos means *the same*). A lesbian is a female homosexual. More recently the term "gay" has come into popular use to refer to both sexes who are homosexuals.

The Merriam Webster free online dictionary, in its concise encyclopaedia defines homosexuality as sexual interest in and attraction to members of one's own sex. Female homosexuality is frequently referred to as lesbianism; the word gay is often used as an alternative for both "homosexual" and "lesbian," though it may (on occasion) refer specifically to male homosexuality.

The role of biological factors in the development of human sexual orientation is a widely debated topic. There is a wide spectrum of opinions about the effect genes, prenatal hormones and brain structure can have on the development of a heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual person. It seems unclear even to those who declare homosexuality an innate trait. At a PrideWorks[1] conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender minors it was stated that "sexuality is fluid" and "may change over time" however, homosexual activists continue to maintain that they are "born gay."

The latest research by the National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis (NIMBioS) suggests that homosexuality is not written in our DNA sequence, which explains why scientists have failed so far to find "gay genes," despite intensive investigations. Instead, they say, it is in certain modifications to how and when DNA is activated. These changes can have environmental roots, so are not normally permanent enough to be passed from parent to child. There is a post script however, because apparently, occasionally they are passed from parent to child. This is a branch of science called epigenetics.[2]

Throughout history particular cultures and societies have treated homosexuality in a number of ways. Homosexual behaviour has variously been encouraged, approved of, tolerated, punished, and banned. The three so called Abrahamic faiths Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have generally viewed homosexuality as sinful.

Attitudes toward homosexuality are generally in flux, due in part to increased political activism, however until the early 1970s many medical organizations, including the American Psychiatric Association, classified homosexuality as a mental illness. In the past couple of decades many Christian denominations have changed their views quite significantly and we now see homosexual ministers and an acceptance of same sex marriages, this however is not the case with the Catholic Church. In late 2012 the Vatican spoke out against any suggestions that traditional marriage had been defeated, following significant victories for gay marriage activists in the United States and Europe. In his Peace Day message the pope said, "(There is) a need to acknowledge and promote the natural structure of marriage as the union of a man and a woman in the face of attempts to make it equivalent to radically different types of union. Such attempts actually harm and help to destabilize marriage, obscuring its specific nature and its indispensable role in society." Earlier in the year the pontiff declared that same sex marriage threatened human dignity and the future of humankind.

Judaism is also struggling with modern day attitudes to homosexuality. The known history of homosexuality in Judaism begins in Leviticus, where intercourse between male homosexuals is a capital offence. "[A man] shall not lie with another man as [he would] with a woman, it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22). Thus Orthodoxy's foundational beliefs concerning the Divinity of Torah and the authority of halachah (received Jewish law) declare homosexuality (the sexual act) as a prohibited action.

In late 2012 the USA's largest rabbinic organization, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) formally withdrew its support of JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality). Judaism's approach to homosexuality has long been one of rehabilitation, as has the Mormon Church. In America Jews struggling with homosexual inclinations are encouraged to seek therapy to help them overcome unnatural desires. At this point it is interesting to note that both JONAH and various gay organisations refer to homosexuality, as fluid, a state that can fluctuate. Many ex-homosexuals agree that homosexuality is a choice.

Greg Quinlan, president of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays & Gays (PFOX), says, "I, as a former homosexual, along with tens of thousands of others who left homosexuality, [am] proof that it is not immutable; you can change." and "It is not innate; you are not born that way." There are also a number of Islamic ex-gay groups aimed at attempting to guide homosexuals towards heterosexuality; including the Straightway Foundation, a UK based ex-gay organization which works with homosexual Muslims seeking to eliminate their same-sex attraction.

In the Quran God explicitly condemns homosexuality.

“When their brother Lot said to them, “Will you not fear God? Verily! I am a trustworthy Messenger to you. So fear God and obey me. I ask no reward from you, for my only reward is with the Lord of the Worlds. Must you, unlike [other] people, lust after males and abandon the wives that God has created for you? You are exceeding all bounds” (Quran 26: 161-166)

There is a consensus among Islamic scholars that human beings are naturally heterosexual. Homosexuality is seen as a perverted deviation from the norm and all schools of thought and jurisprudence consider homosexual acts to be unlawful. Islam considers that our relaxed attitude in this day and age is a product of the times in which we live, where morals have been completely liquefied.

Homosexuality is considered the sin of the people of Prophet Lot^[3] and its Arabic word is *lutiyya*. *Liwat* is the word for sodomy, under which heading the topic of homosexuality is found in the books of Islamic jurisprudence. Under Islamic law both the (same-sex) sodomizer and sodomized are condemned to death. However it must be pointed out that the death penalty is applied only under strict conditions and rules of evidence, and only in places that live under Islamic law. There is no fixed prescribed punishment for lesbianism since sexual intercourse does not take place, however it is undoubtedly prohibited and sinful.

In words that are reminiscent of the Catholic pontiff speech in December 2012, the Quran tells us that marriage, a union between the two sexes is a combination of love, tenderness, and care, so that each finds in the other completeness, tranquillity, and support (Quran 30:21). According to the Quran it is through this spousal connection that men and women find comfort, peace of mind, satisfaction, and fulfilment. These relationships extend beyond the physical sexual contact and to psychological, spiritual relations.

Islam says unequivocally that even if one harbours an urge for homosexual contact the nobility of the human spirit is able to overcome such urges through dedication to pleasing God, and submitting willingly to His commands that are undoubtedly designed for our benefit.

Footnotes:

[1] A USA based conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender youth and their allies.

[2] For more detailed information
(<http://healthland.time.com/2012/12/13/new-insight-into-the-epigenetic-roots-of-homosexuality/>)

[3] (<http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1872/viewall/>)

The web address of this article:

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