



JUBILO

CONFLICT PREVENTION, ETHNIC INTEGRATION AND PEACE BUILDING
THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE



SEXUALITY
IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH



SPANDA

TEA FOR PEACE

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TEA FOR PEACE

SECTION ONE



SEXUALITY

*IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH*



SPANDA



TEA FOR PEACE
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SEXUALITY

INTRODUCTION

SEXUALITY IS THE PROPERTY THAT DISTINGUISHES ORGANISMS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR reproductive roles. Through sexuality, humans experience the erotic and express themselves as sexual beings. Sexuality has different aspects: *biologically*, it refers to the reproductive mechanism, as well as the basic biological drive that exists in all species and can encompass sexual intercourse and sexual contact in all its forms. The *emotional* aspect refers to the bond that exists between individuals and may be expressed through profound feelings or emotions. *Spiritually*, it refers to the union of paired entities in the formation of one body and soul.

Within the Abrahamic faiths, sexuality is believed to be a sacred gift from Y_h_w_h, God and Allah (God). Sexuality is experienced as a strong urge similar to hunger and thirst, which is apparent in all healthy human beings. It is believed that like all human urges, when not controlled, sexual desire can lead most people astray. Ultimately, sexual relations result in the reproduction and survival of the human race where the capacity for self-control enables the regulation of this behaviour. According to the faiths, marriage is the only acceptable outlet for humans to express their sexuality and to avoid temptations and sins that can occur as a result of sexual desire. Therefore, marriage is considered the only suitable and secure framework to adequately nurture and develop sexuality. It is recognised that sexuality does not only encompass the physical act, but also the spiritual and emotional elements. As sex is vulnerable to abuse and misconduct, a healthy sexuality and a strong family environment are among the most necessary elements for human happiness and well being.

- ¶ In Judaism, sex is an act of immense significance that requires commitment and responsibility, which is ensured through marriage. Jewish law (*Halakha*) forbids sexual conduct short of intercourse outside of marriage, recognising that such intimacy will inevitably lead to intercourse.
- ¶ In Christianity, the body is considered to be God's temple. Therefore, it must only be used according to moral dictates. Christians hold the view



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that sex is a mysterious and powerful act, and that it ought to be subject to boundaries, such as marriage.

¶ In Islam, sexuality is considered a natural part of existence as well as one of the main human instincts. Islam teaches that an individual must not be led by his or her natural impulses, but should learn to manage them in a wholesome manner, exclusively reserving any sexual relations to the confines of marriage.

8 Despite the emphasis on marital sex within each of the faiths, non-marital sexual relations are rapidly becoming the norm. Particularly in the Western world, marriage is no longer considered a necessary prerequisite to sexual relations. The concepts of love and commitment have become disengaged from that of sexual relations. Moreover, in today's consumer driven society, sex is regarded as a successful marketing tool. The media constantly makes use of sexual imagery, which only serves to further desensitise and dehumanise the concept of sexuality. With the changing perception of marriage and commitment in the process of obtaining a sexual partner, the necessity of marriage for achieving this end comes into question. In this context, areas of particular significance include sexual health, sex education, teenage sex, chastity, fornication and casual sex, sexually explicit material, masturbation and sexual identity.

S E X U A L H E A L T H

Sexual health is defined as the acceptance and ability to achieve a satisfactory expression of one's sexuality. Therefore, it implies that people are able to have responsible, satisfying and safer sex, and that they have both the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often they choose to do so. The spread of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) is a modern day epidemic that can cause infertility, increase the risk of certain forms of cancer, brain damage, heart disease, birth defects and death.

STIs occur as a result of sexual activity that involves the exchange of bodily fluids, and are spread by contact with infected bodily fluids. STIs can be prevented in a number of ways, including the use of vaccinations, lifestyle choices, safer sex practices and hygienic measures. The risk of contracting an STI is directly linked to the choices one makes about their sexual activity. In general, the larger the number of sexual partners a person has, the greater the risk of contracting an STI. Among sexually active people, the risk of contracting an

infection is lower for those in monogamous relationships. It is important to know the health status of a prospective sexual partner, as sexual activity with anonymous partners increases the risk of contracting an STI.

In the religious context, sexual health and the prevention of disease is prescribed by means of abstinence until marriage. Sexual activity between husband and wife, neither of whom have had other sexual partners, runs no risk of spreading sexually transmitted diseases, unless they also participate in other potentially harmful activities, such as drug use. Abstinence, thereby avoiding sexual activity altogether, is the most effective and guaranteed method of avoiding sexual infection. All Abrahamic faiths share the concern that by supporting the use of contraception, they will promote sexual promiscuity and extra marital sex, rather than prevent infection.

¶ Among traditional interpretations of the Torah, active prevention of pregnancy is in violation of the commandment "Be fruitful and multiply." However, the use of contraception *per se* and the concept of planned parenthood or the spacing of births do not pose a problem. Judaism is more concerned with birth control methods; in particular, some methods are not permitted because of the injunction against "the destruction of seed." Contemporary Orthodox rabbinical authority has expressed no objection to the use of the 'pill'. Nonetheless, the use of condoms is still forbidden, as are some uterine devices.

¶ In Christianity, both men and women are to remain virgins until marriage, and married couples are to remain faithful to each other. While the use of condoms to combat sexually transmitted infections has not been specifically addressed by the Catholic doctrine, the Church has prohibited the use of condoms even in parts of the globe where HIV and AIDS are widespread. Alternatively, sexual abstinence is encouraged to combat the spread of the disease. The traditional teaching of chastity outside of marriage and fidelity within it, is prescribed as the only sure way of preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS.

¶ In Islam, there are valid reasons permitting couples to use contraception, however a distinction is made between permanent and temporary methods of contraception. Permanent methods of family planning are prohibited, as they involve changing human physiology, and temporary methods of contraception may or may not be prohibited, depending on their physiological side effects. Taking birth control pills is forbidden, whereas *coitus interruptus* and condoms are not. Furthermore, Islam places a very high

emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness. This requirement, together with sexual chastity before marriage and faithfulness during marriage, is believed to minimise the risks of diseases associated with the sexual organs.

S E X E D U C A T I O N

10 The global increase in teenage pregnancies and the spread of STIs has resulted in a heightened focus and provoked debate concerning sex education. The debate centres on the effectiveness of a purely scientific and morally neutral sex curriculum as opposed to an essentially religiously driven abstinence programme. There are no arguments that abstinence would reduce teen pregnancy rates and sexually transmitted diseases. However, the issue lies within the accuracy and effectiveness of such programmes that focus exclusively on abstinence, and whether such curricula in effect impose religious beliefs on public school students. The difficulty lies in the uncertainty and lack of consensus as to the definition and understanding attributed to sex education. Sex education can incorporate the anatomy, physiology of the human body, the sexual act, reproduction, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy.

Within each of the Abrahamic faiths, there is a strong desire to bridge the gap between the scientific and moral approach to sex education. It is believed that both extremes are incomplete and that one cannot be taught without teaching the other. To consign this subject fully to the department of science is to treat sex as a purely physical activity and thus rob it of its emotional and spiritual dimension. On the other hand, to present it as a moral issue alone can be equally lopsided.

- ¶ In Judaism there is no consensus about the most appropriate method of sex education. Traditional denominations argue that the injunction to abstain derives from a sense of morality and religious commitment, therefore, arguments based on statistics and science are of little or no value. Liberal groups, on the other hand, support the provision of a curriculum that incorporates science and Jewish law. There is concern that due to the lack of clarity, children will receive mixed messages from their religious authority, in comparison to the crystal clear messages sent out by the media.
- ¶ In Christianity, emphasis is placed on the parental role to guide children according to Christian values; therefore, education begins at home and is not confined to the classroom. Christians often disagree with the naturalistic assumptions frequently made in relation to human sexuality and sex education. It is believed

that God endowed human beings with free will and the capacity of self-control. Young people must be taught to exercise self-control in every aspect of their lives, particularly regarding sexuality. Sex education should therefore inform them about the dangers of premarital sex and the wisdom of obeying God's commands regarding human sexuality.

- ¶ The Qur'an places great emphasis on acquiring knowledge; on this basis, education on matters relating to sex is accepted and encouraged. With regard to who should teach sex education, it is held that everyone has a role to play and that parents have to assume a more responsible role than anyone else. Parents cannot influence the sex education taught by the media or in schools. However, they are in a position to supplement their children with an ethical and moral dimension within the backdrop of family love and responsibility. In general, sex is considered a private subject and can be difficult to broach, as a result young people may fail to fully understand the seriousness and respect it calls for.

T E E N A G E S E X

11 Teenage sex is a universal concern. The issue with teenage sex, aside from the risk of pregnancy and contracting an STI, is that teens are often unequipped to with the overwhelming emotions that sex can incur. Moreover, when sex is experienced too early and without the proper emotional preparation, it can be an unfulfilling experience. The most common reason why teenagers become sexually active is due to external pressures in their daily lives, mainly from school, television and music. A lack of self-esteem and confidence in one's physical appearance can play a pivotal role in succumbing to these pressures. Due to their youth, teenagers are also at a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Therefore, it is essential that teenagers are fully informed and prepared for the physical, psychological and emotional effects that come with sex. Indicators reveal that forbidding sex or invoking fear as a means of prevention does not have the desired impact. Teenagers respond better when their intelligence and ability to make decisions is respected. Like adults, they are sexual beings, and how they come to acquire a healthy view of their own sexuality depends a lot, on how their parents and adult leaders respond to and communicate that knowledge.

Each of the Abrahamic faiths focus on the responsibility of the parents, or adult role model, in combating the problems associated with teenage pregnancy.

¶ In Judaism, the principal responsibility of a parent is to protect his or her child. Before a parent loves, inspires or educates their child, he or she will protect them from harm. Parents must ensure that they play an active role in their children's lives and guide them towards positive choices. This relationship must be nurtured and maintained in the everyday, loving interactions that serve to keep the lines of communication open, and instil respect and love between parent and child.

¶ Christianity encourages open communication between adult and child. The objective is not to focus on preventing teenagers from having sex but to help them choose abstinence for themselves, as a principle as well as a practice. For that to happen, adults need to establish a rapport with teens by communicating availability, acceptance, and love, whilst also providing a safe environment for ongoing dialogue.

¶ Islam focuses on the need for close familial ties in counteracting the teenage desire to become sexually active. A lack of love and appreciation at home could result in an emotional detachment from the family bond, which in turn can lead to an attachment elsewhere.

C H A S T I T Y

The term chastity relates to the behaviour of a man or woman, which is considered acceptable to the particular ethical norms of a given culture, civilization, or religion. In the Western world, the term has become closely associated with sexual abstinence, especially before marriage. However, the term remains applicable to persons of any status, single or married, clerical or lay, and has implications beyond sexual temperance. To live a chaste life also constitutes refraining from the use of sexually explicit material, preventing impure thoughts and personifying human dignity by being driven purely by reason and not controlled by instinct. A further value is the importance of developing emotional ties and feelings during courtship. Chastity allows for friendship and respect to grow into habits during the dating process, so that by the time marriage begins, and sexual relations come into play, the fundamental aspect of love will already be established between the husband and wife.

Each Abrahamic faith prescribes chastity as a prerequisite to marriage and the degree of importance and emphasis placed on the chaste lifestyle over and above marital conjugal obligations varies among them.

¶ In Judaism, chastity is not viewed as avoidance of sex or an active sex life, but only of illicit sexual activity. Whilst living a chaste life before marriage is crucial, elevating chastity above marriage is not an acceptable Jewish practice. Sex is not considered incompatible with the holiness required of a priest or nun, a concession to human weakness for others, but is considered a legitimate good, and is even a commandment (*mitzvah*) in and of itself. Judaism has no ideal of abstinence for particular clerical groups; on the contrary, it is virtually expected for men in religious functions (rabbis) to be married.

¶ The underlying premise of Christian chastity is the need for sacrifice. In theology, sacrifice is commonly defined as the surrender of something precious out of love for God; in this case abstaining from sexual activities until marriage. Certain Christian denominations practice clerical celibacy, in which men and women in the clergy are obliged to remain unmarried and observe perfect continence, thus refraining completely from sexual intercourse. It is believed that a clergyman is in essence married and devoted to the Church and therefore cannot obtain another spouse.

¶ In Islam, chastity is considered a healthy virtue, and unchaste behaviour an unhealthy vice. The principle of preventing unchaste behaviour is to avoid the activities and company that may lead to such conduct. Loneliness and idleness are considered the two most predominant conditions that render people likely to behave unchastely. Darkness and seclusion from the public is believed to incite slippery behaviour among people, therefore Islamic law advocates that its followers occupy their time in good pursuits and conduct their behaviour in broad daylight. Modern society and technologies can entice the weak and the vulnerable to fall into bad company and risky temptations. Therefore, in an effort to guard one's chastity it is essential to pay close attention to these concerns and protect youths from the perils they provoke. In Islam, a chaste person has a clean mind and body, high integrity and self-respect, a modest appearance and composure, unquestionable behaviour, a legitimate sexual relationship, and nothing to hide. Unchaste behaviour can have grave spiritual and legal consequences.

F O R N I C A T I O N A N D C A S U A L S E X

Fornication can be defined as voluntary sexual intercourse between unmarried persons, whereas casual sex denotes sexual activity that is distinct from a

romantic relationship. The main difference between the two is that fornication allows for some form of relationship to exist between the two partners, and casual sex simply involves the act of intercourse itself and the actors may have no connection or relationship whatsoever. Both tend to focus more specifically on physical rather than emotional gratification. Today, particularly in the Western world, society is sex-saturated and the concept of casual sex is glamorised by the media in the advertising and entertainment world. The promotion of non-marital and casual sex is often depicted as a false reality in terms of the health risks involved and reduces the intensity of the emotional affects that sexual relations can generate. Furthermore, the failure to account for your partner's sexual history can increase the risk of contracting an STI.

¶ Although Judaism prescribes restricting intercourse to marriage, the reality is that many Jewish followers do not abide by this rule. Under such circumstances, liberal Jewish movements argue that the violation of one Jewish norm does not exclude a person from abiding by other Jewish standards. On the contrary, those specific values that lead Judaism to advocate marriage, honesty, modesty, health and safety, love, and holiness, arguably still apply to sexual relations outside of marriage, but are perceived to be more difficult to achieve in that context. Even though their behaviour will not be ideal by Jewish standards, particularly in Orthodox Judaism, if followers can make those values real in their lives, they will be preserving their Jewishness and their own mental and physical health, as well as that of their partner to some extent.

¶ In Christianity, any sexual relationship outside of marriage qualifies as adultery. Fornication is considered a sin, as it is in violation of God's temple – the body – which is where the Holy Spirit dwells. Like the basic needs of food, water and shelter, the sexual drive is very powerful and is not to be underestimated. It is believed that the human sex drive is not intended to torment man, but to be satisfied in the right time and manner, within a secure and loving marital relationship.

¶ In Islam, all forms of sex outside of marriage are considered criminal, not only against the individual but against the whole of society. Fornication is deemed the highest form of sin (*zina*). The Quranic approach is to ban all activities that arouse the sex. This means that not only is illegal sex prohibited but also anything which leads to illegal sex, such as mixing freely with members of the opposite sex, provocative clothing, nudity, obscenity and

pornography. The dress code for both men and women is to protect them from temptations and desires by onlookers who may fall into sin.

S E X U A L L Y E X P L I C I T M A T E R I A L A N D M A S T U R B A T I O N

Sexually explicit material (video, photography, written material) presents sexual content without obscuring or censoring it. The term is not very specific and is often used as a euphemism for pornography, and what is considered sexually explicit varies from culture to culture. With the widespread use of the internet, pornography has become easily and readily accessible. The porn industry argues that sexually explicit material is beneficial to society as it serves to 'safely' redirect sexual impulses that might otherwise be steered in a dangerous or illegal direction. Opponents vehemently disagree, claiming that pornography encourages and causes sexual addiction, abuse, violence and rape. Moreover, pornography reduces women to mere sexual objects, which dehumanises and degrades them. Pornography is often used as a sexual stimulant alongside masturbation. Masturbation has proven health and psychological benefits, including: reducing the risk of prostate cancer, reducing stress levels, reducing the risk of depression, creating a higher sense of self worth, reducing the risk of coronary heart disease and lowering blood pressure. Furthermore, it can be argued that masturbation provides an outlet for unmarried individuals to dispel their sexual needs without engaging in sexual intercourse and running the risk of pregnancy and disease. It is argued, however, that masturbation can develop into a compulsive sexual addiction.

The Abrahamic faiths believe that sexually explicit material and self-masturbation results in unchaste behaviour and sexual addiction. They each take the view that once sex is stripped of all emotion, it is reduced to a purely animalistic, biological and thus unfulfilling act.

¶ In Judaism, pornography is considered sinful as it reduces human beings to sexual objects and reduces sex to an animalistic instinct. The Torah prohibits the spilling of a man's seed and therefore prohibits male masturbation. This is based on the belief that the God-given ability to produce life should not be wasted. The issue is, however, somewhat less clear for women as spilling the seed obviously does not occur during female masturbation. Female masturbation is nonetheless considered impure in Judaism.

- ¶ Whilst the Bible does not specifically address the issue of pornography, it is generally accepted as sinful within the Christian community, on the basis that adultery is committed simply by looking at another woman lustfully. Therefore, it seems logical that adultery is also committed by gazing at sexually explicit material in an equally passionate manner. The Church has not officially accepted nor has it rejected the morality of masturbation. Due to the social stigma attached to this issue, it has been reluctantly, if at all, addressed by any of the Christian denominations. Moreover, they are in divergence of opinion as to whether masturbation benefits the sexually deprived or the sexually depraved. The conservative view is that masturbation is sinful because of the sexual fantasies it generates, and it is unchaste, impure, addictive and a misuse of God's intention for sexuality.
- ¶ In Islam, pornography in all its forms is absolutely forbidden and is considered a grave sin. Pornography is believed to cause psychological and social injury. Furthermore, God commands Muslims to spend their time wisely and fruitfully. Time spent examining pornography is considered wasteful and in ignorance of God's wishes. Masturbation in the form of self-stimulation is forbidden. The Qur'an makes it very clear that any sexual gratification outside of marriage is considered a transgression of the law of God and also implies that sex is an act which involves two people.

S E X U A L I D E N T I T Y

The term sexual identity encompasses two distinct and separate concepts. Sexual identity can describe a person's sexual orientation or can be based on sexual characteristics incorporating physical biology, which are closely related to gender identity. The topic of sexual identity incorporates homosexuality and transgenderism. Homosexuality denotes a sexual attraction to persons of the same sex, whilst transgenderism refers to persons in conflict with their inner gender identity and that of his or her physical or genetic sex. Transgender and homosexual individuals are at great risk of hate crimes and discrimination. The drive to expand civil rights to include both groups is gaining momentum. To be diagnosed with gender identity disorder there must be a strong desire to be the other sex and a persistent discomfort with one's own body. There are also intersexed (hermaphrodite) individuals, which physically possess developed male and female reproductive organs. A transgendered or intersexed person may or may not have had sex reassignment surgery, and he or she may or may not have homosexual tendencies. Both transsexuals and

homosexuals argue that their sexual identity is predisposed at birth and not learned or chosen. Today, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities are fighting for recognition by religions and equality in the eyes of the law, particularly in relation to civil rights and marriage.

In the religious context, opponents argue that homosexuality contradicts the nature of sex, which is designed by God as sex between a man and a woman. Furthermore, there is a belief that homosexuality promotes promiscuity and it is therefore seen as a health risk and a threat to the institution of marriage. Proponents believe that God did not intend man to be alone, since gays and lesbians can only develop a relationship with a person of the same gender; it is clearly God's intention that they form partnerships. Liberal religious movements believe that same-sex marriage should be legalised, as they claim that sexual activity performed whether within the confines of a committed homosexual or heterosexual relationship is to be recognised and welcomed. Most religious authorities are undecided on the issue of transgenderism. Conservative movements believe that giving transgendered people recognition essentially disrupts God's plan and implies that God can make mistakes. They believe that psychological sexual identity confusion is developed and learned by circumstance and not predisposed at birth. Intersex individuals are considered to have a curable birth defect and issues of gender identity are not a concern. Alternatively, liberal groups believe that God made no mistake when he created transgendered individuals, who assert that they should be treated with equality and tolerance, and that their sexual orientation be given adequate recognition and treatment.

- ¶ A vast majority of Jewish denominations are progressive in their approach to sexual identity, although traditionally, the Torah forbids same-sex relationships. Presently, the reform movement does not condemn homosexual sex, and openly gay people are eligible for admittance into reform rabbinical schools. Additionally, the reform movement approves of rabbinic officiating at same-sex marriages and commitment ceremonies. However, they do not consider same-sex marriage as tantamount to heterosexual marriage. Whereas heterosexual marriage is referred to as holy (*kiddushin*), many reform rabbis object to applying this term to homosexual relationships. The conservative movement's Law Committee voted to accept two contradictory positions (*teshuvot*) on homosexuality, one reaffirming the status quo and the other affirming change. Conservative institutions may choose to continue not to permit commitment ceremonies and not to hire openly gay or lesbian rabbis and cantors; alternatively, they may choose to do so. Both

positions are considered valid. The reform and conservative movements are welcoming transgendered Jews. These progressive movements believe that those who claim God's creation prohibits change are closing their eyes to conversion, and to transplants as well as many other medical procedures that do in fact alter God's creation.

¶ Christian denominations are split over demands for official recognition and acceptance of homosexuality. The majority interpret biblical verses on homosexuality to denote that God created the heterosexual family and that same-sex relationships contradict God's design for marriage and therefore violate His will. The Church does not accept that God creates a person with the genitals of a male and the mind of a female or vice versa. Gender identity is believed to be a developmental issue that is learned after birth and the human body is regarded as a precious gift from God. However, transsexual individuals perceive their bodies to be a mistake denying their 'true selves', which resides in their mind and emotions. This conflicts with the Bible's view, which maintains that the body is the sacred expression of God.

¶ Homosexuality, as well as sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage, is prohibited in Islam. Muslims recognise that human beings are capable of many forms of sexual expression, orientation and identification. However, the potential for behaviour, such as homosexuality, does not mean that its practice is lawful in the eyes of God. Therefore, individuals are expected to control themselves and not act on their desires if such action is contrary to the guidelines of Islam. The male whose organs of masculinity are complete, and the female whose organs of femininity are complete, are not legally allowed to change their identities to that of the opposite sex, and any attempt to achieve such transexuality is considered a crime. This is because it is considered an alteration of God's design. Those who possess the organs of both sexes, should however, receive medical treatment and their sex should be assigned on the basis of the more dominant gender, with the recessive organ being removed. This form of transgender is considered an illness; hence the treatment aims to cure and treat the illness and not to change God's creation.

C O N C L U S I O N

The issues pertaining to sexuality emphasise the commonality between the Abrahamic faiths. Sexuality is considered a God given trait that can be controlled

by the will and in other species is governed solely by instinct. According to the faiths, sex is only to be practised with God's blessing within a committed, loving and marital relationship. To ensure sexual health and prevent the spread of sexual infection, the faiths prescribe abstinence until marriage as the only guaranteed solution.

The modern reality of non-marital sex and its consequences on society needs to be addressed and a solution found. This calls for a revival and reengagement with the belief that all sexual relations must be reserved for the marital bed, or alternatively, the faiths need to adapt to an evolving understanding of relationships and lay emphasis on education and acceptance, rather than marriage. The faiths believe that comprehensive sex education requires both scientific and spiritual dimensions. It is believed that to combat the issue of teenage sex, parents, family members and adult role models must actively seek to open the lines of communication, and to guide and educate teenagers in the realities and difficulties associated with sex. Each of the faiths prescribes chastity as a precondition to marriage and promotes chaste attitudes and lifestyle choices.

The faiths prohibit fornication and casual sex on the basis that marriage is the most suitable environment to foster and develop a healthy sexual and emotional relationship. Moreover, sexually explicit material and self-masturbation result in unchaste behaviour, sexual addiction, and the degradation of women, as well as reducing sex to an unemotional, biological activity. Sexual identity confusion incorporates both homosexual and transgender individuals.

The faiths have come to very little consensus among and within their respective creeds. The basis of the divergence lies in the question of whether an individual is born either homosexual or transgender, or whether these attributes are learned and developed socially. Opponents fear that by giving recognition to these groups, it will imply that God made a mistake and interfere with divine creation. Proponents do not believe God made any error and that therefore these individuals deserve equality and recognition. It is hoped that highlighting these commonalities within the topic of sexuality will encourage an open dialogue that will promote mutual acceptance and tolerance. †

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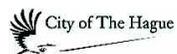
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