

PROGRESSIVE ISLAM IN
PRACTICE



MUSLIMS FOR
PROGRESSIVE VALUES

SEXUAL DIVERSITY & ISLAM PT 2

BY DR. SCOTT SIRAJ AL-HAQQ KUGLE | ADAPTED FOR MPV
BY TYNAN POWER

@MPVUSA | #ISLAMISJUSTICE



DOES THE QUR'AN TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY?

Not exactly. Sexuality is a modern concept. The Qur'an refers to sex acts. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and early scholars also talked about sexual acts and desire. However, classical scholars did not talk about the difference between sexual acts and identity.



COULD SEXUAL DIVERSITY BE PART OF GOD'S PLAN?

Yes. The Qur'an celebrates diversity. It even protects diversity of religion, by instructing Muslims to protect other religious groups, such as Jews, living under Muslim rule. The Qur'an says that variety in human appearance, culture, language and even religion were created by God's divine wisdom. We know that homosexuality exists, among human beings with free will. It also exists among animals—and the Qur'an says animals do not have free will, they are only obedient to God. In the Qur'an, Surat al-Rum (Qur'an 30:22) says God has created human beings with different *alwan*, a word that can mean both "colors" and "tastes." Human beings certainly have different tastes in many things—including sexuality. It seems clear that sexual diversity must also be a type of human diversity that was created by God's divine wisdom.



DOES THE QUR'AN SPECIFICALLY MENTION SEXUAL DIVERSITY?

Yes. Surat al-Nur (Qur'an 24:31-24:33) specifically mentions "men who are not in need of women." These "men who are not in need of women" might have been gay or asexual, but by definition they were not heterosexual men. They are not judged or condemned anywhere in the Qur'an.



DOES ISLAM SAY ANYTHING SPECIFICALLY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

No. First of all, we can not say “Islam says...” or “the Islamic law says...” because only people speak. Islam itself can not say anything. So where can we look for answers? We can look in the Qur’an, which is the basis of Islam. The Qur’an does not even mention the word “homosexuality,” though. It does not refer to gays, lesbians, or bisexuals. In fact, scholars had to come up with a term for homosexuality in Arabic. They came up with *al-shudhudh al-jinsi*, a phrase that means “sexually rare or unusual.” If the Qur’an mentioned homosexuality by name, scholars would have simply used that term.



DID THE PROPHET KNOW OF ANY KINDS OF SEXUAL OR GENDER DIVERSITY?

Yes. There were men in Arab society at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who fit the Qur'an's description of "men who are not in need of women." A detailed study of early Islamic literature also showed that the Prophet accepted men called *mukhanath*, or men who were seen as "acting like women". Today, they might be considered transgender or they may have been gay men whose sexual orientation was seen as making them "like women." The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) seemed to recognize these men were different from others. His wife, Umm Salama, had a *mukhanath* friend named Hit. Unlike other men, Hit was allowed to enter both men's space and women's space, including the private women's space of the Prophet's household.



DID THE PROPHET EVER PUNISH ANYONE FOR HOMOSEXUALITY OR HOMOSEXUAL ACTS?

No. After the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) died, his companions once discussed whether to punish a person for homosexuality. If the Prophet (PBUH) had ever done so, his companions would have simply referred to his decision. Since they didn't know what to do, we know that the Prophet gave them no example to follow.



DID THE PROPHET EVER PUNISH ANYONE FOR HOMOSEXUALITY OR HOMOSEXUAL ACTS? II

In the case of Hit, Umm Salama's *mukhanath* friend, the Prophet (PBUH) did "punish" him in a way, but not for his sexuality. He found out that Hit described a woman's body to a man—which he could do because he was able to enter both women's and men's spaces. At that point, the Prophet (PBUH) told his wife not to allow Hit into the women's quarters anymore. However, he did not criticize Hit for his sexuality or for "acting like women"—he only criticized Hit for not respecting the privacy of women.



DOESN'T THE QUR'AN SAY THAT HOMOSEXUALITY IS UNNATURAL?

No. Using words like “natural” and “unnatural” as ways to describe sexuality is something that was started by European Christians. When today’s Muslims use this argument to say homosexuality is against Islam, they are actually borrowing ideas from European Christians. The conclusion that homosexuality is “unnatural” is not based on anything in the Qur’an. Again, the word “homosexuality” is never even used and does not exist in the Qur’an!



ARE THERE WORDS USED IN THE QUR'AN TO TALK ABOUT SEXUAL BEHAVIOR THAT IS NOT ALLOWED?

Yes, there are a few: *Fahisha* is a word that is used to mean “doing something that is not allowed” or “transgression.” *Fahisha* can mean something that is sexual or something that is not sexual. *Zina* is the only word used in the Qur'an for a transgression that is definitely sexual. *Zina* means “adultery.” The words *fisq* or *fusuq* mean “corruption.” They are used to describe the state of mind of someone who is doing something that is not allowed—in other words, someone who is committing *fahisha*. Some scholars try to connect *fahisha*, *fisq* and homosexuality. However this connection is not clear from the Qur'an. Some scholars also try to connect *zina* and homosexual acts, by saying homosexuality is like adultery. The problem is that this connection does not exist in the Qur'an—the Qur'an simply does not say that! Human jurists are the ones who say there is a connection.