



Islam and the LGBT Question: Reframing the Narrative

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The following article is based on a video presentation by Dr. Carl Sharif El-Tobgui on Blogging Theology with Paul Williams (July 17, 2022) and has been slightly modified and annotated for readability in collaboration with the presenter. The link to the original presentation is referenced below.¹

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Originally published in 2022. This version was updated with new research and revisions in 2025.

¹ Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, “Islam and ‘LGBTQ’: Gender, Sexuality, Morality & Identity,” Blogging Theology, YouTube video, June 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4aHFvrCul&t=39s>.

Introduction

On May 17, 2022, which marked Canada's annual International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, a poster, promoted under the auspices of a Canadian university, depicted two Muslim women in headscarves on the verge of kissing.² A number of other Canadian universities and high schools allowed the poster to circulate as a way of promoting "diversity in love." The poster also featured a biracial homosexual couple, a black heterosexual couple, and a couple consisting of a fully-abled and a disabled person, alongside the two Muslim women, with each couple engaging in a romantic act. Many Canadian Muslims were enraged after the release of this poster, and rightfully so considering the appropriation of a patent Muslim symbol (i.e., the hijab) for a cause that is explicitly prohibited in Islam. The Muslim community organized collectively and submitted a petition signed by thousands of individuals, from young students in high school to leaders of Muslim organizations, demanding that the university take down the poster. One Muslim wrote to the university, "Shame on you [...] for such an insulting mockery post to my religion."

Soon after, LGBTQ Nation published an article titled "University pulls image of women in hijabs kissing after Muslim community protests."³ The university initially pushed back against the petition, conceding that the topic was "complex and intersectional" but insisting that the poster would remain. The LGBTQ Nation article ended with the following statement: "Muslim culture isn't inherently anti-gay: the Qur'an says nothing about homosexuality (unlike the Bible); Islamic history is filled with texts openly depicting homosexuality as a beautiful, matter-of-fact thing; and more American Muslims support same-sex marriage than do Christian Evangelicals, Protestants, and Mormons, according to a Pew Research Study."⁴ The framing of the article as a whole, from its title to its final paragraph, portrays Muslims who objected to the poster as unnecessarily "homophobic": they

² Adan Butt, "Western University: Remove the Depiction of Hijab from Your LGBTQ Post," Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/western-university-remove-the-depiction-of-hijab-from-your-lgbtq-post>.

³ Daniel Villarreal, "University Pulls Image of Women in Hijabs Kissing after Muslim Community Protests," LGBTQ Nation, May 19, 2022,

<https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2022/05/university-pulls-image-women-hijabs-kissing-muslim-community-protests/>.

⁴ Villarreal, "University Pulls Image."

were protesting a beautiful thing that their own religious scripture supposedly does not condemn and that their own history has allegedly celebrated for centuries.

In the end, however, the university acquiesced to the demands of the Muslim community and pulled the poster down. There is an uplifting lesson here. The Muslim community—starting with the young students who had the intelligence and awareness to decipher the subversion of Islamic teachings and the courage to raise their voices against it and the Muslim organizations who came to their aid—is to be congratulated. Even against the aggressive agenda of the cultural, political, and capitalist elites, the Muslim community scored a small but significant victory for their faith and in favor of truth and reason.

As elaborated below, Islam’s prohibition of homosexual acts is categorical, and its teachings on gender relations and sexual norms are foundational and inseparable from belief in Allah and His revelation. There is no room in Islam for the new direction in which the liberal culture appears to be dragging the West and, through its coercive ideological apparatus, the world as a whole. It is a culture that denies the natural and divinely ordained norms of union between men and women, erasing sexual differences in favor of a utopian, ideological, anti-religious, and anti-scientific androgyny. One would have to reject Islamic guidance root and branch in order to incorporate this radical gender egalitarianism. This agenda requires, and has already mobilized, rigorous social engineering domestically, as well as neocolonial wars and anti-religious propaganda in the Muslim world in particular and the Global South generally. Muslims must, therefore, establish and advocate for the Islamic paradigm of gender and sexuality over and against modern and postmodern perversions, while also supporting those Muslims who acknowledge orthodox Islamic teachings, but who struggle with same-sex attractions and/or gender dysphoria, in their struggle to live lives of virtue in conformity with the will of Allah and the teachings of Islam.

We cannot explore the Islamic paradigm of sexual morality without first understanding where morality itself comes from. A theocentric worldview, such as that of Islam, takes God as the ultimate source of morality. Our very purpose for existence is to uphold God’s command to the best of our ability: “I have not

created jinn and humankind but to worship Me.”⁵ We maintain that God and His Messenger alone are the legislators of what is right and wrong, permitted and prohibited. Allah states in the Qur’an, “It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their affair. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed strayed into a plain error.”⁶ Islamic morality is not arbitrary; although the divine command is at the heart of our rich tradition, Muslims have long engaged in rational reflection on the wisdom of divine creation and the divine word for centuries, producing a comprehensive discourse on the consequences of acts for the individual and the community, and incorporating it into the *fiqh* tradition.

The “diversity in love” poster, discussed above, reminds us that over the last couple of decades, the perspectives and claims of the LGBT movement have become not merely tolerated but championed. They are now pervasive, ubiquitous, and irresistible. Within one generation, LGBT ideas and behaviors have gone from being taboo to mainstream. The questions we need to ask are:

1. How did we get here and why should we care?
2. How can we build a conceptual framework on gender, sex, and morality based on Islamic sources?

Given the prodigious changing of the cultural winds, it is no longer sufficient for Muslims—and others who disapprove of same-sex relationships—simply to say that they do not approve of homosexual behavior in the same way that they do not approve of drinking or premarital sex between men and women. The discourse on homosexuality has shifted so quickly and radically that the old Muslim defenses and attitudes (“It is not our problem,” “How is this different for us Muslims from fornication or wine-drinking?,” or “Live and let live”) have become ineffective and we are confronted with grave challenges. Most well-meaning and sincere Muslims are either complacent, helpless, or both. They fail to realize that unlike the haram acts of drinking alcohol and illicit (heterosexual) sex, the affirmation of same-sex relationships and transgenderism is presented as a positive moral cause, undergirded by contentious metaphysical assumptions regarding, among other

⁵ Qur’an 51:56.

⁶ Qur’an 33:36.

things, the human self, the place of sex and sexuality in human identity, and the proper balance between the individual and society. It is a discourse that appeals to universal notions of human dignity, justice, respect, and autonomy. Only by engaging with these issues holistically can we properly understand and respond to this challenge.

Throughout the past century, so much has changed deep within our conscious understanding that we must expend considerable effort to understand that we, as Muslims in the contemporary West, are dealing with two very different conceptual paradigms. Consider the common occurrence of a young Western Muslim saying to an Islamic religious authority, “I think I’m gay. What does Islam have to say about that?” The shaykh may simply respond, “It’s haram (prohibited)!” The youth in this scenario, however, is asking about an individual and political identity situated within a paradigm without truth or metaphysics—a paradigm that views sexual feeling as being as close to unassailable truth as one can get. To our young, college-going American Muslim, who generally champions liberal causes in the name of justice and love, to say that “being gay” is haram might be like saying that being Arab or South Asian is haram. There is miscommunication between the two because each is operating from a different paradigm. On the one hand, we have the Islamic worldview as it pertains to morality—and to gender and sexuality in particular—and, on the other hand, we have the modern/post-modern secular worldview. The two start from diametrically opposed assumptions.

This article sets out to distinguish these worldviews before exploring more specifically the Islamic paradigm on gender, sex, and sexual morality. It then discusses homosexuality and transgenderism from two angles: from the Islamic moral and legal (*shar‘ī*) considerations, followed by a discussion of how to support Muslims who struggle with same-sex attractions. By doing so, we hope to illustrate the urgency of challenging the contemporary discourse around sex, gender, and sexuality and equipping ourselves with the proper conceptual framework to better help Muslims struggling with this issue. We conclude with additional resources on the subject that may be of help in providing further direction.

The proliferation of the LGBT movement

Since the 2010s, there has been a significant growth of LGBT literature geared towards youth in particular. *The Lumberjanes*, for example, is a popular comic book series consisting of seventy-five issues. Its protagonist is a Navajo trans woman (i.e., a biological male who has transitioned to being female) with two gay fathers. In the year 2010, there were approximately ten books published by mainstream publishers for young adults with LGBT characters.⁷ By 2016, a mere six years later, that number had climbed to eighty. We also now see the release of an annual “Rainbow Book List” that provides updates on LGBT-themed books for children of all ages—from infants all the way up to 18-year-olds. Public libraries and elementary schools throughout the United States even host “drag queen story hours,” where men dressed in flamboyant wigs and makeup read to children and, in the process, inculcate highly sexualized caricatures in their young minds.

The same representational shift has occurred in film. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) found that of the 118 major studio films released in 2019, twenty-two (18.6%) contained characters who identified as LGBT. Furthermore, more than 250 LGBT characters were counted in children’s cartoons dating back to 1983. Looking at the data from 2010 through 2020—especially in the latter five years of this period—the representation of overtly queer characters skyrockets.⁸ This increase correlates with the US Supreme Court’s 2015 *Obergefell vs. Hodges* decision that legalized gay marriage. In the years following gay marriage legalization, Sesame Street, SpongeBob, and other shows for children were also featuring openly LGBT-identifying characters.

The LGBT narrative has also permeated at an institutional level with several states, including California, Colorado, Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington, mandating LGBT education in various public schools, some as early as elementary school. Other states have rolled out “inclusive” curriculum standards

⁷ Malinda Lo, “LGBTQ YA by the Numbers: 2015–16,” *Malinda Lo* (blog), October 12, 2017, <https://www.malindalo.com/blog/2017/10/12/lgbtq-ya-by-the-numbers-2015-16>.

⁸ Victoria Whitley-Berry, “After Decades in the Background, Queer Characters Step to the Front in Kids’ Media,” NPR, June 30, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/30/1011310695/after-decades-in-the-background-queer-characters-step-to-the-front-in-kids-media>.

but have not yet signed statewide bills. In Canada, programs like the Sexual Orientation Gender Identity (SOGI 1 2 3),⁹ which has used Muslim children as symbols in its promotional material,¹⁰ are devoted to advancing LGBT-related education in schools.

One popular means of teaching gender fluidity and sexual identity to students involves the “Genderbread Person.”¹¹ This diagram uses a gingerbread man-like figure with a multicolored brain as a teaching tool to explain gender and orientation. It asserts that gender identity is not binary as is traditionally believed; rather, it is fluid and based on one’s self-perception. The red heart in the genderbread person’s chest symbolizes attraction, communicating the belief that sexual attraction can be whatever a person’s heart feels, regardless of his or her biological sex. The diagram states:

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don’t. Like inception. Gender isn’t binary. It’s not either/or. In many cases, it’s both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be for gender understanding. It’s okay if you’re hungry for more. In fact, that’s the idea.¹²

The diagram also defines the terms “gender identity,” “gender expression,” and “biological sex” as follows:¹³

- Gender identity: how you, in your head, define your gender, based on how much you align or don’t align with what you understand to be the options for gender.
- Gender expression: the ways you present gender through your actions, dress, and demeanor, and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

⁹ SOGI 1 2 3, 2019, www.sogieducation.org/, accessed September 13, 2022.

¹⁰ “Results,” SOGI 1 2 3, <https://www.sogieducation.org/results>.

¹¹ Sam Killermann, “The Genderbread Person V4.0,” The Genderbread Person, 2017, www.genderbread.org/resource/genderbread-person-v4-0, accessed September 13, 2022.

¹² Sam Killermann, “Breaking through the Binary: Gender Explained Using Continuums,” March 27, 2015, <https://www.genderbread.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Breaking-through-the-Binary-by-Sam-Killermann.pdf>.

¹³ Killerman, “Breaking through the Binary.”

- Biological sex: the physical sex characteristics you're born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

What is problematic about the “genderbread person” is that it presents natural binaries as a spectrum—a fluid and flexible identity that one chooses based on one's emotions and desires, effectively robbing biological sex markers of any necessary connection or normative relevance to questions of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

So deeply and so rapidly has this cultural crusade penetrated young American Muslim minds that many are growing increasingly sympathetic to statements like: *“I feel this way internally; therefore, I'm an inauthentic person unless I'm allowed to live my life according to this feeling. And if the Muslim community doesn't accept my sexual orientation, then they are rejecting me and undermining my dignity as a person.”* As Muslims respond to such individuals and to concepts such as authenticity, identity, choice, and dignity, it behooves us to take stock of the colossal cultural shifts introduced almost overnight into American society and their deeper roots in the modern West. These shifts have also been accompanied by some political and cultural resistance within the United States. Some states and individuals have challenged the institutionalization of LGBT curricula. In 2022, for example, the governor of Florida passed a law banning all teacher-led LGBT-related instruction in state classrooms from kindergarten to grade 3.¹⁴ This legislation, however, was immediately met with opposition. Faced by mounting pressure from certain groups, the multi-billion dollar Disney corporation came out in full force to reject this proposition on the grounds that it is wrong and homophobic.¹⁵ This represents a prime example of how an allegedly entertainment-oriented corporation, known for producing cartoons and movies, can be politicized and absorbed by the burning questions of the day.

In a similar move in the same year, a Burger King ad in Austria proudly featured the “Pride Whopper,” a burger with matching top and bottom buns—a not so subtle

¹⁴ Wikipedia, s.v. “Florida Parental Rights in Education Act,” last modified May 28, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida_Parental_Rights_in_Education_Act.

¹⁵ Wikipedia, s.v. “Florida Parental Rights in Education Act,” sec. The Walt Disney Company.

reference to homosexual male intercourse where one partner plays the top role and the other the bottom role.¹⁶ The company quickly apologized after facing backlash for a “tone deaf” marketing campaign. Ironically, the criticism was directed not at this vulgar sexual representation in a decades-old fast food corporation but at the chain’s failure to understand “how gay sex works” and the accusation of “rainbow-washing” during Pride Month. In response, Burger King Austria issued an apology and promised to properly communicate with experts from the LBGTQ community for future campaigns, as “equal love and equal rights” remain their priority.

Beyond the omnipresence of the LGBT narrative in the West, Muslim countries are under growing pressure to also become “LGBT-affirming.” For example, in June 2022, the US embassy in Kuwait tweeted in support of Pride Month:

All human beings should be treated with respect and dignity and should be able to live without fear no matter who they are or whom they love. @POTUS [the president of the United States] is a champion for the human rights of #LGBTQI persons. #Pride2022 #YouAreIncluded.

US embassies in other Muslim countries did the same. It is thus important to remember that the LGBT movement not only seeks to radically reshape society on a domestic level, but is at the vanguard of a neo-colonial project on an international scale as well.

Needless to say, as Muslims we agree that all human beings should be treated with respect and dignity. We learn from the sunnah of our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that we are to, “give everything its due right.”¹⁷ As Muslims, therefore, we believe in giving all people their due rights. Justice is central to Islam. We disagree, however, with what respect and dignity entail in certain cases. In this context, these terms are used with very specific definitions to imply that if one does not fully endorse homosexual behavior, relationships, and family structures, then one lacks respect for people’s dignity—a serious moral charge. This loaded terminology is then used as a tool for social and political demonization.

¹⁶ Anna Cooban, “Burger King Has a ‘Pride Whopper’ with ‘Two Equal Buns,’” CNN, June 7, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/07/business-food/burger-king-pride-whopper>.

¹⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 1968.

Here lies the ultimate challenge: the current LGBT discourse, as mentioned above, is presented as a *moral* discourse. We are given to believe that questions surrounding sexual desires and behavior, family structure, and so forth are primarily questions of equality, dignity, and human rights and that any opposition to the goals of the organized LGBT movement constitutes opposition to those three values. But contemporary LGBT discourse has defined equality, justice, human rights, and compassion in ways that have radically altered their meanings. In order to comprehend how this shift in understanding has occurred, we have to look back to the last few decades of Western cultural history.

Tracing the roots: The sexual revolution

The Western sexual revolution, which began in the late 1960s, may be taken as the proximate cause for where we are today. The sexual revolution constituted a fundamental rejection of Christian religious and moral norms surrounding gender, sex, and sexuality. Before the 60s, premarital sex and homosexual acts were taboo, and it was rare to find non-married couples living together.¹⁸ People were generally reticent about discussing sex in both public and private settings. For example, soap operas replaced the word “pregnant” with euphemisms like “she is expecting” or is “with child” since the word “pregnant” was considered too direct. If a film had a scene with a bare-chested woman for even a few seconds, it would be given an R rating. The marketing and sale of pornography and salacious erotic novels were also prohibited by law across the Western world at this time.

These sexual norms were born from a cultural understanding that sex is a reproductive act that should only occur in the context of marriage. This is not to say that sex was not also for experiencing pleasure or for cultivating intimacy and love between a couple. But traditionally, before the advent of the first

¹⁸ See Meg Jay, “The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/15/opinion/sunday/the-downside-of-cohabiting-before-marriage.html>.

“Cohabitation in the United States has increased by more than 1,500 percent in the past half century. In 1960, about 450,000 unmarried couples lived together. Now the number is more than 7.5 million. The majority of young adults in their 20s will live with a romantic partner at least once, and more than half of all marriages will be preceded by cohabitation. This shift has been attributed to the sexual revolution and the availability of birth control, and in our current economy, sharing the bills makes cohabiting appealing.”

FDA-approved birth control pill in 1960, there was no form of contraception as effective as there is today.¹⁹ If a couple were to engage in intercourse, they were always running a fairly substantial risk of experiencing the natural consequences of that act: pregnancy. In such a climate, it would be unwise for any society to allow for unregulated sex outside of marriage. Children would be born without knowing the identity of their fathers, without a traceable lineage, and without knowing from whom to seek protection. Mothers would be left to care for these children on their own without anyone to provide for them.

Sex out of wedlock, as a rampant cultural phenomenon, directly undermines the structure of society and the stability of the family unit. Family has been the core institution in all societies, historically and anthropologically speaking, even in the modern West. Because sex and reproduction are tightly bound to one another, moral duty requires that sex between two people be confined to those who are lawful to one another. This ensures that children entering the world have a father to provide for them and a mother to care for them, that they are received in stable circumstances conducive to their flourishing, that they have known lineage and extended family connections, along with all the rights, duties, and protections that flow from such fundamental human relationships. It is no casual thing to conceive a child. It was, therefore, naturally considered immoral and detrimental to interfere with a child's right to enter the world with these safety measures in place.²⁰ Illicit sex (i.e., fornication, or sex out of wedlock) was recognized as a direct threat to the social fabric because it was understood to undermine the family unit and, most especially, to jeopardize the well-being of the mother and child.

Similarly, up until the 1930s, all major Christian denominations—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—were opposed to artificial contraception because they considered it unnatural to separate the sex act from its natural consequences (i.e., possible insemination, pregnancy, and reproduction).²¹ Hence, it was common to find contraceptives illegal in the United States and many European countries. Until the year 1965, for instance, contraceptives were illegal in the state of Connecticut.

¹⁹ See Mary Eberstadt, *Adam and Eve After the Pill: Paradoxes of the Sexual Revolution* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

²⁰ See Katy Faust, *Them Before Us* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2021).

²¹ See Sherif Girgis, "The Historic Christian Teaching Against Contraception: A Defense," *Public Discourse*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/08/17559/>.

It is noteworthy here that Islamic law has a more measured attitude toward these issues and offers greater latitude on the use of birth control as compared to Christianity.²²

The Pill

First marketed a few years before the onset of the sexual revolution, the birth control pill became its catalyst.²³ As a more effective form of contraception, the Pill allowed people to divorce the sex act from reproduction. The moral norm that once bound these two variables together increasingly came to be seen as irrelevant. Yet the advent of the birth control pill and the subsequent separation of sex, reproduction, and family were only two of the factors that drove this titanic social change.

In a society that revered God and valued devotion to a higher truth, the prevalence of contraceptives and other factors might not have been as devastating as they in fact were in mid-century Western nations. What proved decisive at this juncture is that Western society had long ago chosen a secular path, one centered on the maximization of perceived individual happiness. In contrast, Muslim-majority societies remained theocentric and have resisted sexual decadence even after the introduction of the Pill, although aggressive Western imperialism and internal weakness has made them increasingly threatened and vulnerable to the same trends.²⁴ A religious worldview that is rationally coherent and compelling, Islam orients humankind toward God. In turning its back on religion and God, the Western society found no reason for continuing to bind sex, reproduction, marriage, and morality together. In the 1960s, these four were essentially blown apart, and each came to be seen as a free-floating variable, to be defined and practiced according to the dictates of individual preference. In this way, the sexual revolution brought about a wholesale rejection of Christian moral norms as related

²² Omar Suleiman, "Islam and the Abortion Debate," *Yaqeen*, March 20, 2017, updated September 20, 2022, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/islam-and-the-abortion-debate>.

²³ The Pill was hailed as a success as a contraceptive in the closing years of the 1950s. See Nicholas Bakalar, "Birth Control Pills, 1957," *New York Times*, October 25, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/26/health/26first.html>.

²⁴ Nicholas Eberstadt and Apoorva Shah, "Fertility Decline in the Muslim World: A Demographic Sea Change Goes Largely Unnoticed," Hoover Institution, June 1, 2012, <https://www.hoover.org/research/fertility-decline-muslim-world>.

to sexuality. Men and women started living together before marriage, an arrangement once referred to as “shacking up.” Then, love and commitment between two individuals became the only prerequisites for morally and socially acceptable sex. By the 1980s, only consent mattered anymore. No longer did two people need to be married, in love, or even committed to one another for their sexual relationship to be considered morally legitimate; they merely had to consent before engaging in the act.²⁵ This brought about the demise of the nuclear family, with major social dislocations (e.g., divorce, fatherlessness, delinquency, single motherhood, single mother and child poverty, and so on). Women competed against men in the workforce—a new development for middle and upper class families—with “latchkey kids” returning to empty homes after school because both parents were at work. Without its anchoring in reproduction, marriage, family, and morality, sex came to be seen strictly as a matter of pleasure and individual fulfillment.

But this was just the beginning. The sexual revolution also spawned the gay liberation movement. Relations between two men or two women came to seem less objectionable because they, just like heterosexual relationships, now also fulfilled the new sole prerequisite for morally acceptable sex: mutual interest and consent. The civil rights movement, once specifically aimed at the protection and promotion of Black civil rights, expanded beyond race to encompass gender and sexual orientation as well. In doing so, for reasons that lie beyond our scope, powerful groups in Western culture seeking sexual liberation drew a false equivalence between themselves and victims of longstanding racial violence, positioning themselves as equally oppressed by the mainstream.

In the wake of the sexual revolution, many denominations of mainstream Protestant Christianity, as well as Reform and Conservative Judaism, have taken on the basic assumptions of the sexual revolution (such as the elective nature of sex that is legitimized through consent alone). Those still trying to hold on to religious moral values find themselves isolated and alienated.

²⁵ For a short but useful treatment on the problematic notion of “consent” as employed in contemporary liberal discourses surrounding sex and sexuality, see Timothy Hsiao, “The Limits of Consent,” *Public Discourse*, September 23, 2015.

Sexual attitudes in Christianity and Islam

The sexual revolution in the West may have been in part an extreme reaction to the “sex-negative” attitudes that have dominated Christian teaching throughout the centuries. Celibacy has always been considered a high calling in Christianity. Mary was a virgin at the time of her miraculous conception of Jesus, even if she married thereafter (hence the “Virgin Mary”). Jesus was also celibate, as are all leaders of the Catholic church. Saint Augustine, who was a licentious man before converting to Christianity in the fourth century, was so disgusted by his previous life of profligacy that he ended up holding a thoroughly mistrustful view of sex. He spread the idea that pure spirituality meant denying oneself all carnal pleasure. Though this attitude aligned more with trends in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy than with biblical scripture, it nonetheless spread throughout Christian lands. The Qur’an addresses this trend among Christians in the following verse:

Then in the footsteps of these [prophets], We sent Our messengers, and [after them] We sent Jesus, son of Mary, and granted him the Gospel, and instilled compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers. As for monasticism, they made it up—We never ordained it for them—only seeking to please Allah, yet they did not [even] observe it strictly. So We rewarded those of them who were faithful. But most of them are rebellious.²⁶

Islam, on the other hand, is the middle path—the path of moderation, balance, and reason in harmony with God-given nature. Allah describes Paradise in the Qur’an as the perfect and perpetual fulfillment while regulating all kinds of behavior in this life, refusing the dualism between physical and spiritual bliss.

Accordingly, sexual pleasure is not intrinsically evil, nor is it strictly for the proliferation of the human race. Rather, when enjoyed in licit ways it is a blessing, even a sign of God’s favor upon His creation. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once told his companions that they would be rewarded for fulfilling their desires lawfully with their wives. Confused, they asked why they would be rewarded merely for satiating their desires. The Prophet ﷺ responded, “Do you not see that if one does it in a haram way, he will have the burden of sin? So if he does it in

²⁶ Qur’an 57:27.

a halal way, he will have a reward for that.”²⁷ Islam’s fundamentally sex-positive attitude meant that Muslim scholars did not shy away from writing about sexual etiquette. Some scholars have even described the moment of climax as a foretaste of Paradise because it is the greatest physical pleasure human beings are able to experience.²⁸ Islam mandates that sex occur in the proper context, and so long as that condition is fulfilled, it is an occasion of divine blessing and otherworldly reward.

The antecedents to the sexual revolution

To better understand and deconstruct the underpinnings of recent Western movements of sexual licentiousness, we must explore the antecedents of the sexual revolution. Starting around the seventeenth century, sections of Western societies began drifting from a theocentric worldview toward a materialistic, mechanical one. People no longer saw God’s hand in His creation, and this blindness severed every object in the universe, humans included, from its true purpose and nature. Scientists and empirical data alone—to the exclusion of prophets and revelation—became the bearers of truth and knowledge. Meaning, purpose, and natural order all began to fall by the wayside. Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century pushed further, making human reason the standard for all knowledge, including morality. The human mind became the primary moral arbiter in place of God. Revelation in the Christian world became largely discredited through geological and historical criticism of the Bible, whose cultural authority was further undermined by Darwin’s theory of evolution in the mid-nineteenth century. By the closing decades of that century, Nietzsche was able to declare that (for Western man, at least) “God is dead.”

In the centuries that followed this epistemic explosion, increasing numbers of people were left to grapple with the meaninglessness that comes from an individualized, self-generated purpose disconnected from a Creator. Just as our existence was stripped of higher purpose, so too were our bodies. No longer were male and female bodies endowed with a natural complementarity whose violation

²⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 1006.

²⁸ For one such instance where spiritual ecstasy is likened to sexual climax, see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, translated by Ovamir Anjum as *Ranks of Divine Seekers* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 2:224–25.

would constitute a moral transgression; they became material “stuff,” untethered to natural and supernatural laws that could be transgressed without consequence.

Another antecedent to the sexual revolution was the rise of liberalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which ultimately placed individual freedom and personal autonomy above things like community and family. Freedom as a value is widely appreciated: political freedom from tyranny, freedom from oppression, and so on. But modern liberalism has reified and fetishized it, placing it above all other, and even nobler, values, in the process enslaving humans in worse ways than through merely physical and conventional constraints. Modern humans are born into this world demanding complete freedom from all external limitations, be they moral, religious, cultural, familial, or other. Every constraint is perceived as a new barrier to be broken, another boundary to be transgressed on the path to self-actualization. Understanding this mentality is absolutely critical because it informs much of the current discourse around gender and sexuality in the West.

The root of all evil lies in turning away from God.²⁹ With God no longer at the center of human devotion, the individual self became the single most valuable thing. In other words, man himself became deified. A helpful guide in tracing these transformations in the West is a book by Christian theologian Carl R. Trueman titled *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. In it, Trueman traces the roots of this inflated modern notion of the self to the famous eighteenth-century Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who located the core identity of the human being in the inner psychological life of the individual, positing that feelings are central to who we are and that an individual’s authenticity is tied to his or her outward expression of inner feelings. Rousseau’s writings on selfhood are what Trueman calls the beginning of the “psychologization”³⁰ of the human being: Who I am is no longer the role I play in society (father, wife, guildsman, etc.); rather, it’s my inner feelings. And to be authentic is to express freely and outwardly the full depth and breadth of my inner feelings. Any discrepancy between my inner

²⁹ Qur’an 8:20–23.

³⁰ The concept of psychologization is discussed in Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), Ch. 4.

feelings and outward expression is a lack of self-realization. This captures well the character of contemporary LGBT discourse, as shall be explained presently.

Other key strands in today's rejection of sexual mores include Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Marx grounded his passionate quest for justice in materialist history rather than God. Nietzsche railed against all conventional morality, exposing Enlightenment pretensions of reason but replacing them with little more than human quest for power and self-assertion as the ultimate good.³¹ Freud similarly rejected religion and contended that satisfying the sex drive was foundational to human personhood and happiness, but that the possibility of civilization nonetheless requires the containment of this drive. According to Freud, even infants are sexual beings. Though much of Freud's thought has been debunked for decades, his ideas still inform our cultural psyche. The disciples of these figures pushed the boundaries further. Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) called for radical sexual liberation in the 1930s and beyond. Many had by this point come to believe that moral notions were essentially a matter of taste. In other words, one's individual sensibilities and emotional responses are the primary arbiters of what is right and wrong.³²

When tracing the epistemology of the Western secular paradigm on sexual morality, we must bear in mind that the defining figures of today's Western ideologies were nearly all staunch atheists. Their atheism had a definitive influence on their ideas of sexual morality and secular values more broadly, and help explain today's resistance against God, religion, and nature. Without God to provide objective stability to the cosmos, human nature becomes untethered from its source of teleology and definition.

As Muslims, we affirm the reality of the unseen, and our revelation informs us that our worst enemies, Satan and his ilk, are at work to pervert our notions of good and evil so that we prefer our judgments over God's. We reject the secular European

³¹ For a relevant discussion of the thinkers named here, see the aforementioned work by Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), chap. 5 and 6.

³² This idea, called emotivism, was studied and critiqued at length by Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1980).

psychologization of the self and its attendant notion of radical autonomy, as these ideas are inherently un-Islamic. Allah declares in Sūrat al-Ḥaṣhr: “And be not like those who forgot God so He caused them to forget themselves.”³³ Modern Western history is replete with people who have forgotten God and subsequently forgotten themselves. Having lost God, they have little more than their whims to worship: “Have you seen the one who has taken his own desires as his god?”³⁴ Replacing revealed guidance with personal sensibilities and emotional judgments as the arbiters of morality turns the human lower self (*nafs*) into a plaything for Satan. It turns vice into virtue and evil into good, like “those whose evil deeds are made alluring to them so that they think they are good.”³⁵

Homosexuality in the wake of the sexual revolution

Central to LGBT discourse is the formation of identity around sexual desire. If we understand the aforementioned historical and cultural groundwork, we can see how fundamentally problematic this movement is for Muslims.

Another crucial move in modern sexual delinquency has been to reject the divinely inspired soul as the essence of the human being, as it had been for Muslims as well as Christians, Jews, and others, and to replace it with sexual identity. As Carl Trueman observes, “It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this move to make the sexual desire central to human identity. In modern society, everything from the common use of terms such as ‘straight’ and ‘gay’ in everyday conversation to the underlying assumptions of international human rights law presupposes that this is the case. And the idea that human flourishing is virtually synonymous with sexual fulfillment is a commonplace—in fact, virtually an intuition—of modern Western culture.”³⁶

Like all religions, the beliefs of this religion of sexual libertinism demand political expression. Thus, Trueman says: “If we are at root defined in large part by our sexual desires—if sexual desire (or ‘orientation,’ as we now say) is who we

³³ Qur’an 59:19.

³⁴ Qur’an 25:43.

³⁵ Qur’an 35:8.

³⁶ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 74.

are—then sex must be political because rules governing sexual behavior are rules that govern what is and what is not considered by society to be legitimate as an identity.”³⁷ This has a further consequence: “The old chestnut of ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ simply does not work,” Trueman writes, “in a world where the sin is the identity of the sinner and the two cannot be separated even at a conceptual level.”³⁸

Being “authentic” is not inherently objectionable, but our true self is that which aspires to the ultimate truth of God, not the one that is given to transgression, lust, prejudice, and satanic whispers. As Muslims, we affirm that the human being must be considered holistically in mind, body, and soul. Every self is unique and precious, but nurturing the self is a moral choice, and our duty is to nurture our potentials, train our bodies, and shape our desires in accordance with God’s revealed guidance, which is the reflection of our truest and deepest human nature. The ultimate expression of submission in Islam is prostration: the lowering of one’s mind to the ground while uttering *subhāna rabbī al-a‘lā*, “Glory be to my Lord, the Most High.” While in this position, we realize our teleology and embody our most authentic selves, namely, as creations of God humbled before our Creator. It is as God states in the Qur’an, “And I have not created the jinn and humankind except to worship Me.” Worshiping God, then, is the most authentic human good.³⁹

After the Ball: The plan to alter America’s sexual morality

Unfortunately, Western Muslims who parrot LGBT talking points do not realize that much of their moral sensibility has been shaped by people with a deliberate agenda to destroy religious mores. In 1989, neuropsychologist Marshall Kirk and social marketing and advertising executive Hunter Madsen co-authored the book *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s*.

³⁷ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 79.

³⁸ Trueman, *Strange New World*, 157.

³⁹ For more on this, see Dr. Shabbir Akhtar’s essay, which discusses the Qur’anic notion of *fitra* and its corruption: Shabbir Akhtar, “A Path Straightened Out: Perspectives on Human Nature in the Qur’an,” *Yaqeen*, October 22, 2020, updated November 5, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/a-path-straightened-out-perspectives-on-human-nature-in-the-quran>.

Both these Harvard-trained authors identified as gay, and their book served as a manifesto for normalizing homosexuality in Western societies. Since its release, the book's plan has been implemented lock, stock, and barrel by members of the LGBT movement. The authors boldly state early on in the book: "The campaign we outline in this book, though complex, depends centrally upon a program of unabashed propaganda, firmly grounded in long-established principles of psychology and advertising."⁴⁰ Kirk and Madsen employed the principles of desensitization in their campaigning. They sought to build on people's primal instincts, whereby "a flood of gay-related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible," would get the job done. "If straights can't shut off the shower," the authors quip, "they may at least eventually get used to being wet." On their notion of "conversion," the authors write, "We mean conversion of the average American's emotions, mind, and will through a planned psychological attack in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media."⁴¹ As Muslims, it is paramount that we recognize and stand firm against such calculated efforts to desensitize us to the limits set by Allah.

Contemporary moral discourse

It goes without saying that in stark contrast to Islam, in the West the divine command bears practically no relevance whatsoever to contemporary moral discourse. Subordinating divine omniscience to the temporal and temperamental whims of modern society is bound to bring ruin, and its effects are only beginning to be seen. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that "It could be that you dislike something, when it is good for you; and it could be that you like something when it is bad for you. Allah knows, and you do not know" (2:216). When religion becomes irrelevant to sexual behavior and life at large, people feel compelled to form their own, thoroughly personal and subjective moral frameworks regarding sexuality. People's emotions, personal taste, sensibilities, or even perverse desires guide their notions of acceptable sexual behavior. Furthermore, contemporary moral and ethical discourse replaces central religious concepts with ersatz (i.e., substitute) notions such as:

⁴⁰ Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (N.p.: Plume, 1989), xxviii.

⁴¹ Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 149.

- Freedom: In popular culture, this is understood as the radical elimination of external barriers to achieve maximum happiness. In Islam, freedom is based on servitude to God, which frees us from serving our desires, material things, and falsehood.
- Individual autonomy: The latter is a word formed from the suffixes *auto*, meaning “self,” and *nomos*, meaning “law.” The West’s notion of autonomy literally means “giving oneself the law” whereby each person determines what is right and wrong without recourse to a higher power. In Islam, by contrast, God and His messenger alone have the right to legislate.
- Authenticity: The modern West defines this as complete, unfettered expression of the inner self (thoughts, feelings, desires), whereas in Islam, we are our true authentic selves as human beings only when we have found and submitted to our Creator (in consonance with our *fiṭra*, that is, natural or inborn, inclinations).
- Consent: The modern world has come to fetishize *choice* and *consent*, which are derivatives of the notions listed above. Any action a person takes is legitimized by his choice and consent to do it so long as there is no harm to others, and this is especially the case for sexual activity. In contemporary culture, notions of “moral character,” and particularly any consideration of “virtue,” are deemed antiquated, old-fashioned, and unnecessary for the cultivation of authentic selfhood. In this vein, how a person behaves sexually has no bearing on his or her moral character as long as the acts are consensual. Given the postmodern premise that all notions are socially constructed, the emphasis on consent as the fulcrum of moral validity is utterly incoherent. In Islam, choice and consent are balanced through revelation and reason with other desiderata critical to human flourishing, such as the maintenance of the family, the cultivation of piety, and the repeated divine command to “enjoin good and forbid evil.”

Islamic norms

In contrast to the rapidly changing societal attitudes towards sex, gender, and sexuality in secular societies, we find in Islam a timeless framework for approaching these topics, rooted in the Qur'an as well as the prophetic Sunnah.

On the creation of the male and female

A fixed principle in Islamic law and theology is the creation of only two genders, the male and the female: “And He created the two sexes, male and female.”⁴² The Shariah makes no distinction between biological sex and what people in the West today (mostly from the 1970s onward) refer to as “psychological gender.” If a person is born in a male body, then the norm is that he would identify and express himself as a male (and vice versa for females). For him to identify otherwise would be an exception, comparable to the modern notions of gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria.

The Islamic paradigm for gender and sexuality is reflected in a number of verses:

- And [by] His creation of the male and the female.⁴³
- And that He created the two mates: the male and the female.⁴⁴
- And the male is not like the female.⁴⁵
- And of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect.⁴⁶
- O mankind! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it He created its mate, and through both He spread countless men and women.⁴⁷

These verses recognize two genders, distinct yet complementary in nature, that were created by intentional design to be companions of one another. In another

⁴² Qur'an 53:45.

⁴³ Qur'an 92:3.

⁴⁴ Qur'an 53:45.

⁴⁵ Qur'an 3:36.

⁴⁶ Qur'an 30:21.

⁴⁷ Qur'an 4:1.

verse, Allah Almighty stresses both the uniqueness of men and women and their spiritual equality:

Surely [for] Muslim men and women, believing men and women, devout men and women, truthful men and women, patient men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who remember Allah often—for [all of] them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.⁴⁸

In the following, Allah declares men and women allies:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give *zakat* and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those—Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might, Wise.⁴⁹

Through this description, Allah teaches us not to compete for the same roles and responsibilities, but rather to work alongside one another in enjoining good, forbidding evil, and forming communities that exalt the Divine Command:

And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty. Indeed Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing.⁵⁰

Despite their spiritual equality, men and women are different on a practical level: they have different roles, rights, and responsibilities that guide how they interact in the domestic sphere and in society at large. In short, they are not treated the same because they are not created the same.

Allah declares the equality of men and women in the Qur'an in their duty to worship Him, as well as in their ability to develop themselves morally and spiritually in fulfillment of that duty. In various biological, psychological,

⁴⁸ Qur'an 33:35.

⁴⁹ Qur'an 9:71.

⁵⁰ Qur'an 4:32.

dispositional, and physiological ways, however, men and women are different by God's intentional design. These differences, now rejected or resisted by extreme leftist ideology, have in fact been documented in scientific literature for a very long time.⁵¹ For example, Allah declares that "men are the protectors and maintainers of women" (*al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'*).⁵² Men also take on certain leadership roles, such as head of the household and, paradigmatically speaking, religious leadership (e.g., as imams in places of worship). Women, on the other hand, are granted the right to be supported financially throughout their lives.

We maintain that male and female bodies each have an inherent teleology, a God-given *purpose*—hence their obvious biological complementarity. Reproduction is the primary purpose of this complementarity, but unlike in traditional Christianity, not every sexual act in Islam necessarily has to allow for the possibility of conception, as the Shariah permits spouses to enjoy each other also for the purpose of pleasure.

The complementarity of men and women goes beyond biology, however. In our dispositions (*khilqah*), we find a duality of masculine and feminine traits. Fathers and mothers are *not* interchangeable. God's law, the Shariah, takes these differences into account. Although by default men and women follow the same religious rulings, in certain aspects the rulings pertaining to the two sexes differ (e.g., in aspects of prayer, inheritance, and dress code).⁵³

Ultimately, as the Creator of our bodies, God has the categorical prerogative to endow them with meaning and to place limits on how we use them. It is not for us

⁵¹ See, for instance, Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 2017). See also Steven E. Rhoads, *Taking Sex Differences Seriously* (New York: Encounter Books, 2005); Peter J. O'Connor and Cressida M. Brown, "Sex-Linked Personality Traits and Stress: Emotional Skills Protect Feminine Women from Stress but Not Feminine Men," *Personality and Individual Differences* 99 (September 2016), 28–32; Ron Su et al., "Men and Things, Women and People: A Meta-analysis of Sex Differences in Interests," *Psychological Bulletin* 135, no. 6, National Library of Medicine (Nov. 2009), 859–884; "Sex Differences in Brain Anatomy," National Institutes of Health (July 28, 2020).

⁵² Qur'an 4:34.

⁵³ For instance, in all major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, men can be imams and lead a congregation in prayer, whereas women cannot; men are strongly recommended to pray in congregation at the *masjid*, while women are given a free choice, and it is preferred for them to pray at home (some schools strongly recommend against women praying in *masjids*); the ideal row for men is the front row, while for women it is the back row. One hadith states: "The best rows for men are the front rows and the worst are the back rows. The best rows for women are the back rows and the worst are the front rows." *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 440.

to devise purposes or assign meanings of our own accord, or to dispose of our bodies (which ultimately belong to God) as we see fit. The slogan “My body, my choice” is therefore antithetical to Islam. It challenges God’s moral authority by denying Him that right and placing it in the hands of individuals.

Mind the difference

Cultivation of behavior that accords with one’s biological gender is an Islamic obligation, and deliberate imitation of the opposite sex in dress and behavior is forbidden. The Prophet ﷺ cursed men who purposely imitate women and women who purposely imitate men.⁵⁴

This hadith, it should be noted, is not about men who naturally exhibit more effeminate traits (e.g., a soft voice or effeminate mannerisms or gait) or women who naturally exhibit some masculine traits. Rather, the hadith pertains to individuals who deliberately impersonate the opposite sex in speech, mannerisms, dress, and so on. Drag queens may be the most conspicuous and exaggerated example of this behavior cursed by our Prophet ﷺ, who was sent as mercy to all the worlds and who would not curse a thing unless that thing were a cause of corruption and evil.

Islamic sexual morality: “Do not go near *zinā*”

Immersed in this secular paradigm, many Muslims are not fully aware of Islam’s sexual and gender norms. Islam has a rich, comprehensive moral system that concerns itself with human sexual behavior because it is so intimately tied to one of the most central and vital of human institutions, namely, the family. The importance of the family derives from the fact that it constitutes the very basis of society, and not just Muslim societies. As mentioned earlier, sex is reproductive; it gives rise to dependent children. Children and parents need stability. In addition to its familial and societal ramifications, *zinā* gravely compromises personal virtue, moral character, and one’s standing before Allah.

⁵⁴ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5885.

The scriptural texts concerning the norms of proper gender and sexual behavior are so numerous, clear, and foundational that the jurists categorize them under one of the five objectives of the Shariah. The objective of Islam's legislation on sexuality is to preserve the family and the extensive network of relations and community around any child, which is of paramount importance for human flourishing. Engaging in unlawful sex (*zinā*) is strictly forbidden and constitutes a major sin (*kabīrah*). In fact, illicit sexual behavior is not merely a personal sin, but a crime, potentially adjudicable in an Islamic court of law.

So how does Islam render its prohibition of *zinā* a realizable moral norm for the average man and woman? It begins by limiting or regulating any act that opens the door to temptation and desire. Men and women alike are commanded to lower their gaze and not to look at one another with sexual lust, to cover their bodies, and to maintain modest dress, speech, and behavior.⁵⁵ Muslims are also expected to avoid both physical contact and isolation (*khalwah*) with unrelated (non-*maḥram*) individuals of the opposite gender.

When it comes to sexual behavior, all acts are forbidden by default unless specifically permitted by divine revelation (*al-aṣl fī al-abdā' al-taḥrīm*). Allah states in Sūrat al-Mu'minūn, "[Successful are] those who guard their chastity, except from their spouses or those whom their right hands possess—for these are free from blame."⁵⁶ Everything outside of an explicitly sanctioned union between a man and a woman is prohibited. This includes anal intercourse,⁵⁷ sexual acts short of intercourse (such as manual stimulation or oral sex), exposing one's 'awrah (i.e., private parts) to anyone other than a lawful partner (or for medical need). The prohibition is extended to any behavior that systematically threatens to lead to illicit relations or creates such desires, such as touching, gazing, isolation (*khalwah*), immodest speech, dress, behavior, and so on. God commands us in the

⁵⁵ Mohammad Elshinawy, "Ḥayā': More Than Just Modesty," *Yaqeen*, August 5, 2021, updated October 8, 2021, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/haya-more-than-just-modesty>.

⁵⁶ Qur'an 23:5–6.

⁵⁷ Anal intercourse is categorically prohibited, including between a man and woman who are lawful to each other (such as in marriage), because the rectal cavity is not a proper or suitable receptacle for the male organ and its fluids. Such an action is considered a gross misuse of the body, as well as a violation of the God-given teleology of our sexual and other organs.

Qur'an to avoid any act that potentially leads to *zinā*: “And go not near *zinā*; verily it is iniquity and an evil way.”⁵⁸

Protection of family and lineage in the Shariah

Adhering to the bounds of permissible sexual activity within Islamic law fulfills a key objective of the Shariah: the protection of family and lineage (*nasl* and *nasab*). Non-marital sex entails the risk of obscuring (or “mixing”) lineage, known as *khalt al-ansāb*. This is crucial for a number of reasons. First, a fraction of a person's inheritance devolves upon close relatives according to predetermined shares. The rights of inheritance cannot be fulfilled by individuals who cannot identify their blood relatives. For example, a man needs to know the identity of his children in order to spend on them just as he needs to know the identity of his parents in order to receive inheritance from them.

Furthermore, blood ties as a basis of lineage must be established through natural reproduction, not artificial means. The Shariah prohibits surrogacy, egg donors, and sperm donors and considers such reproductive practices as tantamount to *zinā*. The only exception to prohibition of artificial insemination, according to most Islamic scholars, is in the case of a married man and woman: if, for example, the husband has healthy sperm and the wife has healthy eggs (but, say, her fallopian tubes are blocked and she thus cannot conceive through natural means) and she carries the baby, in such a case the couple may seek artificial insemination. The child in this situation will have been delivered by his biological mother and with the fertilized egg and sperm of his biological parents, thus honoring God's intended reproductive order for His human creation. Reproductive techniques that rely on sperm donors, egg donors, or surrogate wombs are prohibited because, ultimately, they reproduce the consequences of *zinā*, such as *khalt al-ansāb*, by mixing lineage and blurring natural family lines.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Qur'an 17:32.

⁵⁹ For a summary of the rulings and numerous relevant references to contemporary juristic deliberations and conclusions on the question, see Ayman Shabana, “Islamic Law, Assisted Reproductive Technologies, and Surrogacy,” *Islamic Law Blog*, June 30, 2021, <https://islamiclaw.blog/2021/06/30/islamic-law-assisted-reproductive-technologies-and-surrogacy/>, accessed September 16, 2022.

Protection of lineage and family is one of the many wise purposes of the divine law against illicit sexual behavior. There may be even more important reasons, such as the protection of the children from the harms that come from being born outside of a normal and complete family and protection of the mind and heart from unbridled sexual lust, which is one of the greatest obstacles to focused worship and a God-centered life—worship being the very purpose of our creation.

Gender nonconformity

Contemporary liberalism severs natural, biological sex from both gender identity and expression, on the one hand, and sexual orientation, on the other. Prior to 2013, a person experiencing such a dissonance between his or her biological sex and gender identity would have been clinically diagnosed with a condition called Gender Identity Disorder. This term signaled an understanding that one's sex/gender was based primarily in biology and that a mismatch between one's external sex and one's internal gender identification constituted an objective psychological disorder. Over time, however, Gender Dysphoria replaced Gender Identity Disorder as the condition requiring treatment. What is now deemed acceptable to treat are the feelings of anxiety and depression experienced by those struggling to identify with their biological sex.⁶⁰

Today, it is unacceptable to do anything other than validate a person's feeling that "I am in the wrong body." One's objective physiology and biology have lost all meaning in Western culture, as deference to biological facts is seen by the postmodernist and post-truth mind as offensive and unjust, to be resisted and overcome. Although the original advocates of liberalism and the modern self might be aghast at these consequences, by rejecting divine guidance these champions of reason paved the way for these most frivolous displays of unreason.

According to Islamic guidance, God Almighty has intentionally designed the human body such that these three things are normatively aligned. When they are

⁶⁰ With the publication of *DSM-5* in 2013, "gender identity disorder" was eliminated and replaced with "gender dysphoria." See the American Psychiatric Association article "Gender Dysphoria Diagnosis," <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/transgender-and-gender-nonconforming-patients/gender-dysphoria-diagnosis>, accessed September 15, 2022.

not aligned, people with Gender Identity Disorder (GID) and same-sex attraction should make reasonable efforts to conform to God's objective and intentional design of their biology. Exceptions to the rule where a person may fall subjectively outside the natural gender binary or normative opposite-sex attraction do not undermine the rule itself or the normativity of the conjunction between biological sex, psychological gender identification, and sexual attraction.

Given the key Islamic principle that one is only responsible for what one has control over, people are not morally responsible for gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction to the extent that they did not *choose* to feel what they feel. However, we are all responsible for our actions. Engaging in prohibited sexual behavior or deliberate impersonation of the opposite sex *would*, therefore, be sinful. This includes cross-dressing and socially, chemically, or surgically transitioning to the opposite sex, as well as engaging in any form of sexual behavior or intimacy with members of one's own sex.

In distinguishing masculinity and femininity, scholars take into account the societal conventions (*'urf*) to which individuals are subject. The *'urf* may be referenced in order to determine what specific dress, interests, and mannerisms are perceived as masculine or feminine in a given time and place. The bottom line is that, despite cross-cultural and cross-historical differences, every society differentiates between its male and female members, even if the specifics of that differentiation are, to an extent, socially dependent. For example, if we traveled back in time and visited eighteenth-century Americans, we would find the men dressed in big, white, curly wigs, frilly blouses, and tight stockings. Such sartorial features strike us as decidedly feminine given our current-day norms, to the extent that dressing in such a manner today would likely be identified as drag. This example demonstrates that conventions of masculine and feminine dress are often unique to particular times and places. So long as *'urf* does not violate the rights and responsibilities of men and women as outlined by Islam, a Muslim is typically required to respect the known conventions (*'urf*) of his or her gender. However, as we note below, there are limits to this expectation, as Islam guides and corrects customs that go to extremes, transgressing both nature and human interest.⁶¹

⁶¹ For the notion of *'urf* in Islamic law, see Ayman Shabana, *Custom in Islamic Law and Legal Theory: The Development of the Concepts of 'URF and 'ĀDAH in the Islamic Legal Tradition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan,

Scholars recognize that a person can have gender-atypical mannerisms, gait, voice, and so on, which manifest in a person either naturally (*khilqī*) or through deliberate affectation (*ghayr khilqī*). The term *mukhannath* refers to a male with effeminate mannerisms, while the term *mudhakkarah* refers to a female with masculine mannerisms. Purposefully affecting gender atypical mannerisms is prohibited by our revealed texts and the consensus of Muslim scholars. As for those whose gender-atypical mannerisms are *khilqī*, scholars have differed: some rule that the *mukhannath* and the *mudhakkarah* must make reasonable attempts to recondition their mannerisms in order to align more closely with those of their own sex, while other scholars have ruled that they are under no obligation to attempt such reconditioning.

Islam, as a rule, is not overly prescriptive concerning the specifics of what counts as masculine versus feminine, and we must be mindful of false ‘*urf*—one that has been socially engineered for excessive profit or other immoral ends. Girls are free to pursue sports and bricolage, just as boys are free to pursue art and cooking. Our Prophet’s *sīrah* and the *sīrah* of his companions present us with many examples of men and women behaving in ways that violated pre-Islamic Arab gender norms, such as men crying profusely, women fighting in battle, and the Prophet ﷺ participating in domestic chores. Similarly, certain Victorian notions of womanhood, which presented the ideal woman as a dainty, delicate, ever-fainting damsel in distress, are not to be mistaken for indigenous Islamic norms.

Similarly, what constitutes appropriate same-sex interaction in Islam is also, to a fair extent, conventional and based on a society’s ‘*urf*. For example, many Muslim men, particularly in the Arab world, are rather “touchy-feely” compared to their Western counterparts. Such men may be seen kissing one another on the cheeks upon meeting, holding hands or hooking arms in public, or calling one another by

2010), especially chap. 2. For a thorough discussion on the role of culture in determining gender norms, how these norms change over time, and how Muslims should relate to them at various stages of their transformation, consult the interview with Shaykh Mustafa Umar and Waheed Jensen on the *A Way Beyond the Rainbow* podcast, episode 77 “On Shar‘i Perspectives: Gender Roles and Gender Nonconformity,” February 14, 2022, <https://awaybeyondtherainbow.buzzsprout.com/746186/9323916-77-on-shar-i-perspectives-gender-roles-and-gender-nonconformity>.

names of endearment (e.g., *ḥabībī*, meaning literally “my love”). For Western men, these platonic acts would be interpreted as overtly homosexual.

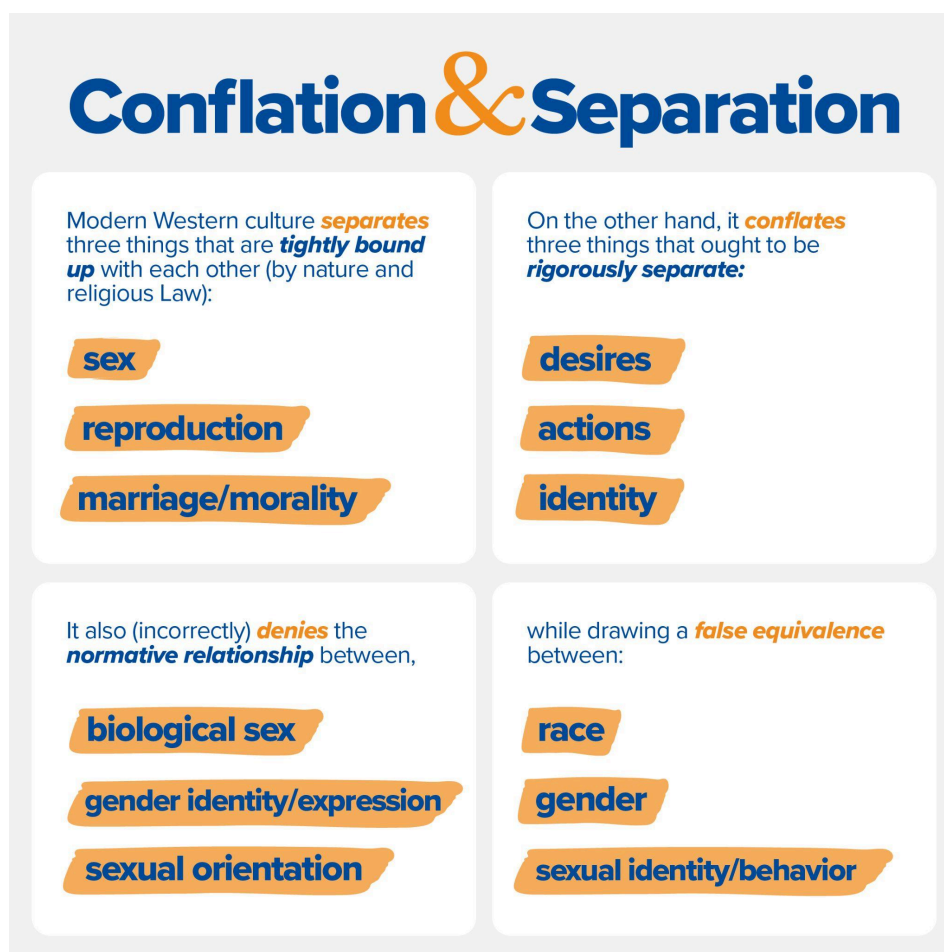
Norms of Arab male friendship are changing, though, as the West continues to propagate its gender and sexual paradigm globally through mass media. Muslims are not immune to this propaganda, which pushes Western norms as morally necessary. We must be vigilant against the impact of such norms on our psyches and maintain our commitment to Islamic guidelines on gender and sexuality.

Questioning the terms: Homosexuality and LGBT

To understand homosexuality—as well as the broader trends and identities included under the LGBT label—from within an Islamic framework, we must begin by questioning the terms of the discourse and the underlying assumptions they encode. As one principle in the Shariah states, “passing judgment on something is contingent upon its (proper) conceptualization” (*al-ḥukm ‘alā al-shay’ far ‘an taṣawwurihi*). There is no word in classical Arabic—or any other Islamicate language, for that matter—that is equivalent to “homosexuality,” just as there had traditionally been no concept of a gay or LGBT identity (with corresponding vocabulary) even in the West before the late nineteenth century. The term “homosexual,” first coined in Germany in the 1860s as a medical term to study (and, if possible, to treat) individuals who had sexual relations with members of the same sex, has been elevated to a *sexual identity*. “Sexuality” itself is a fairly recent neologism in the West. Traditionally, in both East and West, sexual behavior has been something an individual *does*, not what a person *is*.

On its own, the word “homosexuality”—formed from the Greek word “homos,” meaning “the same,” added to the Latin-derived word “sexuality”—preserves a scientific and purely descriptive connotation, meaning simply “same-sex” in plain English. In contemporary parlance, homosexuality could refer to *feelings* of romantic and/or sexual *attraction* to members of one’s own sex, as well as to *behavior* based on those feelings. More poignantly, however, it typically also refers to a full-blown personal and social *identity* based on such feelings and behaviors.

Collectively, these three meanings mirror the contemporary Western understanding of the self and its conflation of desire, behavior, and identity.



Only in contemporary Western liberalism are desires, behaviors, and identities inextricably fused together. It is from this paradigm that the identities “gay,” “lesbian,” “queer,” and so on were born. This is all very new and specific to the contemporary West, and, as Muslims, we must resist taking on terminology fraught with un-Islamic beliefs and ideas, such as this inextricable conflation of desire, behavior, and identity. It is morally problematic to elide any meaningful distinction between desires and actions, for the mere existence of a desire can never be a moral justification for acting on it. Rather, we must appeal to independent moral criteria in order to evaluate any given desire and the moral status of acting upon it. For the post-sexual revolution West, that criterion is consent: as long as two adults

consent, the act shared between them is seen as justified and unassailable. Compare this to the verse in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb:

It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if anyone disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed gone manifestly astray.⁶²

Reflecting upon this verse highlights the dilemma Muslims face today. On the one hand, we must look to revelation to know what is permitted and prohibited of the various desires we experience. On the other hand, the hegemonic discourse of the liberal West insists upon treating homosexuality and other prohibited behaviors as identities needing to be preserved, defended, even honored, in the social, political, and moral arenas. Bombarded with this attack on the fundamentals of their religion, young Muslims today start with the deck already stacked against them. Any disapproval of homosexual or transgender behavior is immediately perceived as an attack on a personal *identity*, accompanied by accusations of “denying people’s dignity,” practicing “exclusion,” or otherwise being motivated by hate, bigotry, or prejudice.

To reclaim our language and conceptual framework, let us turn to how homosexual acts are characterized by our Creator and Lord Almighty.

Verses on the people of Lot (as)

A discussion of Islamic sexual ethics, and homosexuality in particular, would be incomplete without mentioning the Qur’anic verses on the people of Lot. In recent years, the clear and traditionally undisputed interpretation of these verses has been questioned by secularly-trained Western academics, including those who identify as Muslims. Let us take a look at these passages.

The people of Lot are mentioned in at least nine different places in the Qur’an, in a total of more than seventy-five verses. The emblematic sin of Lot’s people, according to the Qur’an, is their engagement in sexual behavior with other men. A

⁶² Qur’an 33:36.

few verses (e.g., Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt, 29:29) make incidental mention of other misdeeds on their part, but their primary transgression mentioned in all cases is “approaching males with desire (*shahwah*) instead of females.” Revisionists, who are often open about their desire to read whatever meaning they need to into the Qur’an, have attempted to reinterpret their sin as one of rape or inhospitality to Lot’s guests. This flies in the face of plain, academically rigorous, and historically unanimous readings of the passage. One verse states:

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, “Do you approach iniquity (*fāhishah*) such as none in creation have committed before you? Verily, you come with desire unto men instead of women. Nay, you are a people transgressing [beyond bounds].” But the only reply of his people was to say, “Turn them out from your town. Surely, they are a people who make themselves pure.”⁶³

In an exercise of eisegesis (reading meaning *into* a text, as opposed to exegesis, which involves reading *out of* a text the meaning imbedded in it as intended by its author), many of these revisionists draw from contemporary Christian and/or Jewish reinterpretations of the biblical story of Lot in the Book of Genesis and read these—no matter how implausibly—back into the Qur’an as a rape narrative.⁶⁴ Other verses that bring clarity to the story include:

The people of Lot belied the messengers. Behold, their brother Lot said to them, “Will you not be mindful [of God]? Indeed, I am a faithful messenger unto you, so fear your Lord and obey me. I ask from you no reward for it; my reward is only with the Lord of the worlds. Do you approach males from among all creation, leaving what your Lord has created for you from your spouses? Nay, but you are a people transgressing [the bounds].” They said, “Lot, if you do not desist from this, you shall certainly be driven out.” He said, “I am, in truth, of those who loathe your deeds. My Lord, deliver me and my family from what they do!”⁶⁵

⁶³ Qur’an 7:80–82.

⁶⁴ For a detailed examination and thorough deconstruction of such revisionist attempts, see Mobeen Vaid, “Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts? Quranic Revisionism and the Case of Scott Kugle,” MuslimMatters, July 11, 2016, <https://muslimmatters.org/2016/07/11/can-islam-accommodate-homosexual-acts-quranic-revisionism-and-the-case-of-scott-kugle/>.

⁶⁵ Qur’an 26:160–169.

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, “Do you commit iniquity (*fāḥishah*) with eyes wide open? Do you indeed come with desire unto men instead of women? Nay, but you are a people behaving foolishly.”⁶⁶

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, “You commit iniquity (*fāḥishah*) such as none in creation have committed before you. Do you indeed come unto men, and cut off the path, and practice evil deeds in your assemblies?” The reply of his people was but to say, “Bring upon us God’s punishment, if you are among the truthful.”⁶⁷

And when Our messengers [the angels] came to Lot, he was anguished on their account and constrained from helping them. And he said, “This is a trying day!” And his people came hastening unto him, and before they had been working evil deeds. He said, “O my people, these are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear God and disgrace me not with respect to my guests. Is there not among you a right-minded man?” They said, “You know well that we have no claim on your daughters, and indeed, you know what we want.”⁶⁸

Revisionists have presented this last verse as evidence that Lot’s people were punished for rape, the highest crime being attempted rape of God’s messengers (angels) who visited their city in the form of men. But if their crime were rape, then why would Lot offer his daughters (which some have understood as a reference to the women of the town) to his people instead? In addition to this, Lot concludes by reaffirming God’s standard for sexual morality: “O my people, these are my daughters; they are *purer for you*.” This reinforces the fact that their crime was intended sodomy, not rape, for one does not decry rape on account of its being “impure,” proposing non-rape as the “purer” alternative. Indeed, it would be abusive to interpret this verse as anything other than a condemnation of (male-male) anal intercourse—which it would be perfectly conventional to denounce as “impure”—and a commendation of the “purer” (*aṭhar*) alternative of male-female intercourse as designed and intended by the Creator. The only morally pure avenue for fulfilling one’s sexual desires is in the manner that God has decreed, and He has clearly prohibited sexual relations with members of the same

⁶⁶ Qur’an 27:54–55.

⁶⁷ Qur’an 29:28–29.

⁶⁸ Qur’an 11:77–79.

sex. Furthermore, the highest crime of Lot's people could not have been the rape of the angels, for the angels were sent to punish them for the crime of "approaching men with lust instead of women" in which they had hitherto long been engaged.

Reinterpreting this narrative as rape is a classic example of anachronistically projecting contemporary notions—such as the post-sexual revolution fixation on "consent" as the only relevant criteria for sexual relations—onto the revealed texts and their exegesis. Only in the last three decades has "consent" become the one and only measuring stick of sexual morality in the West. Projecting this peculiar moral outlook thousands of years into the past, and reading it into a text where an alternative narrative is explicit, is unacceptable. Some of the world's leading biblical scholars, such as John Barton and others (who themselves are not literal followers of the Bible), emphatically state that the revisionist case on the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has failed.⁶⁹ In the only acceptable reading of the story, the primary sin of Lot's people was homosexual acts, *not* rape. Others have tried to historicize the moral implications of Lot's story by arguing that God had decreed such ethical standards to an ancient society in their Near Eastern context and that His standard no longer applies to us today. We refer our readers here to one of the best written works debunking this argument found in "Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts? Qur'anic Revisionism and the Case of Scott Kugle," by Mobeen Vaid.⁷⁰

Building an Islamic framework

To begin building an Islamic framework, we note that Islam does not categorize human beings on the basis of mere desires, especially if such desires are for acts declared not only illicit but also unnatural and deserving of punishment. Accusing someone of being a *lūṭī*, for instance, carries a *ḥadd* punishment for libel or slander (*qadhf*) according to most schools.⁷¹

⁶⁹ A strong case for this is made in the highly regarded work on biblical scholarship by Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002).

⁷⁰ Vaid, "Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts?"

⁷¹ See, for instance, Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī*, 10 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1388/1968), 9:87.

Accepting a Western sexual identity framework changes the discussion, elides moral concerns, and frames the issue as one of social justice (defined subjectively) as opposed to Allah’s command, which embodies perfect justice. We cannot claim to be more just and compassionate than God, for He is al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm.

Next, we note that the Shariah categorizes sexual acts—not sexual identities—as halal and haram. Halal sexual relations are those between a man and a woman in marriage bound by an Islamically valid contract; all else is illegitimate. Haram acts are further subdivided into enormities (*kabā’ir*), which include male-female *zinā* (fornication and adultery) and (male-male) sodomy (*liwāṭ*), and non-penetrative sexual acts such as *siḥāq* (female genital rubbing), manual and intercrural stimulation, oral sex, and all other such acts between any two persons (of either sex). All of these are classified as *muḥarram li-dhātihi* (prohibited intrinsically). Furthermore, the Shariah recognizes and prohibits preludes to these sexual acts, such as touching, gazing, *khalwah*, and immodest dress, speech, and behavior. These are considered *muḥarram li-ghayrihi* (prohibited on account of another, i.e., because they lead to that which is prohibited intrinsically).

Faithful strugglers

It is a fact that there are Muslims—including very faithful and practicing ones—who experience same-sex attractions and/or gender dysphoria. How do we respond when they say that their inner feelings and desires make them feel like a “lesser” Muslim or ask, “Does Allah hate me? Am I a walking sin? Am I going to hell for these desires?”

Our response to these individuals ought to begin with the principle that we have noted earlier, namely, that Islam does not define or categorize people on the basis of internal feelings, sexual or otherwise. Rather, it affirms our core identity as servants of God, defined essentially and primarily in terms of our belief in Allah, our love of and submission to Him, and our devotion to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ and obedience to the path he was sent to establish for the welfare and success of mankind until the Day of Judgment. In addition, the Shariah differentiates between feelings and acts and, further, between the commission of (private) sins and

(public) advocacy on behalf of those sins. Given these considerations, it is necessary for us to deconstruct the contemporary liberal paradigm and, by doing so, properly historicize and provincialize it. By offering Muslims who contend with same-sex attractions and/or gender dysphoria an Islamic paradigm and language through which to conceive and express their experiences, we reassure them that their faithful struggle with such challenges may even be a means for them to attain the rank of true *mujāhidūn* in the path of God. As the Prophet ﷺ has said:

A striver (*mujāhid*) is he who strives in God’s obedience, and a migrant is he who migrates from sin and error.⁷²

Furthermore, we should emphasize that falling into a sin does not make one unworthy of God’s love, forgiveness, and mercy. Sexual transgressions, while serious, do not amount to *kufṛ*, and many are those in our day who struggle with pornography, *zinā*, and related trespasses. We ought to remind those who wish to live in the path of Allah—regardless of the specific nature of their challenges—that the door of *tawbah* is forever open and that, indeed, as the Prophet ﷺ has emphatically reassured us, “Allah rejoices more at the repentance of His slave than one of you (would rejoice) upon finding his mount after having lost it in a waterless desert.”⁷³ It is important that Muslims dealing with same-sex attractions and/or gender dysphoria be able to find support among trusted individuals within the Muslim community, be they imams, counselors, family, friends, or others. Concomitantly, Muslims who do not experience same-sex attraction or GID should understand that such feelings cannot simply be turned on and off like a switch, that they are frequently intertwined with painful emotional wounds and experiences, and that they can represent a substantial challenge on various levels for those who must deal with them. In light of these factors, it can be particularly unhelpful when individuals who may be well-meaning but who are unfamiliar with the territory, so to speak, volunteer facile advice suggesting that a person “merely need do *x* or *y*” for all his problems to be solved.

⁷² *Musnad Aḥmad*, no. 23958, declared sound by al-Albānī.

⁷³ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2675.

In addition to providing general emotional and spiritual support, family, friends, and community leaders should direct those struggling with same-sex attraction and/or gender identity issues to the numerous specialized resources that now exist in the Muslim community. The most important of these is the 88-episode podcast *A Way Beyond the Rainbow*,⁷⁴ produced by Br. Waheed Jensen, a physician, medical researcher, and practicing Muslim who understands the struggle with same-sex attraction from within and has produced a comprehensive resource that deals with the issue from all conceivable angles—psychological, spiritual, medical, emotional, sociopolitical, personal, familial, and communal. (Many episodes, in fact, explore topics in a manner that is useful even for Muslims who do not deal specifically with same-sex attraction or gender identity issues.) In addition, two support networks currently exist for Muslims experiencing same-sex attraction and/or GID, namely, the Straight Struggle Discord group⁷⁵ and the UK-based Strong Support foundation.⁷⁶ Finally, Br. Yousef Salam, the longtime moderator of Straight Struggle, has published an insightful and well-written article that serves as an excellent introduction to, and statement of principle on, homosexuality in Islam and the Muslim community. This article is well worth the read for any Muslim who is concerned about this issue.⁷⁷

To reiterate a point raised above, in responding to those dealing with such issues within our community, we must emphasize that one of the most perilous traps for Muslims in the West is the ubiquitous gay identity paradigm, which insists that one must, as a question of core identity, conceive of and present oneself as “gay” or “lesbian” if one is attracted to the same sex. This is the language and attendant conceptual framework that the dominant secular culture of the West has prescribed for interpreting and processing such feelings. Despite its seeming ubiquity, however, the current paradigm in fact represents a very particular and idiosyncratic way of construing such experiences, one that is neither transhistorical nor cross-culturally universal. To accept this paradigm, moreover, is to completely upend the moral discourse of the Shariah by incriminating it in the exclusion of

⁷⁴ Waheed Jensen, *A Way Beyond the Rainbow*, <https://awaybeyondtherainbow.buzzsprout.com>.

⁷⁵ Straight Struggle, Discord server, <https://discordservers.com/server/686461916939288584>.

⁷⁶ Strong Support, <https://www.strongsupport.co.uk/>.

⁷⁷ Br. Yousef, “From a Same-Sex Attracted Muslim: Between Denial of Reality and Distortion of Religion,”

MuslimMatters, August 22, 2016,

<https://muslimmatters.org/2016/08/22/from-a-same-sex-attracted-muslim-between-denial-of-reality-and-distortion-of-religion/>.

people's core identities and the undermining of their human dignity. As Muslims, we do not base our identities on our sexual drives, but rather on our commitment and submission to God and His purpose for us.

Conclusion: From challenging the framework to recovering morality

The foregoing treatment has shown how contemporary Western liberalism unknots three dimensions of the human experience once recognized as being bound together by nature and religious law: sex, reproduction, and marriage/morality. At the same time, it conflates three things that ought to be differentiated: desire, action, and identity. If our desires transgress divine law, they should not be acted upon; and even if they are acted upon, they should not become our identity. Up until the recent past, religious morality had furnished social meaning, norms, and structure and disciplined desires by determining which of them should be actualized and which should not. In today's liberal extremism—which has overtaken, eliminated, or disfigured nearly all traditions—the only sacred deity is the subjective desire of the *nafs*.

In this liberal extremist dogma, as long as two parties consent, whatever action they decide to engage in is morally unobjectionable assuming no harm results (or at least does not appear to). In reality, the desires to which such parties consent are mass manufactured, and the definition of “harm” by which they abide is carefully determined by a self-serving elite. What was once morally unobjectionable only for that extremist elite has been mainstreamed and then forced down the throats of populations unable to resist. Crucial to this agenda is the transformation of the non-normative desires of the few into a sacred right that must be approved and then celebrated by all. This process necessitated the transmutation of desire into identity, such that objecting to someone's desires and/or concomitant acts becomes synonymous with objecting to their very existence, and hence comparable to a violation of basic human rights and fundamental dignity.

The following summarizes a number of recommendations that result from the exposition offered above.

1. Reclaiming our language

We must begin by reclaiming our language. Key terms of discourse on sexual desire, behavior, and identity have been infused with enormous political and social baggage as part of a deliberate campaign. For this reason, it is best for us to avoid using terms such as LGBT—whether the acronym itself or its constituent labels—as a description of reality, limiting it to critical analytic discourse. Rather, when discussing the issue in terms of unchosen tendencies that Muslims and others experience, we should opt for descriptive terms devoid of identitarian baggage such as “same-sex attractions,” “homosexual inclinations,” “gender dysphoria,” and the like. When speaking of prohibited sexual behaviors—whether male-female *zinā*, male-male sodomy (*liwāt*), lesbian sex (*siḥāq*), or any other—we should be forthright, in appropriate contexts, in using language that conveys the moral opprobrium attached to such acts by the Shariah (such as *fāḥishah*, etc., or English equivalents).

2. Clearly establishing the Islamic gender and sexuality paradigm

As a community, how do we deal with this issue effectively in a just and compassionate way? First, we need to strongly and confidently establish our Islamic gender and sexuality paradigm as independent and distinct from the one inhabited by the contemporary West. Though stating this is taboo, we regard gender as something essential and not merely incidental or socially constructed. We affirm gender differences as real and God-given. Deconstructing the conflated sexual desire–behavior–identity framework of the West allows us, and teaches others, to appreciate the wisdom and legislation of our Creator.

We should also continue actively critiquing and deconstructing the Western paradigm post-sexual revolution while simultaneously asserting our own paradigm. Condemning post-sexual revolution norms does not make Muslims “prudes.” Licit sexual activity is not only permissible in Islam but celebrated and rewarded. Illicit sexual expression—whether it be heterosexual or homosexual—leads to individual and communal destruction and chaos.

3. Pointing out the neocolonial nature of the LGBT project for the Muslim world

We should also stress that the spread of the LGBT paradigm throughout the world today begins with cultural imperialism and brainwashing but, like feminism in the Second Gulf War, could be easily weaponized as part of the attempt to justify neocolonial coercion and sanction.⁷⁸ In other words, the LGBT normalization project that originated in the West is being forced upon other societies as a non-negotiable “truth.” Others are expected to align themselves with Western interests, ideas, and ideologies as a matter of principle because “the West knows best; it always has and it always will.” Advocates of the progressive left in the West speak of “deconstructing” and challenging neocolonialism yet have done little more than trade one kind of neocolonialism for another. We cannot criticize Victorian morality imposed on the Muslim world by British colonizers in the nineteenth century while turning a blind eye to the post-sexual revolution paradigm imposed on the Muslim world today.

4. Rejecting the sexual identity paradigm

Individuals in Islam are not identified by their sexuality, and normative Islamic sources and tradition have no terms by which to mark people off in terms of a “sexual identity.” We dignify people with respect to their having been created by God, not the kind of desires they experience. The sexual identity paradigm is inherently incompatible with Islam. We should use descriptive terms and adjectives, such as “he experiences same-sex attraction” or “she experiences gender dysphoria,” rather than essentializing identitarian language, like saying that “he is gay” or “she is trans.” Doing so allows us to avoid reducing these individuals to a single facet of their existence, namely, their sexual desires. It also helps Muslims who experience such challenges avoid seeing themselves in essentialized and reductive sexual identity terms that are likely to lead to an unresolvable head-on collision with Islamic teachings.

⁷⁸ For the role of liberalism and feminism in justifying the Second Gulf War, see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 29–34.

5. No gay exceptionalism

What is meant by “gay exceptionalism” (either positive or negative) is simply this: pushing for the acceptance of same-sex or “gender-bending” acts in an Islamic environment is just as unacceptable as pushing alcohol, *zinā*, and so on. There is no special license to act upon, or to promote acting upon, what Allah has prohibited simply because it is acceptable in contemporary Western societies or because one has embraced the current Western sexual identity paradigm. As Muslims, we do not tie homosexual acts to identity. Therefore, disallowing or condemning such acts in Muslim spaces is not a violation of a person’s human rights or a rejection of their dignity. In the same manner, we should not stigmatize or single out other Muslims for merely having and faithfully struggling with gender identity issues and/or same-sex attractions. If another Muslim confides in you about this issue, embrace them and support them in their efforts to realize their purpose as a Muslim and live their life in submission to God and His religion. Every person battles with things that they did not necessarily bring upon themselves. In Islam, the test of submission is reforming the *nafs* to align with God’s commands. Whether the struggle concerns drugs, alcohol, same-sex attraction or gender identity, envy, or backbiting—“successful indeed is the one who purifies himself [from what God has prohibited].”⁷⁹

6. Balancing subjective feelings with objective truths

Another necessary component of realizing our principles is balancing individual and communal needs, as well as subjective feelings and objective truths concerning what is right and wrong. To achieve this balance, we should offer struggling Muslims private support and consultation as opposed to public “accommodation” or “inclusion.” Defiant activist types should not be allowed to disrupt Islamic spaces or impose their will on the community. This is similar to how one might treat a Muslim who drinks alcohol: we would ban them from selling alcohol at an Eid carnival while also providing private support to them if they struggle with a drinking habit.

⁷⁹ Qur’an 91:9.

7. Supporting the faithful struggler

We should show empathy and understanding to Muslims dealing with same-sex attractions or gender identity issues for what is often a very difficult and emotionally taxing issue. As mentioned above, one should support the person in their general spirituality and in other ways: finding them mentors, advising them, lending them a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. But one should also know one's limits: the issues involved are often complex and deeply embedded. Do not pretend to know everything about how the person should deal with things. Rather, be there for general support, but point them in the right direction to find the resources they need. For additional resources on this topic and other general background information, please see the references cited below.⁸⁰

8. Upholding the Straight Path

When engaging with this issue on an individual and/or communal level, we should remember the “three Cs” for maintaining the Straight Path: clarity, compassion, and conviction. Being compassionate toward someone struggling with gender identity or same-sex attraction does not mean bending God's commands or misrepresenting the Islamic paradigm on gender, sexuality, morality, and identity.

⁸⁰ Waheed Jensen, “Straight Struggle | The Human Component | LGBTQ+ Conference,” EPIC MASJID, YouTube video, March 3, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipxCFABfYjA>; Yousef, “From a Same-Sex Attracted Muslim”; Omar Suleiman, Mustafa Umar, Sarah Sultan, and Ubaydallah Evans, “Islam and LGBTQ,” Yaqeen Institute, YouTube video, June 16, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb_aqp3yAho; El-Tobgui, “Islam and ‘LGBTQ’”;

Mobeen Vaid, “Where The Rainbow Ends: American Muslims And LGBT Activism,” MuslimMatters, January 7, 2022, <https://muslimmatters.org/2022/01/07/where-the-rainbow-ends-american-muslims-lgbt-activism/>; Mobeen Vaid, “And the Male Is Not like the Female: Sunni Islam and Gender Nonconformity,” MuslimMatters, July 24, 2017,

<https://muslimmatters.org/2017/07/24/and-the-male-is-not-like-the-female-sunni-islam-and-gender-nonconformity/>; Mobeen Vaid and Waheed Jensen, “‘And the Male Is Not like the Female’: Sunni Islam and Gender Nonconformity (Part 2),” MuslimMatters, December 30, 2020,

<https://muslimmatters.org/2020/12/30/and-the-male-is-not-like-the-female-sunni-islam-and-gender-nonconformity-part-2/>; Abdul-Hakim Murad, “Boys Will Be Boys . . . Reflections on Gender Identity and Relations,” About Islam, September 2018, <https://aboutislam.net/shariah/contemporary-issues/boys-will-boys/>; Abdul-Hakim Murad, “Islam, Irigaray, and the Retrieval of Gender,” April 1999, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/gender.htm>; Abdul-Hakim Murad, “Fall of the Family,” The Silva Initiative, July 12, 2021,

<https://thesilvainitiative.org/articles/fall-of-the-family/20210712/by-abdal-hakim/>; “Islam and LGBT Issues: Reading Material,” Muhammadan Discourse, May 20, 2021,

<https://muhammadandiscourse.blogspot.com/2021/05/islam-and-homosexuality-reading-material.html>.

No one is more merciful or compassionate than God; true compassion thus involves guiding others to the truth and what pleases the Creator.

Contemporary LGBT discourse often makes Western Muslims feel embarrassed by Islamic teachings on sexual ethics. Islam's sexual ethics are not the problem, however. Rather, they are the only solution to our problems—the solution that the West and all of the world desperately needs. It is a Qur'anic imperative to uphold our ethical standard with confidence, as Allah states: “Call [people] to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful admonition, and dispute with them in the most courteous of ways; for your Lord knows best who has strayed from His way and who is rightly guided.”⁸¹ This is the command that we have been given, and this is the command that we are bound to fulfill.

O Allah, show us the truth as truth and grant that we may follow it, and show us falsehood as falsehood and grant that we may avoid it. Ameen!

⁸¹ Qur'an 16:125.