

Common Myths & Misconception About Homosexuality

in Muslim Communities



Researched & written by

Imam Muhsin Hendricks

A collaborate contribution by

Al-Ghurbaah Foundation & Sydney Queer Muslims Inc

Table of Contents

Why this booklet?	1
Innate vs Constructed Homosexuality	2
Myth 1: Homosexuality is a choice	7
Myth 2: Homosexuality is a sin	7
Myth 3: Homosexuality can be “cured.”	8
Myth 4: The Quran condemns homosexuality	8
Myth 5: If it was allowed, the Quran would have mentioned it .	11
Myth 6: Marriage is between a man and a woman	12
Myth 7: Accepting homosexuality will corrupt Islam	13
Myth 8: Homosexuality is all about anal sex	14
Resources	15

Why this booklet?

Although we can admit that a diversity of opinions exists amongst the sciences regarding homosexuality, most researchers seem to conclude that both nature and nurture play an important role in shaping one's sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sexuality is probably one of the most complex realities of our human existence and hence to merely brush off a homosexual orientation as 'choice' speaks of a lack of knowledge about the nature of human sexual diversity and the lived realities of homosexuals.

There is a conflict between the science on the horizon, the legitimacy of queer narratives and the views of orthodox Muslim scholars around homosexuality. This conflict results in the inability of queer Muslims to reconcile their sexual orientation and gender identity with Islam. It causes a spiritual cognitive dissonance and an increase in mental health issues faced by queer Muslims.

Spiritual cognitive dissonance is the inability to reconcile two intrinsic identities for queer Muslims, their sexual or gender identity with their religious identity. The one cannot be sacrificed for the other. This coupled with the blatant rejection from orthodox Muslim communities has led many queer Muslims to negotiate this dilemma between sexuality and spirituality through assuming dual identities, drugs & alcohol abuse, irresponsible sexual behaviour, apostasy and suicidal ideation.

It is evident that the contemporary religious perspectives on homosexuality does not provide a solution to this dilemma, yet Islam is considered a natural way of life and hence cannot conflict with science or the lived realities of human beings. It is for this reason that we have embarked on this publication to shed some light on the subject though dispelling myths and misconceptions about homosexuality in Muslim communities.

Innate vs Constructed Homosexuality

Some scholars may argue that homosexuality did not exist during the time of the prophet Muhammad ﷺ since there is no incident in which the prophet ﷺ had to deal with it directly. Based on this, some scholars have concluded that homosexuality is a foreign practice, and the behaviour was imported from 'the evil West'. Other than the story of the people of Lot (*qaumu Lut*) which has always been used as a blanket condemnation for homosexuality, there are no clear injunctions in the Quran related to homosexuality or the punishment for homosexual offenders.

When the prophet Muhammad ﷺ arrived in Medina, there was already a community of gender diverse individuals residing there who were very influential in the arts, music and poetry. They were called the mukhannathun (effeminates / eunuchs). Some of them also served as servants in the houses of Arabs, specifically attending to the needs of women.

According to Rowson (1991) who did a study on the mukhannathun of early Medina, there was a diversity of individuals belonging to this community, some of whom were castrated eunuchs, natural eunuchs, effeminate men, transgender women and intersex (hermaphrodites). There seems to have been a preoccupation with the categorization of the mukhannathun amongst classical scholars. This categorization seems necessary to determine the Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) related to these mukhannathun and their gender identity.

By consensus, classical scholars determined from the Qur'an and numerous Hadith that a *mukhannath* is a man who has no sexual attraction towards women.

Abdul Malik ibn Habib as-Sulami (died 853) who followed the Maliki school of thought, was well versed in fiqh. He viewed a *mukhannath* to include those who displayed congenital and non-congenital effeminate behaviour. In his time society has already labelled *mukhannathun* as immoral. However, he did not consider a *mukhannath* to be only of the immoral kind and accepted the innateness of their being.

Innate Homosexuality - According to Al-Ghurbaah Foundation, 95% of homosexual men and women who have engaged in their programs, shared that they identified as innately homosexual, meaning that they had no choice in the matter of their sexual orientation, neither did they become homosexual due to learnt behaviour or a traumatic childhood experience.

The Maliki jurist Ibn Abd al-Barr (978-1071) agreed with ibn Habib that the *mukhannath* is also the one who resembles a woman in softness, speech, appearance, accent and thinking. He added that although some of the *mukhannathun* were known to have engaged in promiscuous acts, they were not exclusively promiscuous. He determined that if the *mukhannath* is naturally inclined to effeminacy, he would not desire women and would not notice anything sensual about them. Based on this lack of sexual attraction mentioned in Surah 24:31 (*ghayra ulil irbah minar rijal*), this category of *mukhannathun* was allowed in the female quarters and could engage freely with women as helpers and confidants. The non-congenital *mukhannath* (or constructed homosexual) was considered the one barred by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ from entering the female quarters.

Imam An-Nawawi agrees with Ibn Habib and Ibn Abd al-Barr on the view that a *mukhannath* is primarily one who is naturally effeminate. He further separated the *mukhannath* into two categories.

1) *Mukhannath min khalqin* (the innate homosexual) - an individual who is naturally effeminate. An-Nawawi held the view that there is no guilt, blame or shame on this individual, provided that he does not 'construct' the behaviour such as performing illicit acts or exploit it for monetary gain.

2) *Mukhannath bi takalluf* (the constructed homosexual) - an individual who pretends to be a homosexual or a male who uses his sexual orientation for monetary gain. He is considered a sinner. By the close of the ninth century, the term *mukhannath* had developed its association with homosexual sex and it became clearer that exploitive homosexual behaviour versus innate homosexual intimacy, and coercive versus consensual homosexuality, and homosexual public indecency versus private expressions of one's homosexual orientation were all conflated.



Jurists like Ibn 'Abd al-Barr stated that the *mukhannathun* in his time were all "known to be promiscuous". In other words, people were not able to separate the congenital ones who were innately attracted to the same sex from the promiscuous non-congenital ones.

Albeit some of the *mukhannathun* identifying as women or transgender and innately attracted to men, the concern for the *mukhannath*'s sexual needs and expressions were secondary to none. Neither was the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity clear. If they had a penis, they were considered male. If they were castrated, it meant that they lacked sexual vigor. If they had ambiguous genitalia, the opening through which they urinated determined their gender.

Constructed Homosexuality –

Contemporary examples can be seen amongst:

- Straight men in prisons may have sex with other men to exert power over another.

- Some straight hustlers / rent-boys may engage in homosexual sex for money, often to feed a drug habit.

- Homosexual sex is also a ritual in Satanic worship and in South Africa it is also an initiation ritual amongst certain gangs.

- In places like Afghanistan and the northern regions of Pakistan men have sex with boys (baccho-baazi) since women are inaccessible due to the strict segregation between the sexes

Such beliefs reinforced the heteropatriarchal and inconceivable notion that it is unnatural for a male to have sexual intercourse with another male, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The fixation was on the physical appearance of the person.

These Islamic rulings on homosexuality and transgenderism rest entirely upon scholarly opinion and their perception of gender and sexuality at the time. Classical scholars paid more attention to identifying the true *mukhannath* who is without sexual attraction towards women to protect the wives from public sexual immorality (*fahishah*) and to preserve the honor of the husband and family. It was, therefore, essential to ensure that the *mukhannath* who had access to the women's quarters did not have a sexual interest in them.

The Homosexuality of Qaumu Lut –

Homosexuality in the time of Sodom was constructed around idolatrous worship in the temple of Ishtar. Other examples of constructed homosexuality were the male molestation during the robberies on the Kings highway.

The sexual needs of the *mukhannath*, such as the legitimacy of their sexual needs or their need for a love relationship, were never considered since the heteronormative male ego cannot perceive sexual intimacy between people of the same sex. The same is concluded about female sexual intimacy. According to the *fiqh* of Imam Abu Hanifa, lesbianism (*sihaq*) is not punishable simply because there is no penis penetration, and sex is not considered sex without a penis.

Myth 1: Homosexuality is a choice.

Even though most homosexuals believe that their sexual orientation is not a choice, it is considered unnatural and sinful in heteronormative religious communities or conservative cultures. Just as heterosexuals believe that their sexual orientation is natural and not by choice, so too homosexuals believe that they had no choice in the matter.

Most professionals in the healing sciences have concluded that sexual orientation is caused by factors such as genetics, epigenetics, and the biology of brain development. Homosexuality does not develop because of traumatic childhood experiences, poor parenting, or social conditioning.

Myth 2: Homosexuality is a sin.

Sexual orientation is innate and therefore cannot be a sin. Sin is related to how we express our sexual orientation. All forms of expressions of homosexuality that is constructed is considered sinful. However, a consensual homosexual relationship in which homosexual couples define the parameters for their sexual expression is not considered a sin, just as a marriage contract between heterosexuals is legitimized on the bases of consent.

Myth 3: Homosexuality can be “cured.”

Can heterosexuality be cured? Ask this question to any heterosexual and they would find the question absurd. It is as absurd to ask this question of homosexuals. Sexual orientation is innate and cannot be cured through therapy or certain religious rituals. In fact, ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapy causes more harm over time and therefore an unethical practice in the healing sciences and an illegal practice in most developed countries.

“Exodus International, the largest North American reparative therapy organization, shut down in 2013 after 37 years of failure. At the press conference announcing this closure, the president, Alan Chambers, apologized for ‘...years of undue judgment by the organization and the Christian Church as a whole... We’ve been imprisoned in a worldview that’s neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical... From a Judeo-Christian perspective, gay, straight, or otherwise, we’re all prodigal sons and daughters. Exodus International is the prodigal’s older brother, trying to impose its will on God’s promises, and make judgments on who’s worthy of His Kingdom”

Myth 4: The Quran condemns homosexuality.

The Quran condemns constructed homosexuality, just as the Quran condemns coercive sex and sex outside of a contract amongst heterosexuals. Innate homosexuality and constructed homosexuality have always been conflated in the interpretation of the story of Sodom or *qaumu Lut* (the People of Lot). Only 4 out of the 96 verses on *qaumu Lut* in the Quran mentions male-to-male sex (7:81 / 26:165 / 27:55 / 29:29). In all four of these verses the men are perpetrators / penetrators (*fa’ileen*) / committing a crime (*mujrimeen*). The Quran refers to them as criminals (*mujrimeen*) so hence their homosexual activity must be interpreted as crime.

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ

Indeed, you approach the men sexually, excluding the women. Nay, you are a people committing excesses. (7:81)

أَأَنْتُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ

You coerce the men into sex and exclude women (from their sexual and bodily rights)? Nay, you are an ignorant people." (27:55)

The crime in these two verses is related to the molestation of men on the Kings Highway during the looting of the caravans and the institutionalization of homosexuality as an idolatrous practice in the temple of Ishtar, wherein men who came to the temple for worship were compelled to participate in these homosexual rituals which were constituted as an offering to the Goddess of Fertility (*Ishtar*). Men offered their sperm to Ishtar in the hope that Ishtar will keep their lands fertile. At the same time women were forced into temple prostitution. They too had to give their virginity to Ishtar so that they could become pure (*At-har*) and ready to marry and bear children. Women would sit in rows in the temple and men would pass making their choice after having paid the taxes to the temple priests (*Assinu*). Women were stripped from their sexual and bodily rights.

أَتَأْتُونَ الذُّكْرَانَ مَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

Would you really approach the males in all creation? (26:165)

This verse must be interpreted considering its historical context and the fact that the Quran refers to these men as criminals. Sex was used as a power tool to dominate over other men. History is testimony to the abuse of sexual power wherein women were victims, however the men of Sodom instituted this practice whereby the raping of men was

about dominance and power. The victims were often 'straight male travellers' who were subjected to anal penetration. Indeed, a humiliation for these men and hence the Quran poses the above question to the perpetrators.

أَنْتُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرَّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ السَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ فَمَا كَانَ
جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَنْتِنَا بِعَذَابِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

Will you sexually approach men, cut off the highway and make unjust laws in your councils? But his people answered nothing except that they said, "bring upon us the promised punishment of Allah if you are indeed telling the truth." (29:29)

Here the Quran is almost offering a summary of the atrocities which is all related to the abuse of power and privilege; molestation of men, robbery on the highway and unjust laws constituted in their temples. These crimes related in this Quranic rendition of the story of *qaumu Lut*, are considered 'constructed homosexuality' wherein sex was not motivated by innate feelings, love, or consent. Regardless of whether these men were innately homosexual or straight men behaving badly, the atrocities committed and the violation of human rights using sex for power, is what the story is highlighting. Therefore, this story cannot be used as a blanket condemnation of homosexuality as a natural sexual orientation.

Now that we have more information about sexual orientation in the 21st century, it is time that we separate innate homosexuality from constructed homosexuality and understand that the story of *Qaumu Lut* does not condemn the former, but rather highlights a form of abuse wherein homosexual sex was related to power and male privilege.

All the Surahs in the Quran related to the story of *qaumu Lut* are *Makki* Surahs, and *Makki* Surahs mainly deal with idolatrous beliefs,

motivation for the Prophet during his difficult times, stories of previous prophets and previous nations who were destroyed for their injustices. It does not deal with issues of gender and sexuality. These are found to be discussed later in the *Madini* surahs. Had the story been about sexuality it would have appeared in the *Madini* surahs.

Myth 5: If it was allowed, the Quran would have mentioned it.

The Quran is silent about a homosexual orientation since it is largely addressing a 7th century patriarchal society. During that time homosexuality, albeit known and practiced amongst Arabs, was private and did not warrant to be addressed since it was not impacting negatively on society, nor was there a need to identify around one's sexual orientation. The Quran at least acknowledges in Surah 24:31 that there are men especially amongst the servants who serve the needs of women while they did not have any sexual attraction towards them. No classical scholar has ever attempted to unpack the sexual needs of these men who lacked desire for women. It was simply just not important. The Quran acknowledges in Chapter 17 verse 84 that everyone acts according to their own natural inclinations / predisposition and Allah knows best who is guided on the way. This implies that judgment cannot be passed on someone based on their predisposition or innateness of being, especially when the actions that flows from such predispositions do not cause harm to the individual and others.

The Quran also acknowledges in Chapter 3 verse 6 that it is Allah who fashions in the wombs whatever Allah wishes.

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Allah is the One who shapes you in the wombs as Allah wills. There is no deity except Allah, the Almighty, the Truly Wise. (3:6)

Myth 6: Marriage is between a man and a woman.

Whenever the Quran makes reference to partners in a committed relationship, it uses the words ‘*zauj* – partner’ or ‘*azwaja* – partners’ and not husband and wife, except for two historical incidences. Thus, extending the possibility of partnerships to exist beyond hetero-normative monogamous relationships. The Quran mentions in Surah 30:21 that Allah created partners for us, from our own kind, so that we can find tranquillity a cohabitation with them (*sakina*). By deduction, if two persons from the same sex receives the same kind of ‘*sakina*’ from each other, and they can engender love (*mawaddah*) and compassion (*rahmah*) between them, then there is legitimacy for such a relationship to exist. These alternative relationships amongst humans should also be considered as “amongst the Signs of Allah”.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً
وَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And among Allah’s wonders is that Allah created for you partners from your own kind. so that you might incline towards them, and Allah engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think! (30:21)

Conservative religious scholars in all the Abrahamic faiths teach that marriage is for procreation. There are numerous examples of couples who are married but cannot produce offspring. Procreation is a natural

result of 'some' heterosexual sexual intimacy. Marriage legitimizes sex through which heterosexuals procreate and maintain lineage, but procreation is not the primary reason for marriage. If it were, it would mean that couples who cannot procreate, their marriages are null and void.

Through many of these partners humanity is multiplied, but the primary reason for marriage is to engender love and compassion and to find tranquility within each other.

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ

Limitless is Allah's glory, who has created partners in whatever the earth produces, and amongst themselves, and in that of which they have no knowledge. (36:36)

Myth 7: Accepting homosexuality will corrupt Islam.

Islam is a way of life that promotes authenticity; hence the prophet Muhammad ﷺ was vehemently opposed to any forms of imitation and false portrayal of the natural self. Homosexuality as a sexual orientation is innate and accepting that there are people in the world who are naturally attracted to the same sex does not corrupt Islam. Even the expression of one's homosexuality within the boundaries of consent and privacy cannot corrupt Islam. However, homosexuality that is constructed, such as using homosexual sex to exert power over other men, coercive sex, idolatrous homosexual practices, using homosexuality for monetary gain, public display of homosexual sexual intimacy and promoting homosexual indecency can never be accepted in Islam. Accepting people's homosexual orientation and gender

identity is as natural as accepting someone's heterosexual orientation and gender identity.

Condemning homosexuality, punishing people for being homosexual or denying people the right to express their homosexual orientation does not rid society of this so called 'sin' and 'corruption'. On the contrary, because of sexual suppression, the ways in which people find an outlet can sometimes be much more harmful to the personal and the public. Creating acceptance of marginalized sexual identities allows us to access them and create opportunities to promote informed ways of sexual expression that are authentic, safe, and healthy.

Myth 8: Homosexuality is all about anal sex.

Anal sex is not a form of sex that is exclusive to homosexuals. Some homosexual practice it, some don't, some heterosexuals practice it, and some don't. There are many ways in which homosexual couples express sexual intimacy just as their heterosexual counterparts. Homosexuality has always been conflated with sodomy, yet sodomy today is still not clearly defined in theology and in law.

Some consider sodomy as anal and oral sex regardless of the gender. Some consider sodomy as just anal sex, and some consider sodomy as the act of forcing penetration via the anus. Whatever the case may be, homosexuals are not sodomites, while some sodomites, according to the definition can be a heterosexual or a homosexual. Whatever form the sexual expression takes between consenting adults, is best to leave it in the private space.

Resources

El-Rouayheb, K. (2005). “Before Homosexuality in the Arabic-Islamic World, 1500-1800”. Chicago: Chicago University Press

Habib, S. (2010). “Islam and homosexuality”. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Jahangir, J. and Hussein, A. (2018). “ Islamic law and Muslim same-sex unions”. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Kugle, S.A. (2013). “Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims. Oxford: Oneworld.

Rowson, E.K., (1991). "The Effeminate of Early Medina" (PDF). Journal of the American Oriental Society.

Artwork: Courtesy of Mire Mroué @thequeerdomofgod

Contact Us

[Al-Ghurbaah Foundation](#)

Email: admin@al-ghurbaah.org.za

Web: www.al-ghurbaah.org.za

[Sydney Queer Muslims Inc](#)



A Spiritual Resource Project for Queer Muslims



Supported By:

