

# Lesbianism in Islam and Christianity

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# Overview

- Project medium: argumentative essay
- Thesis: By virtue of patriarchal ignorance of women if nothing else, was female homosexuality accepted in the early days of the traditions?
- Contrast attitudes towards male vs. female homosexuality
- Similar analysis possible in other traditions, but I focus on Islam and Christianity

The background features abstract, flowing shapes in shades of purple and pink, primarily located in the top-left and bottom-right corners. Scattered throughout the white space are several small, solid purple circles of varying sizes.

# Islam

# Story of Lot

## Background

Lot hosts God's angels,  
mob insists they be  
allowed to "know" them,  
God destroys city

## Traditional interpretation

Some authorities "read  
into the scriptural text the  
conclusion that Lot was  
sent...to forbid anal sex  
between men."<sup>1</sup>

## Hospitality and power dynamics

The true focuses of God's  
wrath

## No mention of women

Lot story discusses anal  
sex between men, not sex  
acts between women

## Omission = acceptance?

No discussion of  
lesbianism suggests an  
approval not afforded to  
men

<sup>1</sup> Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle,  
*Homosexuality in Islam: Critical  
Reflection on Gay, Lesbian and  
Transgender Muslims*, (Oxford:  
OneWorld Press, 2010), 50.

# “The immorality”

- Need 4 eyewitnesses to confirm: same as to confirm *zina*
  - Hence why some think it refers to female homosexuality
  - Punishment is not the same though
- Grammatical structures of verse debunk that idea: *hunna* and “your women” suggest group of 3 or more women
  - What kind of intercourse is that?
- Surrounding verses are about financial honesty and fraud
  - Lesbianism would be a discontinuity
- Male jurists “often suppress issues of economic injustice and social justice in favor of more narrowly defining ethics in terms of sexual morality.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, 65.

# Legal Frameworks

## Marriage

- sex only acceptable within marriage → no such thing as a legal same-sex marriage in Islam → no forum for licit homosexual sex acts
- Lesbian relationships acceptable in and of themselves, but cannot be legitimated through marriage
  - It's not the connection between the partners, it's the inability to marry

## Sex

- “Many legal effects of sex depend on penetration by a penis.”<sup>3</sup>
- Sex between women not considered actual sex—could bypass need for marriage

<sup>3</sup> Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (n.p.: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 80.



# Christianity

# Counterargument: Romans 1:26-27

**“Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.”<sup>7</sup>**

- “In the same way”: men and women are having the same kind of “unnatural intercourse”<sup>8</sup>
- Categorizes male and female homosexuality together: Paul doesn’t separate them
- Not a place where lesbianism is “accidentally” accepted

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:26-27 (New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>8</sup> Bernadette J. Brooten, “The Bible and Love Between Women,” *Open Hands* Volume, 15:3 (Winter 2000): 15.





# Ruth and Naomi

## Devotion

“Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”<sup>4</sup>

## Exalted lesbian love

Not condemned but rather celebrated with their own book in the Bible

## David and Jonathan

Not a place where lesbianism is condoned but male homosexuality is not

<sup>4</sup>Ruth 1:16 (New Revised Standard Version).



# Leviticus 18:22

- Most oft-cited clobber passage, yet is only about men: “do not lie with a man as with a woman”
- “Biblical and Jewish law regard this ‘lying’ as requiring penetration by a penis”<sup>5</sup>: lesbian sex does not qualify as sex
- Lesbianism doubly affirmed by Leviticus 18:22:
  - Once under traditional anti-homosexuality interpretation (even if only by oversight)
  - Once through reinterpretation/queer hermeneutics
- Lesbianism not a violation of biblical law until 12th century <sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jay Michaelson, *God Vs. Gay?: The Religious Case for Equality*, (n.p.: Beacon Press, 2012), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Michaelson, *God Vs. Gay?*, 60.

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**Questions?**