

A thick black L-shaped frame is positioned on the left and bottom edges of the slide, framing the text.

# **POLICING BODIES 2**

**Desires and Intimacies**

# Purity and modesty

- **Religious** function/rationale:
  - *To be pleasing to God/gods and avoid sin*
  - *To obey sacred scripture and tradition*
  - *To foster marital relationships*
- **Cultural** function/impact of these beliefs in wider culture
  - *Validating existing cultural controls over (predominantly) girls' and women's bodies and sexual agency.*
  - *Reinforcing gender stereotypes of “passive” female sexuality.*
  - *Reinforcing belief that womens' social, religious and moral “value” is determined by their sexuality.*
  - *Creating a culture of shame and stigma for those who do/can not conform.*
  - *Granting validation to people who **choose** to adopt modesty and purity.*

# This week: heterosexuality

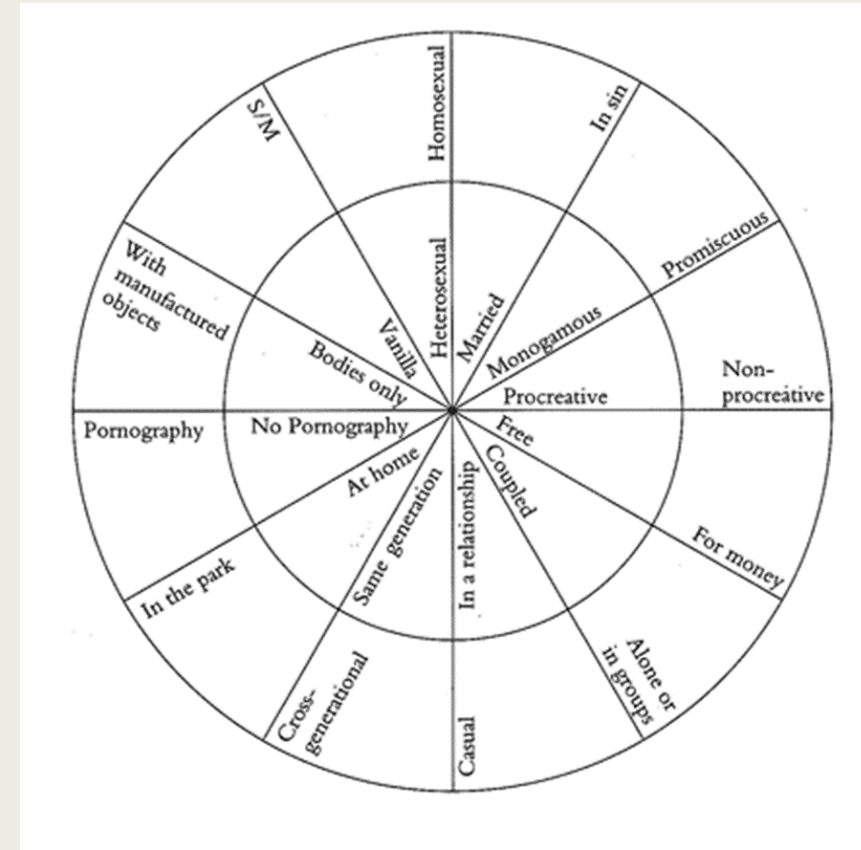
How do religious traditions attempt to prescribe and proscribe bodies and behaviours, regarding issues of heterosex, sexual desire, and reproductive choices?



# Are religions anti-heterosex?

No, but ...

- Only some kinds of heterosex are acceptable
- Prescriptions and rules about heterosex are typically **gendered**
- Sex is only acceptable in certain situations and for certain groups.
- These attitudes are in constant flux – not fixed or stable.
- See Dag Ølstein Endsjø, *Sex and Religion*, ch.4.



# Sex before marriage

- Typically prohibited (or at least disapproved of) in many religions – but particularly for women.
- Sexual double standard – concepts of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’
- Variation among religious communities – e.g. Reform Judaism vs. Hasidic Judaism.
- Pre-marital sex **may be** punished within religious and cultural communities.



# Sex before marriage 2

- Women's sexuality may be heavily policed:
  - *Religious functions – purity issues, conformity to divinely mandated gender relations, preventing impediment to enlightenment.*
  - *Cultural implications– honour and shame, sexuality as commodity, policing women's sexualities to authorize patriarchal control.*
- Men's sexuality is less open to question – e.g. toleration of prostitutes, or sex with women outside the religious community:
  - *Religious functions – no explicit justification given in religious texts or traditions.*
  - *Cultural implications – preserving traditional notions of masculinity; granting authority to male control of women's sexuality.*

# Sex within marriage

- Religious claims that marriage has been unchanging over time and place are erroneous.
- Dialectical relationship between religion and culture:
  - *Religious teachings and beliefs may validate existing cultural norms around marriage and sexual relationships.*
  - *Religious teachings and beliefs may influence or shape cultural norms around marriage and sexual relationships.*





# Marriage

Multiple understandings of marriage across and within religious traditions:

- Lifelong vs. temporary
- Undesirable vs. sacred obligation
- Forced vs. consensual
- Procreative vs. chaste
- Monogamous vs. polygamous





# Who are you marrying?

Marriage between people of different races, castes, and religions have been (or remain) prohibited in certain religious traditions:

## ■ Christianity and Judaism:

- *Biblical basis – inter-racial marriage posed a threat to religious fidelity and community ‘purity’ (see e.g. book of Ezra in the OT/HB). But, there were exceptions – Jewish Bible/Old Testament is multivocal on intermarriage.*
- *Interfaith marriages prohibited according to official RC doctrine.*
- *Biblical arguments of racial/religious purity used to justify prohibitions of mixed marriage in the US, Nazi Germany, and South Africa.*

## ■ Hinduism:

- *Marriage across castes is strictly prohibited in some Hindu communities.*
- *This has been a significant source of violence for those who choose to disobey.*

## ■ Islam:

- *Stipulations for Muslims to marry other Muslims (or Muslim converts) in Koran and Hadiths.*

# Cultural function

“The religious rules defining who may have sex with whom, whether based on gender, colour, ethnicity, caste or religion, all have one thing in common: they reinforce the fundamental rule, important to many religions, that there are differences between people, that there should be differences between people, and that a different value is attached to different people depending on who they are (or are defined as being). **Gender, colour, ethnicity, caste and religion are all factors that define people’s worth within a religious world view. Sex rules contribute to the upholding of these definitions.”**

Endsjø, Dag Ølstein. Sex and Religion, p. 196.

# How many is too many?

- Not all sacred texts or traditions insist on monogamy (for men):
  - *Hebrew and Christian bibles*
  - *Kamasutra*
  - *Koran*
- Some religious traditions tolerate concubines and sexual slaves.
- Attitudes to polygyny often influenced by cultural norms or secular laws.
- Culture clashes – how do religions change with the times?
- Reflects gendered differences in culture and religion.



# Adultery – the great taboo

- Punishable by death in a number of religious texts and traditions.
- Still punishable by death/corporal punishment In some religious communities today.
- Adultery = a man has sex with another man's wife.
- Religious function: adultery is a sin and can 'pollute' the community – not pleasing to god(s).
- Cultural function: reinforcing ideology of women as male property and source of male honour/shame; protecting paternity.



# The hows, whens, and wheres of sex within marriage

- Sex prohibited in marriage at particular times.
- 'Sexpectations' – frequency of sex may be regulated
- Sex prohibited in particular places (particularly sacred spaces)
- Certain sexual practices forbidden (e.g. anal sex, oral sex).
- Some of these have scriptural precedents, others arise in later traditions and may reflect cultural values and taboos.
- Not fixed or stable, but subject to change.
- Religious and cultural functions?





# Divorce

- Religious texts and traditions stipulate when a marriage can end and who can end it.
- These teachings may show gender bias.
- Some religions allow divorce, others ban it completely.
- Differences among and between religious communities – often influenced by socio-cultural context.





# Reproductive rights and religion

- Sex is tolerated in marriage if it is procreative.
- Religious restrictions around birth control (other than abstinence).
- Religious teachings may or may not be adopted in practice.
- Cultural functions: maintain population of religious community; another means of controlling community members (particularly women).



# Abortion

- Religious traditions have various attitudes towards abortion – from outright condemnation, to acceptance in particular circumstances.
- Religious reasons focus on the sanctity of life – of both the foetus and the mother.
- Abortion as a moral decision? Or a religious decision?
- To what extent should religions influence state/national laws around sex and sexuality, including contraception and abortion?