



GHHU 2901

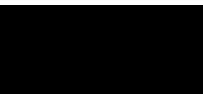


## Religious Love: The Effects Religion Has on Relationships and Marriage

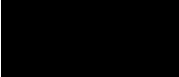
Most religions have stories, poems, and tales of love and romance incorporated into their doctrine as well as cautionary tales of disobeying their rules and commands. Nevertheless, love is a natural part of life that religions would be remiss to not acknowledge. This essay is going to explore how religion has defined love, romance, relationships, and marriage and how these rules and expectations are handled by religious followers. In examining the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the enormous impact these religions have on their almost 5 billion followers is evident.

### Judaism

Judaism had, and has, an immeasurable impact on Christianity and Islam as the oldest of the Abrahamic religions. Love stories and books (Psalms, Song of Songs) from the Torah and the Old Testament are essential to Christianity and Islam. Love and intimacy are seen as necessary and desired in Judaism, but only in marriage. With the respect and acceptance of romance and love in the Jewish faith, it is strongly encouraged, almost required in some sects, to get married. As one can see throughout this essay, Judaism, along with the other Abrahamic religions mentioned, have many restrictions on intimacy before, and even after, marriage. While Judaism is very closely related to the Jewish culture, this essay is going to be exploring practicing Jews, mainly Orthodox and conservative Jews.

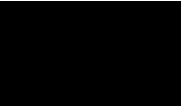


Dating in Jewish communities ranges wildly depending on the sect being considered. For the Orthodox or conservative Jew, dating can be quite rigid and restrictive compared to reformed Jews. These communities may even utilize the help of a Shadchanim, a Jewish professional matchmaker, to find a match within their community (Penkower 1-35). There is also the concept of Shidduch, which is a system of matchmaking and dating that orthodox communities use. In the Shidduch, dating is not meant for fun or frivolous reasons. Dating is used as a way for singles of age to find a serious life partner. Within this community, consent is very important and required for these arranged relationships. In fact, it states in the Talmud (a source of Jewish religious law and theology) that it is required that a man meets his intended and she finds him favorable. The Shidduch, as seen by its followers, is seen as a way to ensure an agreeable and lasting match, rather than a source of oppression (The Shidduch). In modern ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, there seems to be a growing “crisis” of young unmarried singles that the community looks upon unfavorably, to the point where they have even coined a term for the phenomena, “shidduch-crisis”. As these singles get serious about their potential match, there is still an abundance of rules to follow in the process that is intended to discourage inappropriate sexual contact. Very limited physical contact or no physical contact between unmarried couples is strictly enforced. Furthermore, there is the difficult and complex status of the Niddah. The Niddah is a legal status women fall under related to their menstrual cycles (Orthodox couples can choose to follow this). The Niddah is seen as a protective status that unmarried women are always in. Married women, however, can break free from this status using the mikvah (ritual bath). Under the niddah, women and their partners must refrain from any physical contact that provides sexual pleasure including kissing, hugging, and sex. For an unmarried couple already in love, this may apply to any physical contact. Another rule is yichud (seclusion). This rule is for



unmarried couples to remain distant and not be alone together. This concept has led to separate seating sections in synagogues (Penkower 0-45). There are many other rules in conjunction with the ones mentioned, but the main objective of these rules is to reinforce the idea of sexual purity before and after marriage.

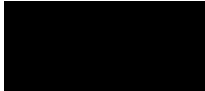
Marriage in Judaism, like dating, also has many rules. Niddah was already touched on in regard to dating, but it also has an influence on married couples as well. The Niddah is based around a woman's menstruation cycle, and a man cannot go near his wife while she is on her period until a seven-day waiting period after her cycle has passed and she takes the mikvah (Penkower 0-45). Other rules focus on the marital bed, such as consent, sexual obligations, masturbation, and birth control. It is imperative to remember that some of the more extreme rules are not followed by all Jews but may be followed by the more devout. This is especially true when looking at the Codes of Jewish Law, which state very harsh laws about sexuality, including prohibited sex positions, and highly regulated bedroom manners, even to the point of prohibiting conversing during sex (Sherbok, Chryssides, Alami 1-17). Polygamy was allowed, although no longer practiced in Judaism, with men allowed to have up to four wives, in contrast to Christianity. Also, divorce is permitted, but must be initiated by the man. Lastly, interfaith marriage is prohibited in Judaism, as this union is seen as disruptive to continuing the Jewish community. It should be noted that this teaching is becoming less enforced (Zarean, Barzegar). A Pew Research survey found that 44 percent of American Jews married outside their faith, mostly found in reformed Jewish communities. The same poll found that interfaith marriage was low to zero among conservative and orthodox Jews (Goodman). While Judaism influenced Christianity and Islam, there are fundamental differences in the actual teachings and enforcement between these religions.



## Christianity

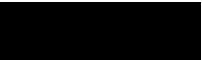
Overarching principles in the Bible influence marriage and relationships in Christianity despite there being many sects. Most Christians see love and relationships as a gift from God and marriage as a commitment and vow between God and husband and wife. This outlook may seem mundane and unexciting but there are many biblical writings, including Song of Songs, that present the erotic side of romantic love. Love stories, such as Sarah and Abraham, David and Bathsheba, and Boaz and Ruth show couples with love and romance and not just commitment and obligation. Romance is clearly seen as acceptable and even encouraged in the Christian faith, however, it must be within the proper constraints. The Bible has many warnings and cautions against “impure” relationships. Teachings on virginity, divorce and remarriage, infidelity, and same-sex relationships are aspects of the Christian faith that have had a profound influence on relationships throughout history and into the present.

One of the most consequential aspects of Christian teaching that has influenced culture in Western Christianity is the concept of virginity. The Bible mentions in multiple places the importance of remaining a virgin until marriage. 1 Corinthians 6:18–20 is often quoted as the scripture that warns against sexual immorality (NIV Bible 1 Cor. 6:18-20). The teachings on virginity have had an enormous effect on people throughout history. Virginity and chastity were used as tools of control, oppression, and intimidation, especially for women, who were held to higher standards of virtue until recently. Even today, there remains a strong taboo on the number of sexual partners women have. A large majority of unmarried Christians are sexually active which has led to many Christians experiencing symptoms of sexual dysfunction. This problem has plagued the Christian community (mainly Western Christians) because there is a cultural pressure to be sexually active, while people are also expected to adhere to Christian teachings.



This environment of acceptable sexual activity while also remaining taboo has left Christians with many challenges, including sexual guilt, sexual dysfunction, and Vaginismus. Vaginismus is an involuntary contraction of the pelvic muscles that prohibit healthy sexual intercourse. This condition can be seen among religious women, where their religion prohibits premarital sex. According to an article, “In Turkey, studies have identified vaginismus as the main cause of unconsummated marriage in just over 80% of couples.” This condition can be seen as evidence of the consequences that can arise where the expectation for virginity is strictly enforced (Whitaker) (McEvoy, McElvaney, Glover). Christians in general do not adhere to virginity teachings as much as other religions do. Because there is less cultural pressure to remain a virgin, the Christian dating culture judges premarital sex less harshly than other religions, such as Islam, with data from a 2011 study, stating that 80 percent of Christians have premarital sex (Miller).

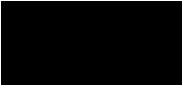
Marriage in Christianity is very complex. In Christianity and more specifically western Christianity, the topic of marriage has found itself almost idolized, while the teachings differ. Judaism and Islam stress more aggressively that marriage is crucial and necessary, however, Christianity has differing opinions. The bible clearly supports marriage and the foundations it sets. This support can be seen in multiple scriptures, mainly in Genesis where it states that a man will leave his home and become “one flesh” with his wife (NIV Bible Gen. 2:24). Furthermore, numerous scriptures show support for marriage including Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, and Proverbs 18:22 (NIV Bible). Lastly, Paul uses marriage as a parable for the church, showing his support. This support for marriage is juxtaposed with scriptures and teachings that seem to deter followers from marriage. Marriage is seen as part of the material world and not of the holy one. It also states in multiple places that it is better to remain unmarried, and people who do so have “the gift” (free from sexual desires). Furthermore, multiple sects of Christianity have people who



are considered highly religious and are part of the sacred orders (nuns, priests), who abstain from marriage and sex (Zarean, Barzegar). Nevertheless, the majority of western Christians do not find themselves bound by these limitations and are married and/or sexually active. After marriage, there are not as many restrictions compared to orthodox Jews.

Many Christian sects vary in their approach to sex. Many protestants hold to far fewer limitations than Catholics or Mormons. This is evident in Catholicism where sex is purposed for procreation and discourages the use of birth control. Since marriage is seen as a sacred act that bonds two people together, there are many requirements to a pure marriage aside from sexuality. Aside from annulment in Catholicism, most sects believe marriage is forever, even if those teachings are not enforced or obeyed by followers. The forever aspect of marriage is handled with care and consideration. Divorce in Christianity is seen as a last resort for infidelity. Adultery is seen as one of the graver sins in the Bible, and to this day is still seen as taboo. After divorce, remarriage is highly discouraged, as teachings state that two people are still regarded as one, regardless of separation. For the same reasons, polygamy is also prohibited under Christianity (Zarean, Barzegar) (Sherbok, Chryssides, Alami 23-32).

Lastly, approaches to interfaith marriage differ depending on the sect. This does not include interdenominational relationships, which refer to different Christian denominations. For protestants, interfaith marriage is discouraged in scriptures that point to not being “bound” with unbelievers, such as 2 Corinthians 6:14–15 (NIV Bible 2 Cor. 6:14-15), but these restrictions are rarely enforced. In everyday practice, protestants find themselves more in line with reformed Jews, having a high number of interfaith marriages (Murphy). As we move into Islam, it is important to remember that while there are a number of similarities between Judaism and




Christianity, as these are Abrahamic religions, Islam does look at love and marriage in a very different way.

### Islam

With sixty different ways to describe love in Arabic (the language of the Qur'an), romance and relationships are deeply rooted in the Islamic community. According to Amira Shamma Abdin, Muslims believe that love is an instinct in humans that was gifted by Allah, as he loves humans, humans should love one another. As this love is directly linked, it is important for Muslims to find love through Allah (Abdin). As long as the love and passion of a couple leads to marriage, and of course keeping to customs until marriage, romance and attractions are permitted under Islamic teachings.


Leading up to marriage, sexual activity and “dating” are still rather taboo among Muslim communities. Islamic teachings are very clear on sexual intimacy before marriage. In Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, virginity until marriage is a strict rule, and all pre-marital sexual intimacy is prohibited (Qur'an 17: *Surah Isra* 32). This has led to young Muslims having difficulties in halal (permissible) dating. Normally, Muslims would avoid dating, as it is seen as a Western concept with sexual undertones. However, as the Muslim youth becomes more global and modern, dating is to be expected. Traditionally, Muslim youths would have their families match them up, but as things change Muslims must adapt to a changing world and expanding community. To keep to halal dating, Muslims are required to follow a number of rules. Premarital sex is strictly prohibited. To ensure that sex does not occur, Muslim couples avoid being alone together without a chaperone and do not engage in improper or sexual conversations (Rashid).



Interfaith relationships in Islam are definitely not ideal, although there are some exceptions. Because marriage in Islam is seen as a way to ensure a new generation is Muslims, interfaith marriages are seen as an obstacle to that objective. Interfaith marriage is permissible under only very specific situations. Marriage is prohibited between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. This is because men are seen as having more influence upon a Muslim women's faith, as men are leaders in the family dynamic. There are exceptions for Muslim men and non-Muslim women. Muslim men can marry a non-Muslim woman if they are “people of the book.” People of the Book are Jews and Christians, who are seen as misguided but are still seen as believers, as opposed to pagans and non-believers. So, Muslim men can marry women of the book, however, it is still not seen as ideal as she can still lead him and his children astray (Islam) (Niekerk, Verkuyten).

Similar to Christianity and Judaism, Muslims believe that marriage and family are the building blocks of society that must be preserved through tradition and laws. As a cornerstone of Islam, there are many teachings on Marriage. The Quran, Hadith, and a number of prophets (including Muhammad himself) all highly encourage marriage. Marriage is seen as a way for humans to reach tranquility. Also, marriage is used as a tool to satisfy sexual desires. Differing greatly from Christianity, marriage in Islam is seen as more of a commandment, with men and women almost required to get married. In Christianity, marriage is permissible and encouraged, however, individuals are seen as more deserving of grace if they can go without sex and marriage. In Islam, if someone decides to stay unwed or childless, this is seen as a shortcoming. Marriage is seen as vital in Muslim communities because it is imperative to continue generations of Muslims (Zarean, Barzegar). Divorced is also frowned upon. Divorce in Islam is seen as a failure and the last resort. Divorce is highly regulated to ensure the best outcome for the family





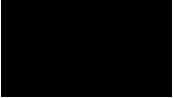
and children. Before a divorce can take place, relatives from both sides, who act as arbiters, try to reconcile the couple. If reconciliation still does not take place, and a couple has exhausted all other options, divorce is lawful. (Zarean, Barzegar).

Differing from Christians and modern Jews, polygamy is permitted in Islam and is still practiced among some Muslims today. It is argued that the practice of polygamy started as a way to care for widows and orphans, as wars took away husbands and fathers. Nevertheless, polygamy became acceptable in Muslim communities and is permitted in the Qur'an. However, there are many requirements and restrictions that go along with polygamy. In the pre-Muslim middle east, polygamy was used, with few restrictions. This led to women being mistreated, as a man could pay the wife's family the dowry, and then she was essentially discarded and treated poorly. The Qur'an, however, did use a number of restrictions to ensure that the wives would be treated fairly. Men are only allowed to take four wives, and only if he is able to take care of them fully and equally. If a man cannot sustain the burden, then he must abstain. Modern Muslim polygamists have over the years given wives more say over the number of wives their husbands can take in (Olsen).

#### In summary

As we have seen with these three religions, their teachings and writings can be quite severe and limiting on sexuality and passion. The natural question to ask is how much influence these religions have on its followers. With many variables, including which religion, how devout the follower, which sect, and geography, one can see how Abrahamic religions influence marriage and relationships.

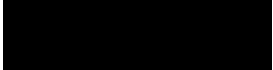
All the Abrahamic religions condemn or severely limit sex and/or physical intimacy in their teachings, yet a large number of followers still find themselves sexually active. A research



paper from 2012 that looked at sexual behaviors and religion saw how these Abrahamic religions differ in premarital sex among followers. One variable in the number of followers that have premarital sex was the religious culture the individual was in. The study saw the country the individual was in, regardless of religion, played a major role in pre-marital sex. One study that looked at a small number of women specifically, showed that Muslims were last on the tier with only 61% saying they had premarital sex. This was followed by Christians (78%) and then by Jews (81%), who had the highest number of unmarried sexually active adults (Adamczyk, Hayes). These findings mirror other studies that show the same results. Muslims are by far the religion with the lowest rates of premarital sex, with Jews having the highest (Gannon).

Interfaith marriage plays a massive role in whether a couple is more or less religious, and whether religion plays a major role in their lives. With 1 in 5 people being brought up in an interfaith household, Americans are by and large more open to these kinds of relationships. According to a Pew Research Survey, 44% of Americans said shared religious beliefs were very important. The survey also found that couples who are in mixed-faith relationships, including interdenominational and unaffiliated relationships, are less religious than their same-faith counterparts. Lastly, married couples in interfaith relationships said the religion of their partner was not a defining factor in their choice to marry, with only 27% saying the religion of their partner was “very important” (Mitchell).

As with sexual activity and interfaith marriage, the Abrahamic religions have a lot to say on divorce. Even with the prohibitions religions impose on divorce, their followers still seem to separate. With divorce being permissible in Judaism, it is surprising that divorce rates aren't higher, as opposed to Christianity which forbids it. The Rabbinical Courts Administration found that in 2016 divorce rates were on the rise with a 1.8% increase (Sharon). Overall, the number of




Jews divorced or separated was low at 9%. For Christians, which has some harshest words for the divorced, the number was 12.1%. Lastly, Muslims were at 8% (Martial Status). Divorce rates among Muslims change drastically depending on the country, with American Muslims having relatively high divorce rates compared to the general public and their Middle Eastern counterparts. Muslims are also less likely, than protestants, to see divorce as acceptable (Mogahed).

In conclusion, even with the similarities these religions have, there is still an abundance of variables that influence their respective followers. From sex to marriage to divorce, religions are there every step of the way to ensure their followers are keeping to traditions and rules. As seen by their followers, these harsh guidelines are there to maintain a functioning society. Throughout this essay it is evident that religion has and will continue to shape relationships.



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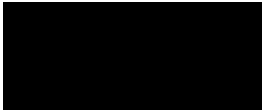
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