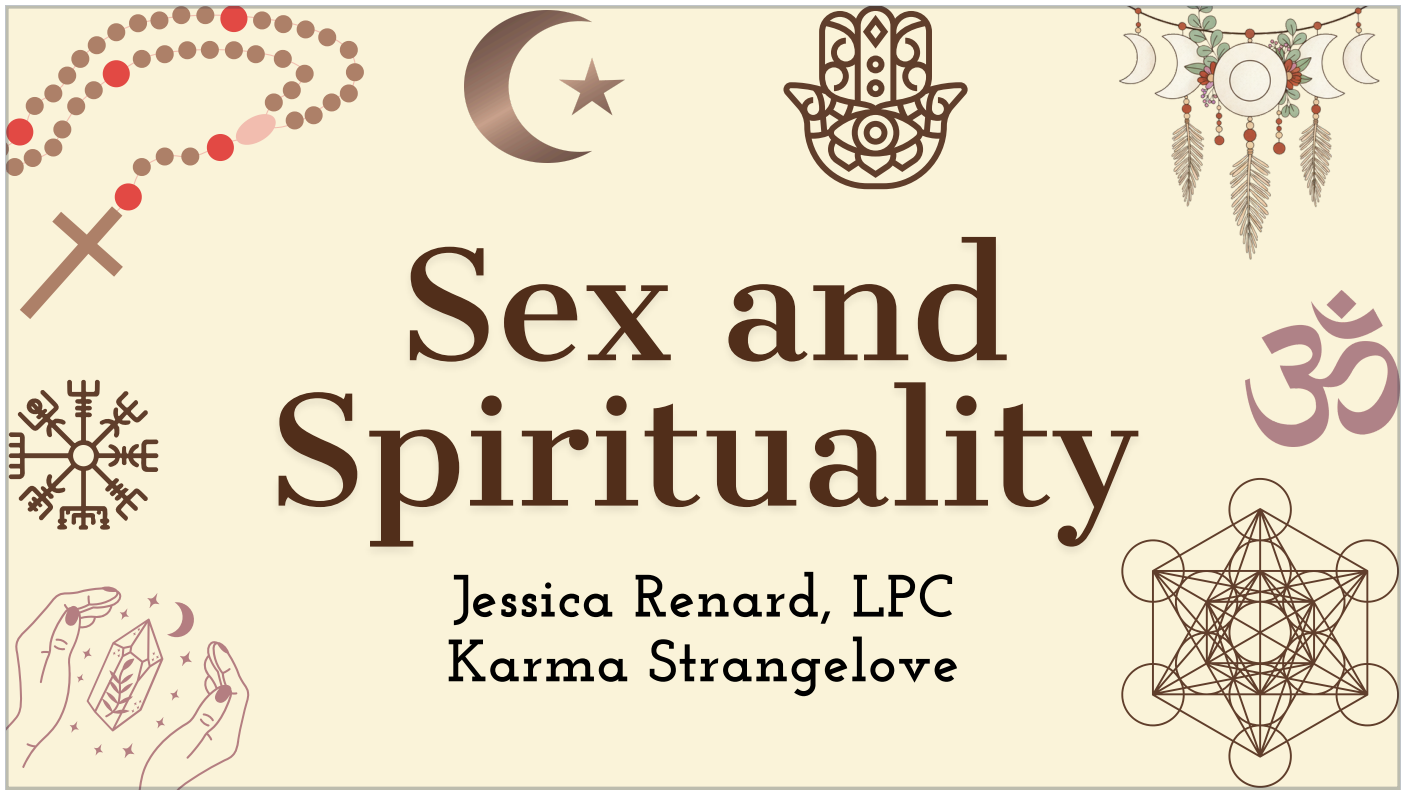
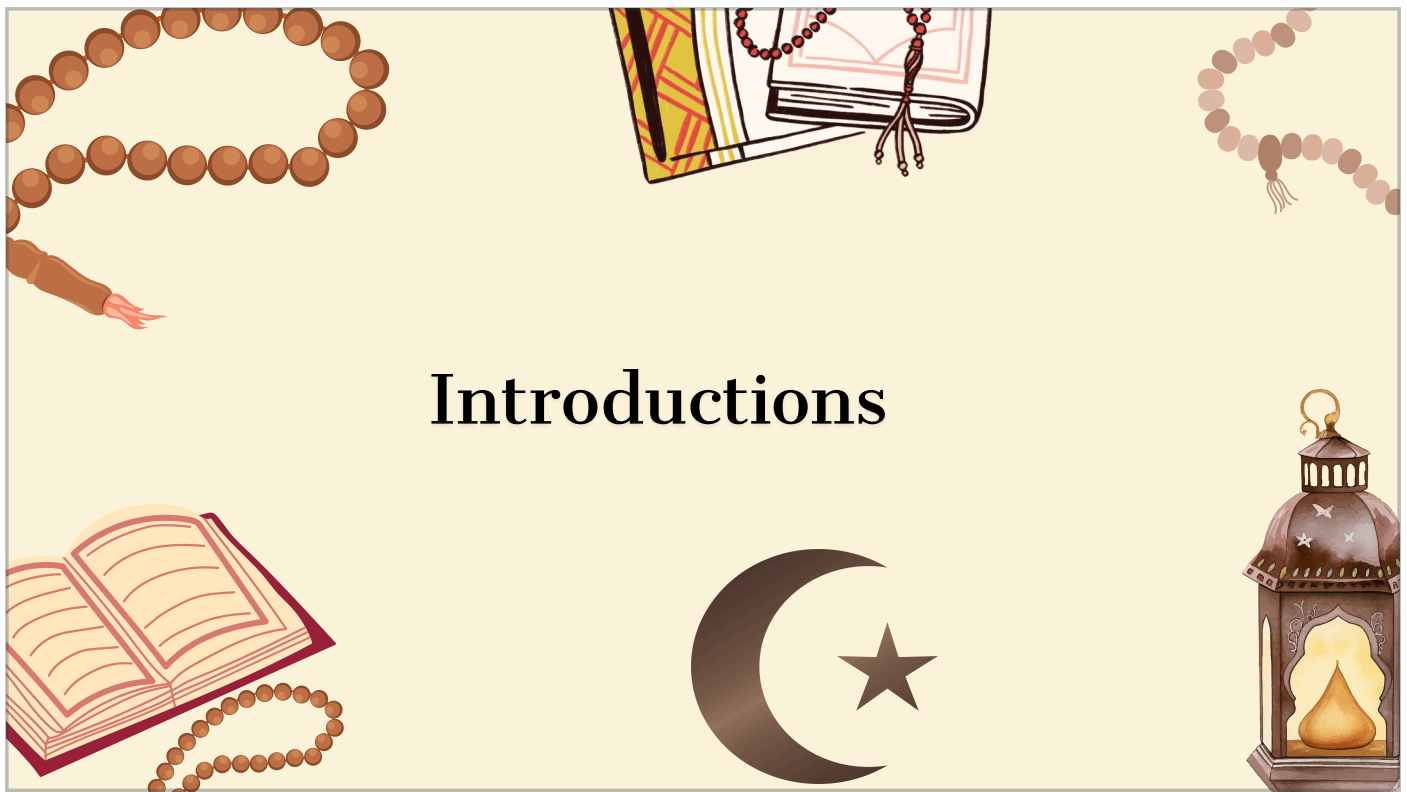






Introductions

Jessica - An AuDHD Sex therapist who works with kinky, bdsm, poly, pagan, neurodiverse, sexual and gender minorities on issues around sex, identity, anxiety, and general maintenance.

I've been working with clients for a little over four years, and currently work at three different practices - StorieBrook Therapy and Counseling, Atlanta Sex Therapy, and Thriveworks.

I am also the co-founder of PATH - Pagan Affirming Therapy and Healthcare, a directory where people can find pagan affirming practitioners.

My co-presenter Karma is unfortunately ill today, so it will just be me up here. I do want to introduce her though, since she was a big part of this presentation and her viewpoint and perspective are invaluable.

Karma - Madame Karma Strangelove is a queer, non-monogamous, and neurodivergent Dominant with over twenty years of active engagement in BDSM communities. As an educator I tend to focus on the intersections of identity, power exchange, and alternative relationship structures. For the past four years, she has incorporated erotic hypnosis into her professional Dominant practice, exploring the psychological dimensions of consensual control and suggestion. I am deeply interested in the ways neurodivergence and trauma shapes interpersonal dynamics and consent frameworks within kink and authority-based relationships.



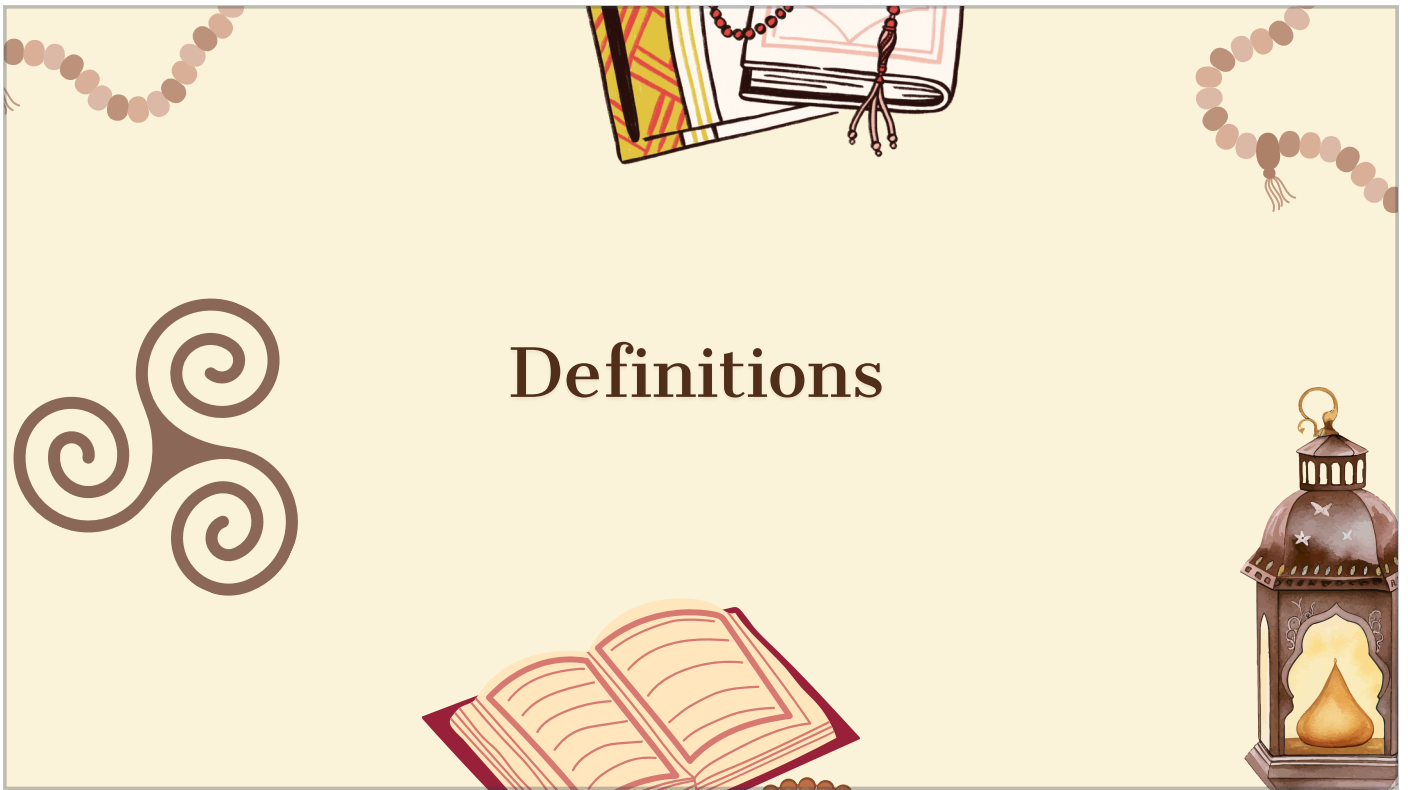
This conversation is filled with landmines - sex and religion/spirituality invoke strong opinions, trigger wounds, and inspire a lot of debate.

We wanted to ground our presentation in these ground rules. We want to approach all of the things that we'll be talking about with curiosity. We don't know anyone's full experience or what has influenced where they are currently.

We want to respect the various viewpoints that we'll be discussing today.

We want to make sure that everyone is consenting on going on this journey with us. This is given by remaining in the room, and if at any point this changes, please take care of yourself and give yourself what you are needing in that moment.

We want to be aware that we are talking about cultural norms, but this may inspire people to want to share their individual stories. This is not something that we want to have leave this room, so please refrain from talking about individual stories and only concentrate on the research that we present.



We are wanting to approach this topic with discussion and a nonjudgmental perspective. We strive to be as inclusive as possible.

We wanted to start with some definitions.

We're defining sex as intimate acts between one or more partners.

We've also come across sex used to describe someone's genitals or gender. We'll be sure to indicate when this is the case.

We're not including a definition that includes sexual status - like virgin, since that has been used predominately as a way to persecute, shame, and vilify people (usually women.)

We're defining spirituality to mean a state of being where a person feels connected to another person, themselves, or a grander concept like the universe or nature.

We're also using this term to describe more structured ideas like religious practices and beliefs.



In the US, the concept and practice of spirituality can be focused on an afterlife, versus how to behave or act while alive.

The conversation around how to act or behave, can be framed in the "things to do in order to get to" the afterlife that you'd like to be in.

Sex is usually on the list of things to not do, or only under certain conditions, like marriage.

In the introduction to *Sex at Dawn* the author writes, "...seismic cultural shifts that began about ten thousand years ago rendered the true story of human sexuality so subversive and threatening that for centuries it has been silenced by religious authorities, pathologized by physicians, studiously ignored by scientists, and covered up by moralizing therapists."

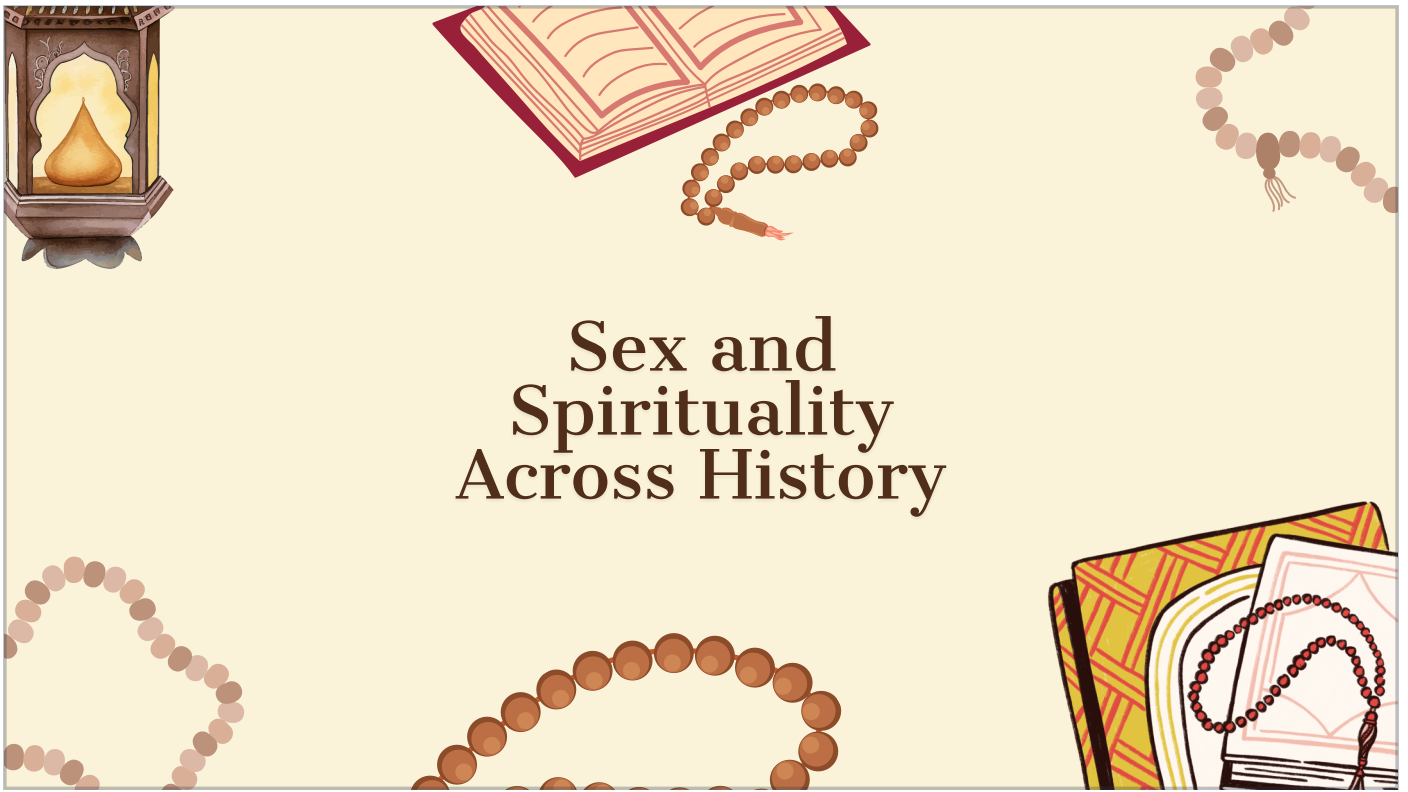
Additionally we have to keep in mind that a lot of history and rules are developed by the winners, and confirmation bias is running rampant when investigating past peoples. Confirmation bias is the act of looking for evidence that supports beliefs you already hold. For example, if someone was already sure that monogamy and men and women's natures were well established, they would view their findings through that lens, versus taking in the findings and letting the evidence create a story regardless of how palatable it is.

Sex at Dawn - "Evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker appears to be 'judging from the social habits of man as he now exists' as well (though without Darwin's self-awareness) when he bluntly asserts, 'In all societies, sex is at least somewhat 'dirty.' It is conducted in private, pondered

obsessively, regulated by custom and taboo, the subject of gossip and teasing, and a trigger for jealous rage."

Sex at Dawn - "'To keep body and mind untainted,' explains Walter Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 'the boy was taught to view women as objects of the greatest respect and even awe. He was to consider nice women (his sister, mother, and future bride) as creatures more like angels than human beings - an image wonderfully calculated not only to dissociate love from sex, but to turn love into worship, and worship of purity.'"

Madonna/whore complex



Precursor - I am not a historical scholar! I have not done deep dives into the citations of these resources and if you are a scholar of these cultures, please correct me!!

Sex at Dawn - "A great deal of research from primatology, anthropology, anatomy, and psychology points to the same fundamental conclusion: human beings and our hominid ancestors have spent almost all of the past few million years or so in small, intimate bands in which most adults had several sexual relationships at any given time."

Timothy Taylor - author of *The Prehistory of Sex* stated, "...early agriculturalist sex was voyeuristic, repressive, homophobic, and focused on reproduction."

Ancient Sacred Sexuality

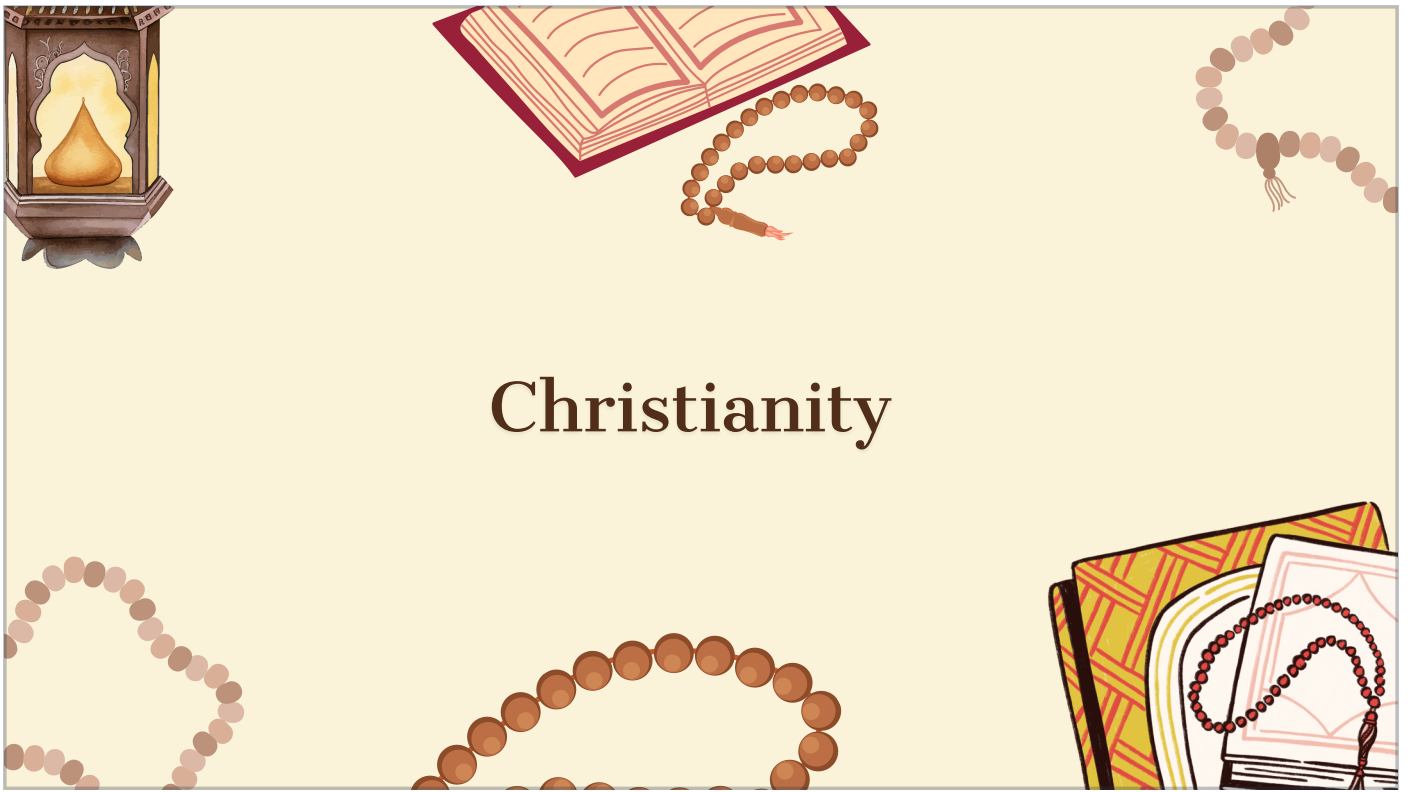
- Fertility rites and temple traditions
- Sex as communion with the divine
- Symbolism of creation and life force

Sex at Dawn - "In the Shia Muslim tradition, there is a similar institution called Nikah Mut'ah ('marriage for pleasure'), in which the relationship is entered into with a preordained termination point, like a car rental. These marriages can last anywhere from a few minutes to several years. A man can have any number of temporary wives at the same time (in addition to his 'permanent wife'). Often used as a religious loophole in which prostitution or casual sex can fall within the bounds of religious requirements, there is no paperwork or ceremony required. Is this, too, marriag

e?"

Queer Magic - In Akkad and Bablyon, Ishtar (called Inanna among the Sumerians) was the goddess of fertility, love, sex, and war, and she was known to magically feminize her male priests, known as kurggaru and assinnu, during ritualized possession ceremonies."

This depicts that in some cultures the spirituality and religious worship reflects a more human like interaction among the deities.



Sex at Dawn - "Until Darwin and others began to loosen the link between religious doctrine and scientific truth, guesses about the distant past were restricted by church teachings."

Sex at Dawn - "Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism each share a fundamental concern over the punishment for a woman's sexual freedom," says Eric Michael Johnson. "Whereas any 'man that committeth adultery with another man's wife [both] the adulterer and the adúlteress shall be put to death,' (Leviticus 20:10) but any unmarried woman who has sexual relations with an unmarried man shall be brought 'to the door of her father's house, and the men of the city shall stone her with stones that she die (Deuteronomy 22:21).

Jessica: This is where a lot of my personal trauma comes from. I grew up in purity culture, was in the newspaper as part of True Love Waits, attended an abstinence conference, and wrote my college entrance paper on teaching only abstinence in schools. The advisor asked me about a scenario where a student comes to me as a school counselor, telling me that they are going to have sex - would I give them condoms. I answered no. He said that I should never be a therapist...

To say that my views have changed would be a drastic understatement.

Additionally GA sex education is required, and not required to be medically accurate and is most often taught with a abstinence core. This has been taught with jolly ranchers, tape, and chewed up crackers.

This approach is especially detrimental due to still putting all of the responsibility on women, and not taking into consideration those who have been sexually assaulted in childhood or in school - leaving those feeling like they are "used" "dirty" or starting out not having a "gift" to give their eventual partner.

This is increasingly important with the alteration of literal sex education in the US. I'm putting a link in the chat that has an interactive map that grades each states sex education components. <https://siecus.org/siecus-state-profiles/>

Here in the state of Georgia sex education is required in school, as is HIV/AIDS information, however, it's not required to be medically accurate. This results in a lot of abstinence education that is super harmful and misogynistic. Some examples of this include using a piece of tape to show how if you have several partners, your ability to "stick" or bond with a partner is reduced - typically demonstrated from a female point of view discouraging women from having multiple partners, but not men.

Another example uses jolly ranchers or saltine crackers, asking if you want "used" jolly ranchers or chewed up crackers instead of "new or fresh" jolly ranchers or crackers.

Christians Under Cover - Debates over defining marriage in the late 1800s, for example, centered around the martial practices of the emerging Mormon Church. The result was that a strictly Protestant definition of marriage became constituted as the American definition of marriage. Sarah Baringer Gordon, a historian of American religion, argues that the court outlawed polygamy in order to solidify a Protestant nation of American ideals - a nuclear family in which each man is entitled to one wife."

Karma: For me, I grew up with a latina mother who raised us alternately as very strict Pentecostal and Baptist through the years. At one point, I was not allowed to wear pants, cut my hair, or talk back to men. It was definitely part of my childhood to hear constantly that I was supposed to arrive pure at my marriage bed or I would be unclean and unworthy of a husband.

As a person in several non-monogamous, kinky, and Female Led relationships, my life has changed a lot from what my parents tried to guide me towards. That does not mean I didn't have to purge myself of the extreme guilt and shame I felt over the years to get to a place where I no longer felt guilty for enjoying sex.

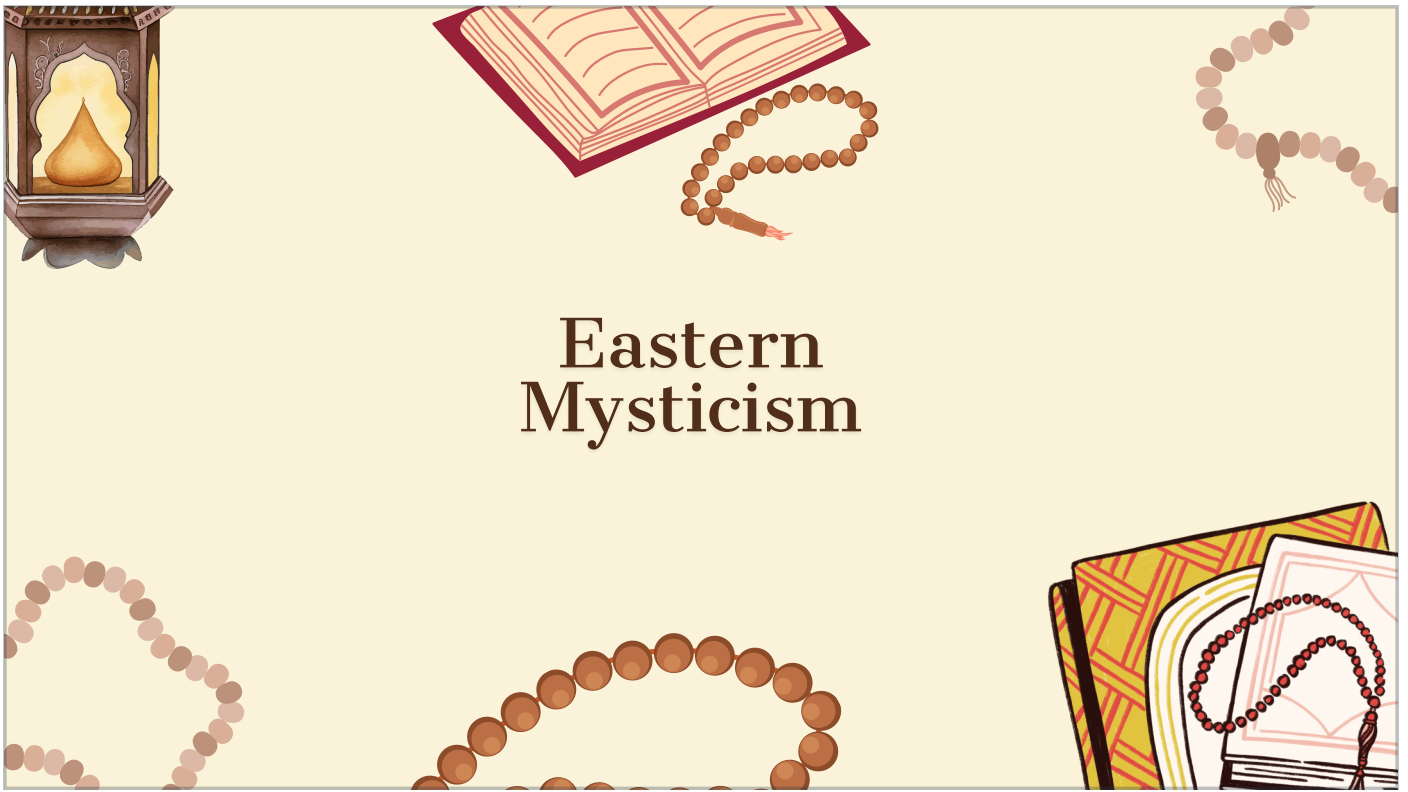
<https://www.facebook.com/reel/1646810003213877> - funny video



The Torah requires that a husband fulfill his wife's need for intimacy. (Exodus 21:10) lists marital intimacy as one of three basic things that a husband must provide to his wife (the other two are food and clothing). And the Talmud provides a detailed schedule for men's conjugal duties, organized by profession. While a man of independent means is obliged to sleep with his wife every day, a camel driver is obligated only once in 30 days, and a sailor once in six months. That being said, a woman is allowed to reject her husband's sexual advances, and Judaism forbids a man from pressuring his wife sexually. He is also supposed to move slowly enough in the act to make sex enjoyable for their wives (Eruvin 100b)

The sexual imagery found in the Kabbalah, medieval Jewish mysticism, is also worth noting. Arthur Green wrote in *The Second Jewish Catalog*, "Kabbalists see the very origins of the universe as a never-ceasing process of arousal, coupling, gestation, and birth within the life of a God who is both male and female, and proclaim this complex inner flow of divinity, described in the most graphic of sexual terms, to be the highest of mysteries."

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/judaism-and-sexuality/>



Eastern Mysticism

The “Kama Sutra” (sometimes displayed as one word, “Kamasutra”) is believed to be written in about ADE 320 to 550 India (during the Gupta Golden Age) by a religious student and philosopher named Vatsyayana. The title translates roughly to “The Aphorism of Desire,” or “The Formula of Lust,” depending on who you ask.

the book is based in Hinduism, which means that it’s technically a religious text. In Hinduism there are four tenets, or goals, of human life that all people must achieve;

Dharma (Duty and virtue),

Artha (purpose and essence),

Kama (Desire and passion) and

Moksha (self-actualization).

The Kamasutra was essentially a guide to achieving the “desire” goal of these tenets.

Only about 20 percent of the book –one chapter, to be exact– deals with the topic of sexual positions. The rest of the books deal with the topics of desire, lust, seduction and the philosophy of love.

Now, keep in mind that in ancient India, sex and sexuality was a large part of Indian culture.

Polygamy and polyamory were common, especially in the upper classes. Nudity in art was plentiful, and sex was considered a marital duty—not just for the wife, but for the husband too. Though it was a private affair, both partners were expected to pleasure each other in the act.

Mystical Traditions Worldwide

- Tantric concepts (presented respectfully and accurately)
- Sufi language of ecstatic union
- Spiritual ecstasy across traditions

Tantric breathing has roots spanning thousands of years in ancient India and Tibet. Emerging around the 6th century CE as a counter-movement to orthodox Vedic traditions, it treats the breath (prana) not just as biological air, but as life-force energy. The practice centers on moving this energy through the body's channels (nadis) and energy centers (chakras) to elevate consciousness, achieve spiritual liberation, and experience deep intimacy.

Many cultures viewed erotic energy as sacred rather than sinful.

KARMA: In some Indian and Tibetan practices, it's believed even a moment of touch can exchange karmic residue. (ie, when you are having sex with someone, you are not sharing a bed, you are sharing your energy field, your history, your emotional residue.

Daoist teachings speak of jing (sexual energy) as the most powerful life force we have, meant to be cultivated, honored, and consciously exchanged

Queer Magic - In Siberia, there are shamans there who would marry spiritual entities who would be their life companion in developing their magic and in embracing characteristics of the opposite sex.

The strongest and most powerful of all of the Chukchi shamans were proud queer individuals known colloquially as "soft men." These soft men were biological males who dressed and styled their hair like females, yet did not adopt fully feminine behaviors.

These spiritual spouses existed only in the spirit world and could either be a same-sex lover who would force the shaman to be the more butch or effeminate partner (whichever they needed to learn), or they were an opposite sex lover who would teach by example rather than role domination. And regardless if the shaman was married beforehand or found a human spouse after their spiritual marriage, it was understood that the spiritual spouse was the #1 partner, outranking the human spouse.



Egyptian

Queer magic - Attempting to look up how Egyptians viewed sex and sexual topics is challenging due to the way that they wrote about sexuality involved the use of forced or contrived flowery language as well as talking about the act in a roundabout way without ever mentioning the act itself. There's no concrete contextual clues to hint one way or another.

One of the most prevailing evidence of LGBT+ tendencies in ancient Egypt to date was found in the tomb of Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum in Saqqara in the 1960s. They shared the same tomb together and the artwork covering the walls of the inner sanctums depicted the two men so close together that their pelvises were touching. One had a depiction of the men with their noses touching which in ancient Egyptian art, generally symbolized kissing.

People against this theory said that they each had wives and children, so they couldn't possibly be a couple - some even go as far to say that they are brothers - conjoined twins.

They belonged to a very privileged class, and what is acceptable for the wealthy aristocracy is often not acceptable for lower classes.

Egyptians contemporaries make specific mention to ancient Egypt's widespread acceptance of lesbianism. From the Hebrews and the Talmud, they talk (in a negative way) about how Egypt is a sexually liberal place of debauched decadence, so much so that female-female sexual acts were known to the Hebrews as "the acts of Egypt." Since the Hebrews were historically not too fond of the Egyptians, it's hard to know the truth of the statements.

Queer Magic - Set is the Egyptian god of storms, the desert, war, disorder, violence, and foreigners. Often depicted as a pansexual deity, his wife is Anat, a transgender female Amazonian warrior goddess, and together the couple's favorite expression of intimacy is anal sex. Page 20 with the lettuce incident.



Greece/Rome

Queer Magic - The ancient Greeks were the first people to believe that the gods looked exactly like them and acted like them too - being equally capable of kindness and valor as they could cruelty and pettiness. Essentially, the gods were pretty much just like humans except they could live forever and possessed supernatural powers.

The Greeks didn't have labels based on gender and sexuality like "gay," "lesbian," or "bisexual." Having sexual desires for and intimate liaisons with a same-sex lover carried with it no effect upon your social identity; rather, it was the role you took during the sexual act itself that labeled who you were. For men, if you were the active partner (the penetrator/"top"), then, according to society, you were associated with the labels of masculinity, maturity, and being higher up on the social ladder. If you were the passive partner (the penetrated/"bottom"), then you were associated with the labels of femininity, immaturity/youth, and being lower on the social ladder.

Since their culture was strongly patriarchal with a strict class structure, they came up with pederasty - the sexual relationship between a young male and an older man. This also doubled as a pedagogical mentor system for young men where the older men imparted knowledge and wisdom to the younger ones - guiding them into adulthood.

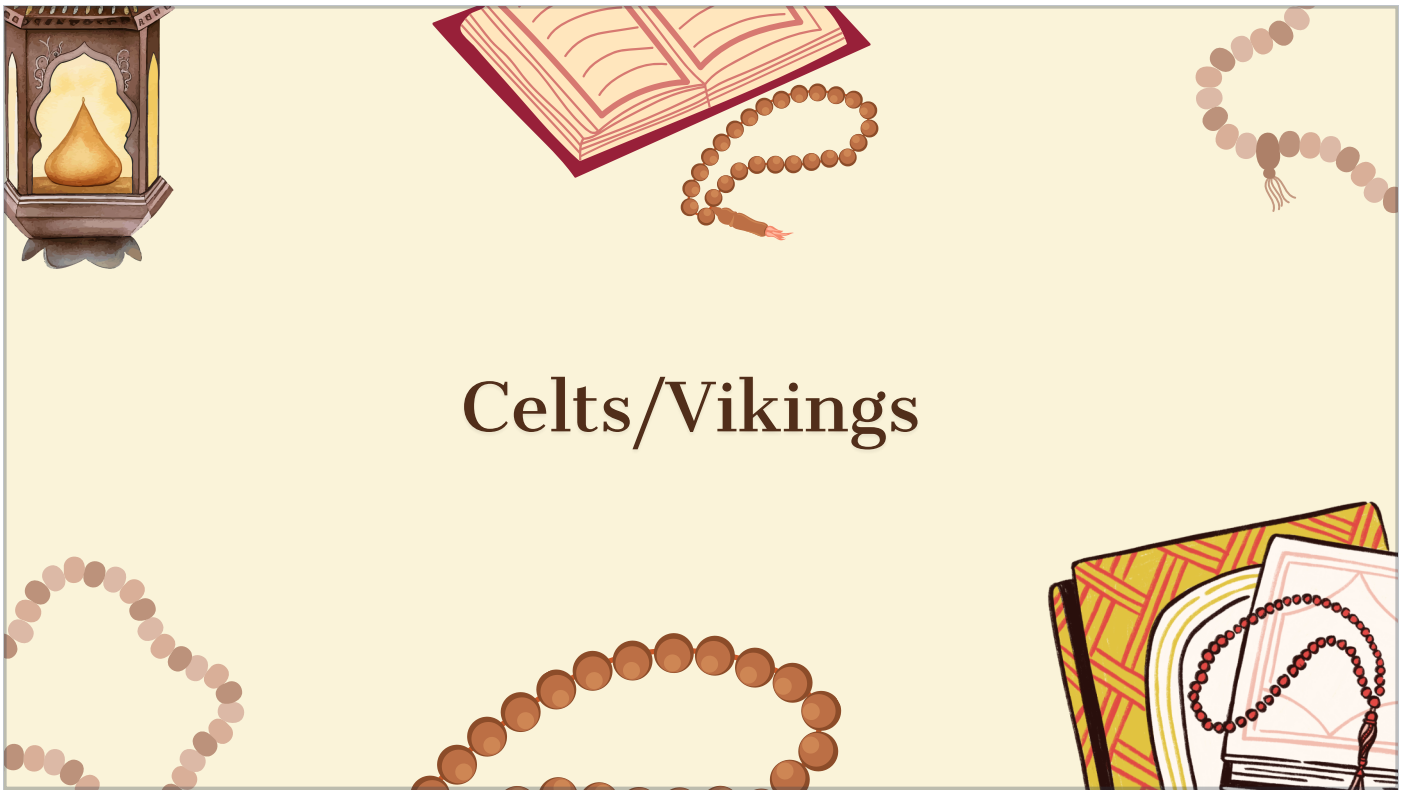
The exception to this rule was in the military. While soldiers who fought together were not expected to be sexually involved with one another, those armies comprised of male-male lovers were seen as more powerful. The line of reasoning was that by developing a romantic and sexual bond between brothers-in-arms, they would fight harder and protect one another more fiercely in combat.

When it comes to ancient Greek female queer sexuality, no one is better known than the poetess Sappho. Her lyric poetry celebrating sex between women that the island in which she was born, Lesbos, became synonymous with female-female love and is the origin of the word "lesbian." Sappho would be labeled in modern times as bisexual due to her surviving first-person point of view poetry describing ecstatic love with both women and men. Even more revolutionary was how she defied the societally rigid "top"/"bottom" dichotomy in her works by expounding upon the virtues of being on both the giving and receiving end of same-sex love making.

Ancient Rome did many things similarly to the ancient Greeks, but the eromenos/erastes intergenerational approach was off-limits due to the free-born male youths were not allowed to engage in sex. They used people who had no legal social standing as citizens: slaves, prostitutes, and entertainers. These people couldn't lose their social standing by being the passive partner in sex. Roman men and women would also socialize outside of the home, unlike the Greeks which was more divided by gender.

They had infamous sexual orgies with threesomes and foursomes. The snide remarks on men who had a passive role in sex still exist in literature and in the preserved graffiti of excavated ruins like in Pompeii.

Page 103 with Apollo, pg 106 with the origin of love



Celts/Vikings

Pagan and Earth-Based Traditions

- Beltane and sacred union rituals
- Embodiment as spiritual practice
- Reverence for pleasure and the body

A lot of the evidence that exists outlining the sexual practices of the early Pagans was from outside sources and third-party observers. Usually these foreign historians were the Greeks and Romans, who related the queerness of "barbarous" Europe in terms of their own rigid "top"/"bottom" dichotomy or they were imperial Christians, who maligned any form of nonprocreative sex that they witnessed these heathens doing. The Celts predominately relied on oral storytelling, so there are few direct depictions of intimacy from themselves.

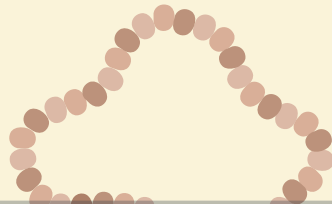
Gay sex was written into the Irish Celts' seventh-century Brehon Laws as a legal reason for which a woman may divorce her husband. It grants a legal divorce to women whose husbands prefer to have sex with other men rather than with her. They had several legal safe guards for women to be able to have children, including other grounds for divorce that include a man being too obese to have sex and outright male infertility.

For the Vikings - gay sex was widely enough known to have a specific insult for it, which roughly translates to unmanly. In the aftermath of battle, it was expected for Norsemen to sexually penetrate their foes. Rape was a weapon of war. To them sexuality was a matter of sexual positioning and psychological dominance, not the inner yearnings and identity of an individual.

Cu Chulainn, Loki, Oden, and Samodivi - a cross between a nymph, a siren, and a harpy. They would flirt with each other in order to attract men to their doom. They are also known to purposely attract women with their Sapphic, suggestive body language, but unlike their male victims, female victims became so jealous that they kill themselves.

Purity, Shame, and Religious Conditioning

- How did sexuality become associated with guilt?
- Historical Development
- Catholic Guilt and Similar Narratives
- Purity Culture



Sex at Dawn - "Hundreds of Catholic priests have confessed to thousands of sex crimes against children in the past few decades alone. In 2008, the Catholic Church paid \$436 million in compensation for sexual abuse. More than a fifth of the victims were under 10 years old."

Historical Development

- Sexual regulation in religious institutions
- The role of social control and morality

Catholic Guilt and Similar Narratives

- Sin, temptation, and bodily distrust
- Internalized shame and fear

Purity Culture

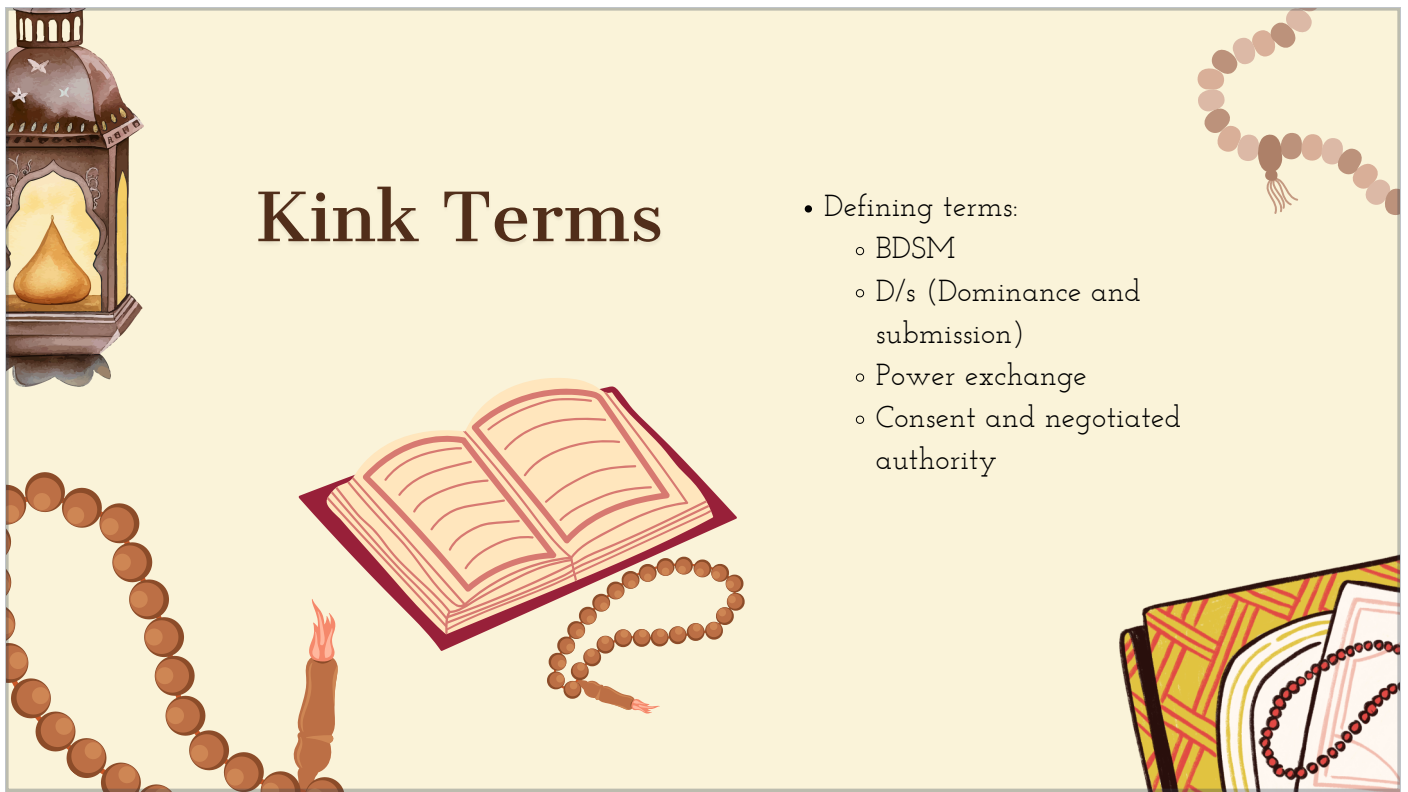
- Messages about worthiness and virginity
- Impact on relationships and self-image
- Psychological consequences

Difference between healthy ethics and shame-based control

Many people inherit sexual beliefs that affect their spiritual and emotional well-being long after they leave those systems.

KARMA:

Speculation about the sexuality of Jesus and Paul as unmarried Jewish men included the possibility that they were eunuchs (supported by Matthew 19:12, which suggests the spiritual superiority of males born without testicles or who castrated themselves “for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (e.g., Caner, 1997; Hester, 2005). In fact, castration—not just celibacy—went in and out of favor during the early centuries of the church (Caner, 1997; Hester, 2005; Ringrose, 1996; Stevenson, 2002) and was practiced by some sects into the 20th century (Engelstein, 1999; Tulpe & Torchinov, 2000), including excision of women’s and children’s genitalia to ensure salvation through sexual purity. Since the first century, orthodox Christianity has viewed sex as an integral part of the “original sin” separating humanity from God—if not the sin itself (e.g., Johnson & Jordan, 2006; Ware, 1997; Weisner-Hanks, 2000).



Kink Terms

- Defining terms:
 - BDSM
 - D/s (Dominance and submission)
 - Power exchange
 - Consent and negotiated authority

We wanted to define some kink terms before moving forward into the next part of the presentation.

Bondage, dominance, sadism/submissive, and masochism
Over 60% of BDSM does not include sexual acts.

Dom/sub dynamic
Which include power exchanges

Needs explicit consent and negotiated authority



Power Exchange

- Ritual and Altered States
- Trust, Vulnerability, and Surrender
- Archetypes and Sacred Roles
- Ethical Considerations

Ritual and Altered States

- Intention setting
- Symbolism and ceremony
- Presence and mindfulness

Trust, Vulnerability, and Surrender

- Similarities to spiritual practices
- Letting go of ego and control
- Witnessing and being witnessed

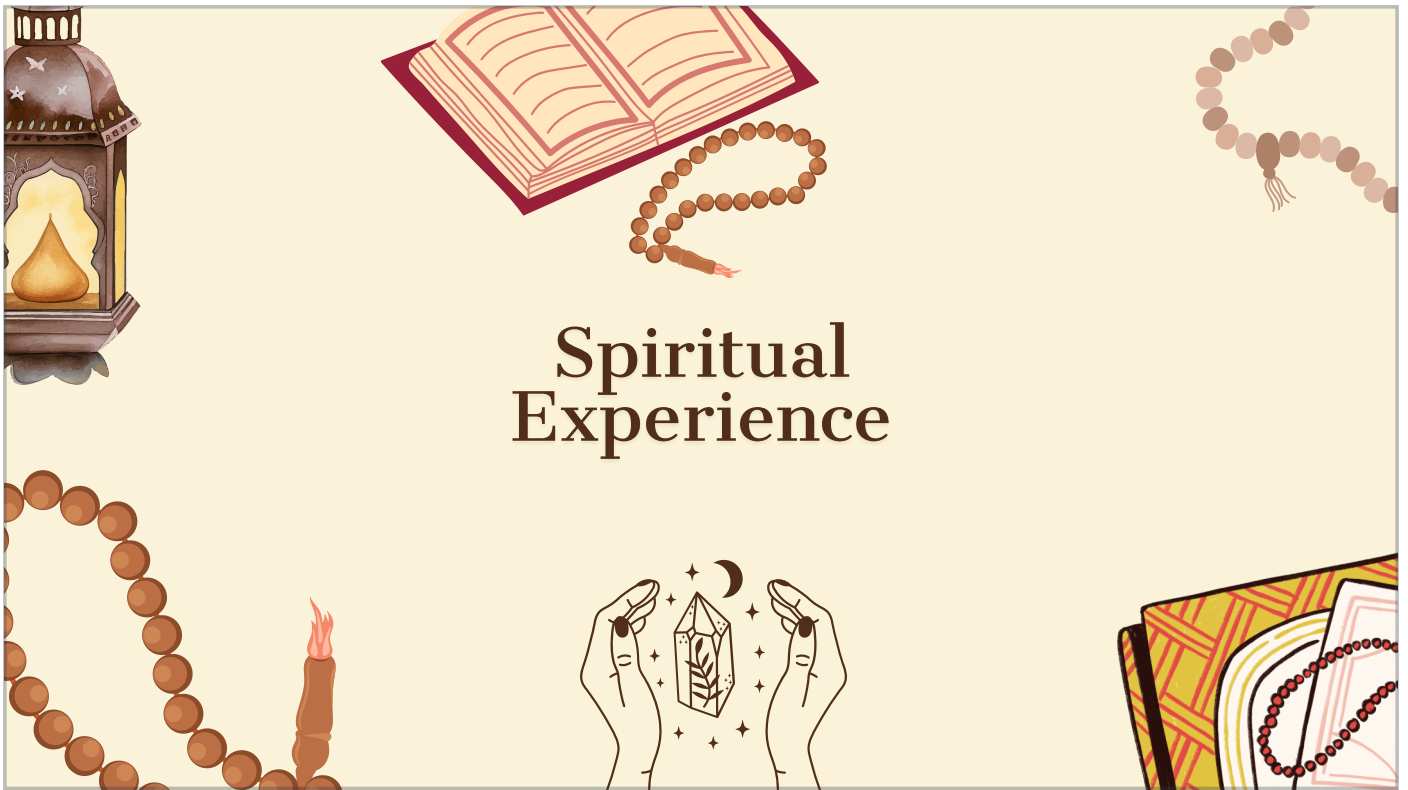
Archetypes and Sacred Roles

- Devotional submission
- Sacred dominance
- Priest/priestess, guardian, guide, devotee archetypes
- confession as absolution of the spirit

Ethical Considerations

- Consent as a spiritual principle
- Avoiding coercion and spiritual manipulation

For some practitioners, power exchange can function as a ritualized path to connection, self-knowledge, and transcendence.



Religious Play (also Sacrilege Play)

Erotic or symbolic engagement with religious/spiritual imagery, roles, or taboos. Shaped by spiritual experiences

Engaging with a symbol erotically is not the same as endorsing or rejecting the belief system it comes from

It can be for personal reclamation - rewriting harmful narratives into experiences someone has more control over

Why This Kind of Play Matters

Taboo intensification

- "The more forbidden something is, the more psychologically charged it becomes"

Reclamation of power

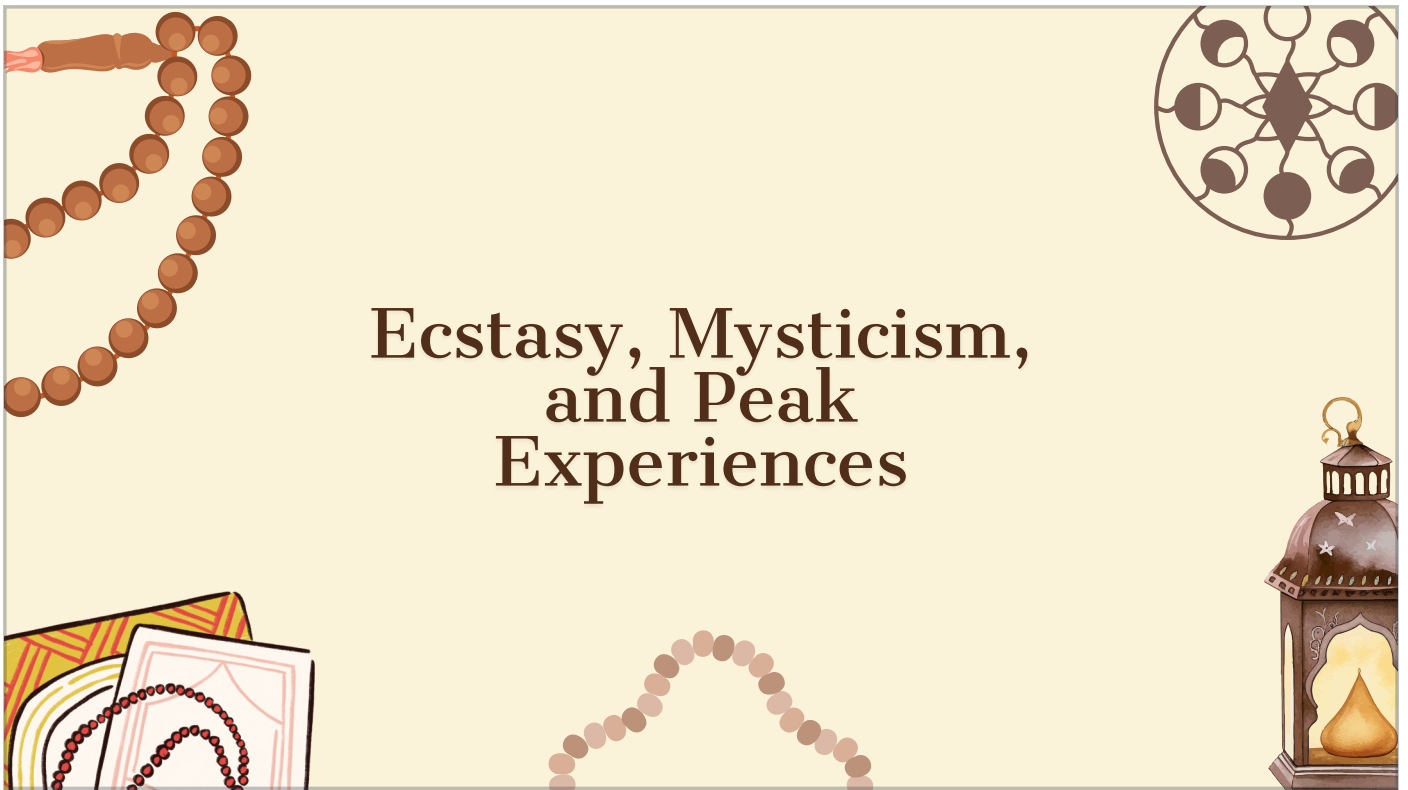
- For those with religious trauma, shame-based upbringing, or repression it can be a powerful way to rewrite the manner in which they approach sex.

Meaning through contrast

- Sacred/profane polarity can heighten emotional and erotic experience through shared tension

Identity exploration

- Playing with roles like “priest,” “worshipper,” “deity,” etc., as archetypes rather than literal identities



Ecstasy, Mysticism, and Peak Experiences

What do spiritual ecstasy and erotic ecstasy have in common?

Mystical Experiences

- Union with something larger than oneself
- Loss of ordinary boundaries
- Experiences of awe and transcendence

Neuroscience Overview

- Flow states
- Altered consciousness
- Embodiment and nervous system regulation

Parallels with Sexual Experience

- Presence
- Surrender
- Intimacy
- Connection

Many traditions describe transcendent experiences using language that overlaps with erotic experience.

KARMA:

Kabbalism, a mystical form that emerged in the Middle Ages,

viewed coitus as a spiritual act enabling aspirants to participate in the masculine and feminine aspects of God sustaining the cosmos (Ariel, 1988; Berger, 2006; Hoffman, 1992; Waite, 1960).



Reclaiming Pleasure as Healing

- Navigating shame
- Rewriting harmful narratives

Can pleasure be restorative?

Recovering from Shame

- Rebuilding trust with the body
- Developing sexual self-compassion

Pleasure as Resistance

- Challenging harmful narratives
- Reclaiming agency and autonomy

Psychological Healing

- Embodiment practices
- Self-acceptance
- Integration rather than repression

Spiritual Perspectives

- Pleasure as gratitude
- Pleasure as presence
- Pleasure as connection

Sexuality and spirituality have often been linked historically

Shame and purity narratives shape many modern experiences

Kink and power exchange can have spiritual dimensions for some people

Pleasure, embodiment, and consent can support healing

"What might change if we viewed desire not as something to fear, but as something to understand?"

Some people experience this play as:

Transgressive

Healing

Intensely intimate

Spiritually confusing (and that's okay!)

Personal reclamation

- Rewriting harmful narratives into chosen experiences

- Can reclaim power over position of power that might have caused harm in previously



In Conclusion...

More than anything we wanted this presentation to be a broadening of perspectives of how sex and spirituality can be interpreted. As we've seen there are a variety of ways that religion has influenced sexuality and how sexuality has influenced religion.

We wanted to acknowledge the harmful histories of those with religious trauma and how it manifests in your sexuality.

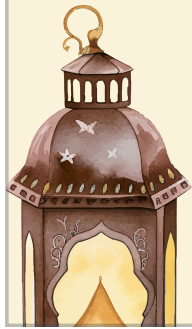
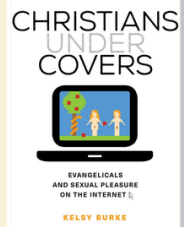
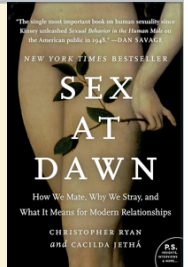
And most of all, we wanted to provide ways to reclaim your body and sexual experience so that it can be a practice of joyfulness and healing to your spirituality.

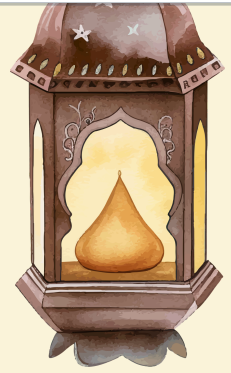
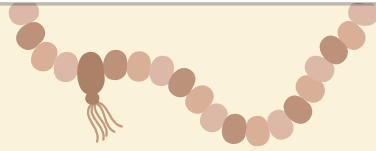
Questions?



References

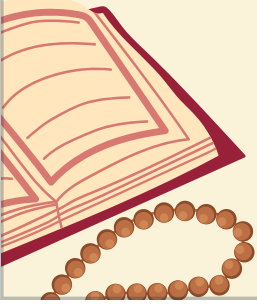
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Thank You

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