

# Sexuality of men and women: a comparison

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The perceived views of men's and women's sexuality have been the subject of great speculation and conflict. Although great strides have been made over the years in the sexual "revolution", the basic views of male and female sexuality have remained the same. Throughout history the ideas of proper sexuality for men and women have changed little. Men have always been portrayed as the aggressive pursuer of a woman's sexual favors.

Women, in turn, have been required by society to diligently preserve their honor outside of the marital bed. Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" offers a good example of the game-like behavior that has become almost expected of a man and woman in society. The narrator beseeches his Lady to "sport us while we may like amorous birds of prey". The Lady on the other hand, flirts casually and spurns the narrator's advances. Women are praised highly for their virtue and honor in keeping their virginity for the institution of marriage.

Even though it is perfectly acceptable for a man to attempt for and even acquire the sexual favors of a woman it is a social sin and in some areas a crime for a woman to succumb to her sexual desires outside of marriage. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter", Hester Prynne is ostracized by her community for having an extra-marital affair. Her punishment condemns her for her adultery and assures her a lifetime of humiliation. Many societies have gone through great lengths over the centuries to ensure fidelity or virginity in women.

In the Middle Ages, women were often forced to wear chastity belts to ensure their virtue was kept intact while men were away at war or some

other manly undertaking. In some countries, women are forced to cover every inch of their bodies in an effort to avoid the advances of other men. The narrator in Amy Lowell's *Patterns* speaks of her passion that wars against the stiff brocade of her dress, the very heavy and unrevealing style of the era in which the poem is set.

She laments the death of her betrothed as they were to be wed in a month and, as she felt bound by the dress, he was to have freed her from it. This poem also illustrates how the narrator, as many women in the past, did not consider it proper to succumb to her passions before marriage. Men on the other hand have often been revered for their sexual prowess. Kings often kept concubines, or mistresses. In some countries, it is acceptable for a man to have many wives. Sexual conquest has become almost a gauge by which manhood is tested.

Men are often bombarded by peer pressure to become sexually active at an early age. Seen as a rite of passage by many men, they begin their pursuit of women before they are even capable of reproduction. In Stevie Smith's *The Frog Prince*, the narrator speaks of his being happy the way he is but he feels that it is required of him to have a girl. Changing times have allowed people to become a little more open in expressing their sexuality. However, more often than not, most men and women tend to conform themselves to expectations that remain the same even in today's society.