

## Unitarian Universalist Views on Sex

Unitarian Universalism has celebrated sexuality for more than sixty years, affirming it as a good and healthy part of the lifelong human experience from womb to tomb.

Our views on the joyous potential of sexual expression have proved to be life-saving. People of all ages who have emerged from religious traditions that shamed and diminished them for their sexual interests, identities, and behaviors have found that Unitarian Universalism encourages them to discover or reconnect with the rich and vibrant beauty of their sexuality.

Scientific evidence is central to Unitarian Universalist perspectives on sex. We know that comprehensive sexuality education decreases unintended outcomes of sexual activity, including pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and regret. We know that honoring each person's sexual identity can decrease self-harm and suicide. We know that sexual expression is a developmental process that begins in infancy and lasts throughout life. We know that consent education increases communication and decreases sexual assault.

### Theological Grounding

According to Rev. Lena Breen (she/her), "Human sexuality is simply too important, too beautiful, and too potentially dangerous to be ignored in a religious community."

The Unitarian Universalist Principles, from "Justice, equity and compassion in human relationships" to "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," have supported our efforts on behalf of reproductive justice and equal sexual rights and recognition for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and heterosexual people. We also believe that appreciation for sexual diversity is essential to a healthy world and healthy society.

We honor all people for who they are, regardless of what they do and the decisions they make. The fact that Unitarian Universalism welcomes us holistically is important and comforting. To many people, our faith feels like coming home.

### We Are Sexual Beings Our Whole Lives

Created by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in partnership with the United Church of Christ (UCC), Our Whole Lives (OWL) is a comprehensive, lifespan sexuality education curriculum that supports developmentally appropriate healthy relationships and sexual expression. OWL is used in secular settings as well as in UU and UCC communities around the world. The OWL values of Self-Worth, Responsibility, Sexual Health, and Justice and Inclusivity can be reinforced by Unitarian Universalist faith values when the curriculum is used in Unitarian Universalist faith settings.

Within Our Whole Lives programs, people explore who they are and the kind of person they want to be in relationship with others. Unitarian Universalist sexuality resources encourage people to be sexually expressive in developmentally appropriate and healthy ways, whether that means learning about their own bodies, sharing pleasure, creating life, or choosing to abstain from sexual activity.

The UUA respects the rights of individuals and families to explore their own informed conversations between partners and among families through curricula and resources. We also offer inclusion resources

that reflect our belief that all people are sexual beings deserving of education, rights, respect, and pleasure.

## Sex and Social Justice

Our commitment to social justice has been expressed in the sexual realm for decades. Congregations and national leadership rose to the personal and political challenges of the AIDS crisis. They led interfaith coalitions in the successful movement toward marriage equality and continue the fight to maintain those rights. This religious movement also holds a place at the forefront of the ongoing struggle for gender and reproductive justice. Our bylaws and practices recognize myriad identities, types of relationships, and the need to prevent sexual abuse and misconduct.

Tomoko Takano (they/them) is a registered nurse and trainer of OWL facilitators. Takano explains, “The amazing thing about OWL is that it normalizes all sexuality. It applies to people who are sexual or whose sexualized selves include identities such as being polyamorous or part of the kink community.”

The work of creating a spiritual home for people across the spectrum of sexuality helps put anti-oppression into practice, says Takano. “Sex and sexuality intersect with all other parts of our lives,” they say. “It becomes a model for how we work on other issues.”

Race, ability, and socioeconomic status are among many aspects of personhood that affect Unitarian Universalists’ varied personal experiences with and beliefs about sex. Even so, it’s safe to say that we agree that all persons have the same rights to enjoy sexual expression and pleasure, as well as the right to be asexual or aromantic.

Generational, cultural, and regional ways of thinking can also affect our attitudes and the education we receive about sexuality. These differences make it important for us to keep expanding our understanding and inclusion of many perspectives on sex, says Jessica York (she/her), UUA Director of Congregational Life. “Unitarian Universalists are used to evolving as we practice this faith and its values. It really is practice, which means sometimes we don’t get it right. It’s important to name our failures and get back up and try again. Our growth and awareness are constantly evolving, which is good and right,” says York.

## We Support You

You’ll feel at home in a UU congregation if you’re looking for a space in which you can be open about your sexual identity, relationships, questions, pleasures, and concerns.

As you explore Unitarian Universalism, expect people to be curious about your new faith. They may express concern or anger that you have chosen a different path than they did. As York says, “Being part of the Unitarian Universalist faith community can cause conflict in families, or at least raise some eyebrows.” Feel free to reach out to other members of your new congregation for tips on navigating difficult conversations or disputes over family traditions that no longer work for you.

**Melanie Davis**, PhD, is the Unitarian Universalist Association’s OWL Program Manager. She is the author of *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Older Adults* and *Sexuality and Our Faith: A Companion to Our Whole Lives for Grades 7-9*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. She is a certified sexuality counselor, educator, and educator supervisor through the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists.

Packs of 25 copies of this pamphlet can be ordered from inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop at [uua.org/bookstore](http://uua.org/bookstore).