Sexuality in the Wiccan Tradition

Sexuality has many definitions in today’s society. It is seen as expression of sexual receptivity, sexual activity, and generally acting in a sexual manner. Sexuality is expressed differently in every religion. In the Wiccan tradition, sexuality is seen in a positive way. “Witches, ever in tune with nature, do not deny their sexuality. They embrace it, enhance it, and celebrate it with joy” (Holland, 167.) This acceptance and reverence causes sexuality to be often seen throughout the religion. There are strong beliefs on the human body, sex magic, and homosexuality. There are also many traditions, rituals, and holidays such as the Great Rite, Beltane, and hand fasting which are laced with sexuality. In the Wiccan religion, sexuality is a common theme.

The Wiccan religion is a tradition based on nature and ancient pagan ways. It is commonly misinterpreted. “The distinctive components of the Wiccan tradition include an emphasis on ritual and magic, a common ethical view of the world, and a focus on the Goddess” (Anderson, Young 266.) Ritual is seen as very important. This is most commonly seen in the festivals throughout the Wheel of the Year. These festivals are called Sabbats, and they represent different intervals in the Earth’s annual cycle. They are heavily laced in ritual and tradition. There is also a strong idea of magic within the religion. Magic is seen as a force that is capable of causing change. They perform magic by doing different spells, chants, and using different combinations of herbs, plants, oils, and the elements. The goddess is one of the most important aspects of the religion. She is often the one honored and mentioned in rituals and spells. She is seen in three aspects: the virgin, mother, and crone. This follows the phases of the moon. Wiccans also believe in the Divine. “The Divine is energy; energy is movement and change.
Where there is movement and change, there is active and receptive, ebb and flow. The Divine is therefore seen as male and female, Goddess and God” (Crowley, 1.) They believe that everything is made in dual parts and are equal with one another. There is also a strong focus on the elements. Wiccans believe in earth, air, water, fire, and spirit. They believe this is what everything consists of and are the most powerful aspects in life. Popular belief presents this tradition as a satanic cult along with many other negative interpretations. However, it is truly a peaceful religion that strongly believes in equality, nature, and tradition.

The human body, whether male or female, has a heavy importance in this tradition. Unlike many other religions, the female body is honored and glorified. “Women were never sacrificed in Witchcraft. Women shed their own blood monthly and risk death in service to the life force with every pregnancy and birth. For this reason, their bodies were considered sacred, and held inviolate.” (Starhawk, 56) Women are considered holy in Wicca. Their ability to create life is considered a miracle. Their bodies are recognized as immaculate. This causes their bodies to be their own, unable to be controlled because it consists of a value that rises above possession. “No longer can it be seen as an object or vilified as something dirty. A woman’s body, its odors, secretions, and menstrual blood, are sacred, are worthy of reverence and celebration. Women’s bodies belong to themselves alone; no spiritual authority will back a man’s attempt to possess or control her” (Starhawk, 127.) Men’s bodies, while are not as revered as women’s body, are still seen as something with great value. It is wrong for them to use their bodies in any negative connotation. They are strictly used for admirable and honorable circumstances. “In the Craft, the male body, like the female body, is held sacred, not to be violated. It is a violation of the male body to use it as a weapon, just as it is a violation of the female body to use it as an object or a proving ground for male virility” (Starhawk, 123.) The human body of each gender is sacred and
honorable. Almost every other belief in the religion is based off of this idea. This results in it being very important in the Wiccan religion.

Sex magic is a very powerful form of magic within the religion. There are many variations of this such as sex healing and sex protection. However, they all share the same basic principle. “The god is invoked into the male witch, the Goddess into the female (or into same-gender partners enacting those roles). They make love, worshiping at the alters of each other’s bodies” (Holland, 167.) Using sex for magic causes a symbolic recreation of the union between the god and goddess. It is a very intense and excited time. The magic grows off the excitement and sensitivity that occurs during sex. “During the excitement of sex, all our senses become heightened, attuning you to the psychic realm much more sharply than is the case in your normal state. Just before, during, and immediately after the sexual climax, the mind is in a state of hypersensitivity, and this can be especially useful for working magic” (Buckland, 170.) While the magic grows off of the passion and intensity, it also creates more. Sex magic can be one of the most powerful experiences imaginable. Your emotions and senses become heightened to places they seemingly have never been before. While this intensity is pleasurable, it is also very powerful. Power can bring danger. Performing sex magic can change everything between the partners. “‘Sex magic’ is something quite different; it can be very powerful, both in its effect in terms of the intended outcome of the work and in its effect on the couple concerned (even if they have been lovers, or married, for years)” (Farrar, 170.) Couples may not expect changes to occur between them; however there is a very strong possibility it may. Sex magic is considered one of the most life changing and strong types of magic there is. This causes it to have a deep rooted history and significance in Wicca.
Homosexuality is commonly accepted in the Wiccan religion. They are not judged or treated any different from a heterosexual member of the tradition. In fact, some Wiccans honor homosexuality. It is seen as a relatively positive life preference and is often seen in the tradition. “Gay and lesbian relationships are openly affirmed as good. Some Wiccan groups have only gay or lesbian or bisexual member. Such a stance is a far cry from the rejection or grudging acceptance of gay and lesbian sexuality in many religious traditions” (Anderson, Young 276.) There are plenty of openly gay, lesbian, and bisexuals in the religion. They can also hold high positions within the religion. As mentioned earlier, Wicca is a tradition that fully believes in equality. They do not discriminate because of sex, race, or sexual orientation. Wiccans commonly believe that no one should push their beliefs on another and that there is not a single right way to live in life. “In a world in which sexual preference is a ground for either privilege or oppression, we necessarily identify with our sexual orientation. But to take one particular form of sexual union as the model for the whole is to limit ourselves unfairly” (Starhawk, 20.) Limitations make life single minded. There are few members of the religion that see heterosexuality as the right way to live. They claim it is the only true way to honor the god and goddess. However, this is rarely the point of view. Sexuality is most often honored in the tradition, regardless of the form and cause of sexuality. Any kind of sexuality is honored, even homosexuality.

The Great Rite is very similar to sex magic; however there is a much greater sense of ritual. While sex magic is just a very intense and passionate way to reach a goal, the Great Rite is more about the journey to the goal. The Great Rite is performing sexual intercourse within a sacred circle. There are two different forms of the Great Rite: actual and symbolic. “But whether it is symbolic or ‘actual’, witches make no apology for its sexual nature. To them, sex is holy – a
manifestation of that essential polarity which pervades and activates the whole universe...” (Farrar, 48.) The symbolic Great Rite is a ritual where the man plunges a knife into a chalice being carried by the women and is filled with wine. This symbolizes the man entering the female. This is normally performed in front of the entire coven. “The symbolic Great Rite, however, is a perfectly safe and beneficial ritual for two experienced witches at the level of friendship normal between members of the same coven” (Farrar, 49.) This version is not as intense as the actual Great Rite. This is when a couple is in a sacred circle alone. They call the god and goddess to them and have sex with each other. They bring themselves together in a sacred form of unity. “The couple enacting the Great Rite are offering themselves, with reverence and hoy, as expressions of the God and Goddess aspects of the Ultimate Source” (Farrar, 49.) The Great Rite is commonly done during Beltane. It is seen as a beautiful and intense experience for the couple or entire coven.

Beltane is one of the seven Sabbats. It takes place on May 1 and is commonly called May Day. It is a festival that celebrates fertility. It marks the emergence of the Sun God in manhood. He desires the goddess and they fall in love and the goddess becomes pregnant. “The virile young lord and the fertile maiden celebrate the evident consummation of their relationship….It is a fire and fertility festival that celebrates the transformation from maiden to mother through the mystery of sexuality” (Holland, 20.) It is a beautiful festival that represents growth, love, fertility, and sexuality. The holiday is traditionally celebrated in many ways. Jumping over the bonfire promotes fertility and wild water is collected and used to bathe in or drink from. The man form of celebration is dancing around the maypole. “The celebration of Beltane (1 May) is an explicit celebration of sexuality as participants dance around the maypole. Berger explains the connection: ‘The dance symbolizes the sex act as men and women holding brightly colored
ribbons weave in and out. The maypole is envisaged as a phallic symbol that is placed in a hole in mother earth” (Anderson, Young, 275.) This is a very obvious sexual tradition. The maypole is a representation of sex. Dancing around it honors and celebrates the sexual experience. During this festival, the Great Rite is often performed as well as handfastings. This Sabbat is very important within the Wheel of the Year and is also highly laced with sexuality.

Litha is the holiday that occurs after Beltane. It is considered one of the four lesser Sabbats and is the celebration of mid-summer. The goddess is far into her pregnancy. “The fertility of the goddess is at its peak. She is pregnant with the young god and pregnant with the harvest. Here, then, is a balance of fire and water” (Buckland, 117.) Litha represents all things polar. Fire and water, female and male, light and dark. There are traits of the goddess and god being represented by women and men. The celebration of Litha is one of the grandest. There are many ways to celebrate Litha. Flowers are often used. Many people will wear garlands or crowns of flowers. They often include the yellow blossoms of St. John’s Wart. It has been traditionally used in the past due to its symbolism of fertility. The festival for Litha is also one of excitement. There is traditionally a lot of dancing, singing, stories, plays, and eating. There are a few traditions that are the same at Beltane. There are sometimes maypoles and there are quite commonly fires. However, the fires at Beltane are normally small. The fires at Litha are quite often large bonfires. Wiccans dance around the fire in honor of fertility, strength, luck, and nature. Many also believe Litha fires produce a great power. “Witches celebrate abundance, fertility, virility, and the beauty and bounty of nature. This is a good time for handfasting and male rituals, for workings of empowerment, consummation, or culmination” (Holland, 20.) This is the time for many sacred events. Couples tend to try and get pregnant because fertility is high.
Litha is not commonly seen as blatantly sexual as Beltane, however sexuality and fertility is still a common theme in this festival.

Handfasting is one of the oldest and most beautiful traditions in Wicca. It can be described as a Wiccan marriage. “A Wiccan marriage ceremony, called a handfasting because the right wrists of the bride and groom are traditionally bound together, symbolizing their union” (Holland, 17.) The ceremony is performed by the High Priestess. The couple’s right hands are literally fastened together with a cord. This is meant to mean that they are bound together forever. Normally, the cord is kept fasted for the entirety of the ritual as well as any following festivities. This is to show that the couple will be united for life. “The dress of the couple depends on their tradition. Some wear white robes, some go sky clad, some will wear traditional Cowan dress, such as white wedding gown for the bride and a white tuxedo for the groom” (Buckland, 95.) Sky clad means the couple would be completely naked. It represents their openness and vulnerability. It also shows their trust within one another. They can show their true selves and vulnerability without fear of being hurt or being ashamed. After the handfasting it is common for the couple to commit the Great Rite “The couple now enacts the Great Rite, and it is entirely their choice whether it should be symbolic or actual. If it is actual, the High Priestess leads the coven out of the room, instead of the Maiden as is usual” (Farrar, 165.) This act completes their dedication to one another. They share a magical and sexual experience as life partners that add solidity to the relationship. It’s a beautiful and highly symbolic tradition that focuses on love. However, since sexuality is so prevalent in the religion, it is also seen in this ritual.

Wicca is a very beautiful religion with strong beliefs and traditions. There are many themes commonly seen such as nature, equality, love, and sexuality. The latter is especially
relevant within this religion. It is seen in many different places such as their beliefs on the body, sex magic, and homosexuality. There are also many rituals that are related to sexuality. This includes the Great Rite, Beltane, and Litha. Wiccans take pride in their sexuality. It’s embedded in the natural flow of the religion. They revere it and never take shame. Sexuality is a large part of why Wicca is such a unique and beautiful religion.


