

# Humanism on... Relationships



A Humanist wedding in Scotland

**This resource will help you to understand, explore and analyse how Humanists approach Gender Roles, Sexual Relationships, Marriage & Equality, and Exploitation. This will be helpful for those studying the Higher or National 4&5 RMPS unit Morality and Relationships.**

Other resources are available for teachers and students studying RME/ RMPS in Scotland.

We also have trained volunteers who can visit your school and answer questions on Humanism. To find out more visit:  
**[www.humanism.scot/education](http://www.humanism.scot/education)**

We are always happy to answer questions for pupils who are completing their Added Value Unit or any other coursework and are looking for a Humanist response.

**Please email [admin@humanism.scot](mailto:admin@humanism.scot) your questions.**

## Key Learning Outcomes

Humanists are people who are not religious and look for real-life evidence to help answer moral questions.

Humanists support same-sex marriage.

Humanists think LGBT people should be as valued as anyone else.

Humanists oppose the view that there are defined gender roles.

Humanists believe all people should be treated equally and no one partner is more important than the other in a relationship.

This resource was developed by Humanist Society Scotland.

Higher/National 4&5 RMPS

# Who Are Humanists?

**Humanism is a non-religious viewpoint. Humanists are people who form their views on moral issues through gathering evidence.**

They use **reason and think critically** about what they find to make decisions. Humanists don't have a central "authority" on right and wrong – there is no sacred text or leader of Humanists. Instead Humanism is a **way of thinking rather than a religion**. Because of this, Humanists will sometimes disagree with each other over the right answer to key problems.

Humanists, however, share an understanding that our world is best understood through **science, observation and rational enquiry** rather than accepting supernatural explanations that cannot be tested. Humanists also share an understanding that our decisions should **not unfairly impact on others**. Humanists think we are all ultimately responsible for our actions and future.

## Understand

1. How does a Humanist differ in the way they would make a moral decision in comparison to people of religious groups you have studied?
2. What would a Humanist consider when making a moral decision?
3. How do you decide what is right and wrong?

## Explore

1. Research and find out some information about a famous Humanist. Create a poster with facts about their life. See if you can find a quote they have said about a moral issue.
2. Create a survey to ask your class how they decide what is right and wrong. You might ask them if religion plays a part in this process, although make sure you keep the answers anonymous. Put your findings together in a chart.

## Analyse

1. Create a table of similarities and differences between Humanists and Christians.
2. In a group/pair discuss the following statements a Humanist might make about how they make moral decisions. What does each one tell you about Humanists?
  - "We are all responsible for our own life, we can't expect someone else to make decisions for us."
  - "I look at a wide range of art, books, films as well as science to understand how life works."
  - "I find not knowing the answer to every single question inspiring and makes me want to discover more."



Members of Humanist Society Scotland campaigning for the law to change on same-sex marriage in 2014

# Gender Roles

**Traditionally society has defined that men and women have different roles. This has included views that men and women should dress differently and that there are jobs that only men or women should do. Certain behaviours or emotions have also been seen by some as “feminine” or “masculine” in nature.**

Humanists don't share the view that people have defined roles based on their gender. Humanists approach an individual's role in society from a point of **equality**.

Humanists think that people should be **free to choose their own path in life**. This means some people will choose to live a life that conforms to traditional gender roles but others will not.

For Humanists it is very important that individuals are **not pressurised or expected** to fill a particular role based on their gender. Traditional views on gender roles also **ignore the existence of LGBT people**. Defined gender roles only work in a world where everyone is heterosexual and their gender is fixed. LGBT people exist and Humanists think that this should be acknowledged, and that LGBT people should have the same rights and respect as other people.

## Humanist Profiles

**Name:** Anne Glover

**Occupation:** Biology Professor



“When I was very young, it struck me as odd that teachers and others thought that it was unusual that I should be interested in science and that they should try and persuade me to consider something else.

It is always unusual to me when others point out that I am the first woman to do something and that suggests to me we have quite a long way to go as the gender of someone in a role should not be worthy of comment.

There is nothing that women cannot do and if they come across a barrier, just look for a way round it and always keep looking ahead. Never fear a rejection or a rebuff.

## Understand

1. Why would a Humanist oppose men and women having defined roles?
2. Does this differ from religious groups you have studied?

## Explore

1. Look at the profile of Anne Glover, a notable Scottish Humanist. How do her comments about working in science help you understand Humanist views on gender roles? Can you find any other information about Anne Glover?
2. Find a copy of the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. What does it say about gender? Do you think a Humanist would agree with this? What do you think of it – if you were to re-write it what would you say?

## Analyse

1. Imagine Anne Glover has been asked to give a speech on improving gender equality in science. Write her a short speech that covers:
  - a. What the problem is as she sees it and;
  - b. What should be done to solve the problem
2. Pick a religion you have studied and find similarities and differences between what someone from this religion might think and what you have put in Anne's speech.

# Inequality/ Exploitation

**Humanists stress the need to value every individual as an equal and that everyone should have equal opportunities. A Humanist would not change their mind about this regardless of a person's gender, sexuality, race or any other characteristic.**

A Humanist approach would be to look at the evidence, and the evidence shows that unequal treatment negatively affects people. For example, people who face stark inequality or discrimination often value their worth to society less than those who are privileged.

Other evidence shows that inequality reinforces itself. Take the example that women should be “home-makers” rather than workers earning an income. Because women in this situation do not have an independent income, they are reliant on someone else financially (traditionally a husband). This financial dependence further limits their ability to be autonomous and to do the things they wish to do in life without asking for permission.

A Humanist would say this shows that inequality and exploitation supports and leads to further inequality.

Humanists oppose people putting limitations or expectations on others and have actively campaigned against this. For example, they do not think that religious organisations should be able to ignore equality laws that protect against discrimination just because inequality is enshrined in their religious beliefs.

## Humanist Profiles

**Name:** Sandi Toksvig

**Occupation:** Comedian/Presenter



“I genuinely believe that society would be more at ease with itself – men and women – if we had equality. I am partly a feminist because of my son: I don't want him to have to ‘man up’; to not cry; to feel as if he has to carry the burden of the world. I'd like him to share it. Even in the most egalitarian countries, there's still a gender pay gap and it's time that we said ‘enough’.

## Understand

1. Give two views a Humanist would have on gender inequality.
2. Can you think of ways gender inequality is present in education?

## Explore

1. Read the profile of Sandi Toksvig. Do a search online and see if you can find other information about her views on gender equality.
2. Do you think being a Humanist shapes her views on this? If so why?
3. Can you find any examples of organisations that challenge gender inequality? What do they do to challenge it?

## Analyse

1. Produce a poster that highlights the gender pay gap. Add any facts you can find on this topic. Add a picture and quote on this topic from a religious person and one from a Humanist.
2. In groups discuss examples of where discrimination is accepted by a culture or society. Do you think this is acceptable?

# Marriage

**Humanists think that marriage can be a positive experience for couples. However, they do not believe that marriage is necessary to have a positive loving relationship with someone.**

Unlike some of the religions that you will study, Humanists see no problem with people living together unmarried or in a civil partnership – all are equally valid to a Humanist – it is **the decision of the individuals taking part that is important**. Humanists believe that marriage should be based on mutual respect and love. They would oppose any view that people should be expected or required to enter into a marriage for any reason.

Humanist Society Scotland **campaigns for same-sex couples to be able to marry**. After the law was passed in Scotland, Humanist Society Scotland carried out the first same-sex marriage. Humanists are also campaigning in 2020 to allow mixed-sex couples the right to have a civil partnership instead of a marriage.

Humanists **do not oppose divorce**, nor divorced people being able to remarry. Ultimately it is for individuals to decide how they lead their personal life.

Below is an example of a vow used at a Humanist wedding:

**“I promise to allow our marriage and each other to change and develop, supporting you in happiness and sorrows, health and illness. I promise to live with you as equal and different individuals and to recognise and accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses. I promise to learn from our shared experiences and to build from them a full and caring friendship based on trust and respect. I promise to work together with you for the good of the community to which we belong and for the good of humanity as a whole.”**

## Humanist Ceremonies

**Type:** Weddings

**Number in Scotland:** 5,000 per year



Humanist weddings in Scotland have been legal since 2005 after Humanist Society Scotland campaigned for recognition. They focus on the individuals who are getting married, their story and their commitment to each other. Humanist weddings have no set form: each one is individually designed by the couple and the celebrant.



## Understand

1. What is different about a Humanist view of marriage and that of a religion you have studied?
2. Do you think that all couples should be married before they live together? Why?

## Explore

1. In Humanist weddings poetry is quite often read. See if you can find a good poem to be read at a wedding.
2. Humanist weddings use gestures to symbolise the love and joining of the couple (such as handfasting shown in the photo). See if you can find other examples of symbolic gestures online.

## Analyse

1. Compare Humanists with a religion that does not support same-sex marriage. Give the main reasons why Humanists do and why this religion does not support same-sex marriage.

# Sexuality

**Humanists believe that all individuals should be treated equally and fairly.**

Humanists believe that **morality comes from individuals and their experiences** and not from an outside source like a belief in God. When considering LGBT rights, Humanists think about how what we do impacts upon other people. They argue that restricting rights for LGBT people is unfair and unequal.

For Humanists there are no 'rules' on sexuality; they support the view that an individual **has a right to do what they want in their life** – so long as it does not harm others. **Same-sex relationships are not viewed any differently from mixed-sex relationships by Humanists.** At their core is a mutual wish for a relationship between two consenting individuals and that is all that matters.

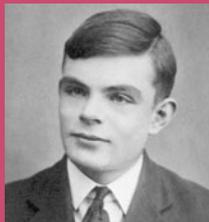
Humanists have been vocal campaigners for equal rights for LGBT people. In Scotland, Humanist Society Scotland was **one of the key actors in the successful campaign to legalise same-sex marriage.**

In other parts of the world where homosexuality is still a criminal offence, **Humanists are at the forefront of trying to change the law.** As Humanists believe there is only one life, they believe it is important to stand up and campaign for human rights. Humanists strongly believe it is what we do in the present that is important.

## Humanist Profiles

**Name:** Alan Turing

**Occupation:** Code breaker & mathematician



Alan Turing was a pioneer of computer science who developed the machines that led to the breaking of the 'enigma codes' used by Nazi Germany in World War II. Turing was prosecuted for being gay in 1952 – a time when this was a crime in Britain. As part of his criminal punishment he was injected with hormone 'therapy' to 'cure' or 'limit' his homosexuality. This and other pressures, such as losing his security clearance, led to his suicide two years later. In 2009 the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, made a public apology on behalf of the country for the way Alan Turing had been treated.

## Understand

1. Would you agree that a person's sexuality is nobody's business but their own? Why?
2. How would a Humanist react to discrimination against LGBT people?

## Explore

1. Research which countries still have criminal laws against LGBT people. Can you find the reasons they give for such laws?
2. What are the main issues that LGBT people in Scotland face? Has anything changed in recent years?

## Analyse

1. Read the profile on Humanist computer scientist Alan Turing. Produce a poster on Turing's life – can you find out more about his achievements? Why is he considered important?
2. Most people accept that being gay is not something that needs or has a cure. See if you can find information about where gay 'cure' therapy is still promoted in the world. See if you can find out what UK politicians have said about such methods. How does this make you feel? Do you think governments should intervene where this is promoted? Why?