

# 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.

Humanists believe that marriage should be the expression of love and commitment between two freely consenting people and strongly oppose forced marriage.

Humanists support the right of unhappy couples or individuals to divorce, and think that divorce should be easy to access for both parties, have 'no fault' grounds, and should not be stigmatised.

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.

# Arranged and Forced Marriages

Humanists believe that marriage should be the expression of love and commitment between two freely consenting people. How a couple meet is not important from a humanist perspective, but humanists believe that people should be free to choose who, when, and if they marry.

## Arranged Marriage

**Arranged marriages** were commonplace in many countries and cultures up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and people still enter into arranged marriages today. An arranged marriage involves the help of a third party or parties to bring couples together (this can be family, friends, or community matchmakers for example) but the marriage is performed with the full and free consent of both parties.

Humanists do not oppose arranged marriages that are **consensual** and that focus on the **happiness and wellbeing** of both parties. However some humanists may have **reservations** about the impact arranged marriage may have on some groups in society. For example, arranged marriage is predominantly (if not totally) between heterosexual couples, which is **problematic** for people who are LGBT and living in countries or communities where arranged marriage is the norm and LGBT identities are not tolerated.



## Humanist Profiles

**Name:** Lynsey Kidd

**Occupation:**  
Director of Services,  
Humanist Society  
Scotland

“ I enjoy working with our celebrant trainees as they learn how to work with couples and families to create and perform humanist wedding, naming and funeral ceremonies. One of the important parts of the training process is ensuring that our celebrants are able to spot the signs of forced marriage and know who to inform of their suspicions. We work with our celebrants so they are aware of the signs to look for in their meetings with the wedding couples, and the reasons why people may wish to force a marriage against someone's will.



## Forced Marriage

**Forced marriage** is a marriage that takes place without the consent of one or both parties in the marriage, or where **coercion or undue pressure** to marry has factored into the consent to marry by one or both parties. Forced marriages are **illegal** and no major religion condones forced marriage.

Forced marriage is a grave abuse of **human rights** and humanists believe that governments should do what they can to **prevent** and **discourage** the practice of forced marriage, both at home and in other countries. Forced marriage is illegal in the UK, but it does not stop some UK citizens from being forced into marriage, and **young people** are especially vulnerable to this type of **exploitation and human rights abuse**.

Forced marriage has been defended by its supporters as a matter of **tradition** relating to either their chosen **culture** or interpretation of their **religion**. Humanists believe that neither culture nor religion are a **valid reason** to abuse human rights.

In Scotland **celebrants** trained by **Humanists Society Scotland** are authorised to **legally marry** couples, and part of their **legal responsibility** is to ensure the couples that they marry have not been forced, pressured, or coerced into the marriage. During the celebrant training process celebrants are taught how to **recognise signs** that a couple or an individual may be being forced to marry against their will. They are also taught what **action** to take to **protect** the couple or individual, and how to report their suspicions to the authorities.

## Understand

Why do humanists not oppose arranged marriage but strongly oppose forced marriage?

Do you agree with humanists who think arranged marriage may cause problems for LGBT members of society? Why/why not?

## Explore

Read the humanist profile and in groups make a list of warning signs that celebrants could use to identify a person who is being forced to marry.

In 2014 the Ministry of Justice said that it would not allow legal humanist marriage in England and Wales because it could lead to more forced marriages. Do you think legal humanist marriage in Scotland has proved or disproved this argument?

## Analyse

See if you can find out how many forced marriages happen in the UK every year.

Can you find any information about the reasons why people are forced to marry.

# Divorce

It is thought that the practice of marriage arose from the need to create stable societies and social groups in which to have children, and protect property, land, and bloodlines.

In European cultures marriage was traditionally a **civil institution** until somewhere around the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD when Christian theologians such as Saint Augustine began to write about the institution of marriage, and the Christian Church began to take an interest in the **ceremonial** side of things. By the 12<sup>th</sup> Century the Roman Catholic Church had formally defined marriage as a sacrament that is sanctioned by God, and **divorce became stigmatised** – an attitude that is still pervasive in many religious and non-religious people alike.

There is **no sacred aspect** to marriage for humanists. Humanists believe that marriage is a **freely given** expression of love and commitment between two **consenting** adults. If one or both people in a marriage decide that they would be happier if the marriage ended, humanists believe that it is **their right** to be **divorced**.

This is not to say that humanists think that people should enter into a marriage lightly. Humanist ceremonies are **individually crafted** by the couple and their **celebrant**, requiring the couple to think deeply about their relationship now and in the future. The planning process that they undertake alongside their humanist celebrant gives the wedding couple space and opportunity to **reflect on their relationship** and the reasons why they are choosing to get married. Official statistics on divorce obtained from the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service in 2017/18 showed that couples married in humanist ceremonies are almost **four times** less likely to get divorced when compared to those married in civil or religious ceremonies.



## Humanist Profiles

**Name:** Professor Maggie Kinloch

**Occupation:** Humanist Society Scotland celebrant

“ I became a humanist celebrant because I was interested in creating marriage, funeral, and naming services that were personal to the couples and families involved and reflected our shared humanist values and views. One of the things I enjoy most about being a humanist celebrant is the opportunity I have to see how deeply couples must reflect on their relationship to create a marriage ceremony that is completely personal to them and their relationship. It’s a wonderful time of reflection – and a great way to check that you are on the same page before you commit to getting married.





## Women and Divorce

Historically **women** have had **fewer rights** than men in divorce, and some of this **inequality** persists today in some countries and within some religious communities. For example women in Japan must wait six months after their divorce to remarry (men may remarry immediately), and in the Muslim faith men may divorce their wives without their consent, but women must have the consent of their husbands in order to divorce. Humanists believe in **gender equality** and do not support restrictive divorce beliefs or practices that are **prejudiced** against women.

## No Fault Divorces

Humanists believe that there should be no **stigma or judgment** attached to divorce, and one way of ensuring this is through **‘no fault divorces.’** Since Scotland removed the need for ‘fault’ in divorce proceedings, over 90% of divorcing couples use the ‘no fault’ grounds for separation. As well as helping to reduce stigma, humanists believe that no fault divorces allow couples to separate **amicably**, reducing the potential for the conflict often caused by fault-based divorce proceedings.

### Understand

What is the humanist attitude towards divorce?

Does this differ from some of the religious groups you have studied?

### Explore

Read the humanist profile and in groups make a list of questions that you think celebrants may use with their wedding couples to create their wedding service. Do you think these questions could help to create stronger marriages?

Make a list of reasons why you think 2017/18 statistics in Scotland showed humanist marriages as much less likely to end in divorce.

### Analyse

Compare humanists with a religion that does not support easy access to divorce. Make a list of the reasons why humanists support divorce and your chosen group does not.



# 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?