

Misogyny and Purity Culture

Why the overt sexism of purity culture has no place in society today.

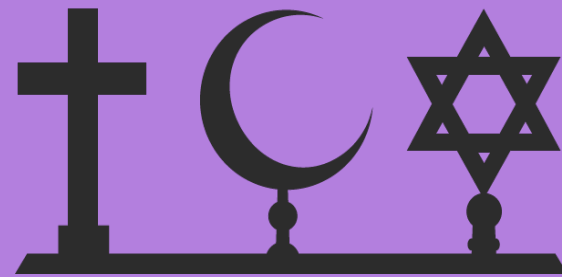
Purity culture claims to encourage women to talk, act and dress in a certain way so they can remain emotionally, spiritually, and physically pure. These rules must be adhered to strictly, meaning a woman must wear modest clothing, save herself for marriage, and act in ways that will not "tempt" the men in their lives. While this was mostly evangelical thought pushing this narrative, in the present we have seen the messaging leak into modern media and perceptions outside religious settings.

It is not difficult to find the sexist inconsistencies in this way of thinking. First, I find myself asking why women are centered in purity culture. Men are the other half of the equation, yet they are nowhere to be found.

Why is it not a man's job to wear certain clothes, to show less skin, and act in a non-tempting way for *women*? Why are women seen as solely responsible for the way men react to them? And when looking at sex, why is the blame almost always placed on women? While I will not concede that sex is wrong in the slightest, if religious people want to place a moral burden on it, the very least they could do is be consistent. If they insist on having a shameful view of sex, they should understand this: it takes two people to have intercourse. It is a split decision between both people, which logically means that the burden should be placed equally on each person. Unfortunately, purity culture is blind to logic, preferring to look through a lens of misogyny instead.

How purity culture is taught

Many understand that the values are wrong at their core, but I would push that they are also immoral in their teachings. While the boys are playing outside, the girls are brought into a room to learn that as they grow into women, they turn into something inherently sexual in nature, something they need to hide and be ashamed of. Mind you, they are being sexualized as early as middle school. Their shoulders, knees and collar bones will be seen as distracting. "You are like a piece of gum" they say, "as you let boys use you, no one will want you. What kind of person wants a chewed-up piece of gum?" Gum isn't the only object we are compared to, it's cars, pieces of paper, and shoes. Who wants a car one hundred men have driven? Who wants a crumpled piece of paper or a worn-out shoe?



I find the constant objectification that is not only taught in religious schools, but schools throughout America, to be abhorrent and extremely damaging to society. A car's main purpose is to be driven, yet following the analogy, it is implying that a woman's main purpose is to be a sexual object. No one should believe that if a woman chooses to have sex that she is worthless, that is a sexist, outdated, and cruel outlook of the world. It is the same people pushing this narrative that ignorantly ask why young girls have self-esteem issues.

Women have self-esteem issues because we are regularly reduced to our looks, youth, and sex appeal as young as elementary school. In reality, we are people, and I am tired of begging to be treated as such. A woman should be respected no matter how she dresses and no matter how many partners she has, calling her as useless as a chewed-up piece of gum effectively plays a significant part in the deterioration of young girl's self-image.

When learning about puberty and intercourse, abstinence is what purity culture pushes to teach. Yes, instead of learning about protection, menstruation, and common misconceptions, some would rather tell groups of teenagers to "not have sex" which has been proven time and time again to not work. It is completely okay for a teenager to apt to abstain, or for a person to save themselves for marriage. But I would assert that is a personal choice that should be up to the individual person, and not taught in schools. Adolescents and teenagers are already exposed to an abundance of misinformation, which only leads to STIs and teen pregnancies. I know purity culture opposes both things, so why are they so against informed sexual education in schools? Not everyone is going to abstain, that is a guarantee, so we should be encouraging safe sexual practices instead of simply discouraging it all together. Most often, sex ed is taught strictly through a heterosexual,

cis, and male dominated lens, and there needs to be a change.

Shame is the main objection I have to purity culture. While you are shamed for your personal choices, you are shamed for your thoughts as well. On both sides, all sexual thought about the opposite gender is immoral, almost evil in the eyes of purity culture. (Same sex attraction is completely out of the question.) You are meant to save yourself, yet I contest the idea that a person controls what they think. There is nothing wrong with thoughts, you cannot sin in your own head, yet that is what purity culture seems to believe.

I do not judge others for their choices, in fact, it is the opposite of what I strive to do. If someone has religious or spiritual values they want to follow, I whole heartedly encourage them to fulfill their desires. To expand further, I believe there is beauty in modesty and women, as well as men, are free to make that choice if it is best for them. But I adamantly oppose the intrusive nature of purity culture. I, and many other young women, never consented to have this narrative pushed onto us, but it is and continues to be. As a society we need to agree that a woman's use lies beyond having sex. We are beyond the labels of daughter, mother, wife, and sister. There are so many talented young girls in this world could change the world, and we shouldn't let anything stand in the way of that.

"What purity culture and sexual abuse have in common is the violation of your sexual agency. Both teach you that your body belongs to someone else."

-Alice Greezyn