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Examining the impact of Christian purity culture on adults' sexuality, identity, and religious practices

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Evangelical Christian purity culture, most popular between 1990 and 2010, is an approach to abstinence-only sex education within Evangelical culture. Youth are taught to follow purity culture mandates such as: protecting virginity and practicing modesty, purity of thought, and avoidance of intimacy before commitment to marriage. This study examines the outcomes of growing up in this culture, with a focus on the impact on later relationships and religious practice. An initial short form survey, distributed through social media, yielded 564 responses with 250 interview volunteers in one week. Due to interview limitations, the short form survey was replaced with a long form survey that included the two validated measures: The Mosher Sex Guilt Scale and Ashdown's Sex Satisfaction Scale, as well as dichotomous questions and open-ended questions. 714 short survey responses and 357 long survey responses were received. Ten interviews were performed, focusing on participants' experience in Purity Culture and their former and current religious practices. Analysis is ongoing, but preliminary survey findings include: 54% of respondents indicate their experience with purity culture was "extremely negative", while only 18% of respondents identified it as "extremely" or "somewhat" positive. Of respondents, 41% still identify as Christian, with 18% now identifying as agnostic, 13% as nothing in particular, and 12% as atheist. Sixty-seven percent of respondents took a formal vow of purity and 62% of those became sexually active before marriage. Additionally, 77% of respondents reported experiencing shame, sexual aversion, or some other negative emotion attributed to purity culture, and 38% have sought professional help with these issues. Future direction includes studying the impacts of purity culture on LGBTQ persons, siblings, and heterosexual couples both raised in purity culture. An additional area of inquiry is the experiences of participants who sought therapy for issues they attribute to their experiences in purity culture.