

A Preliminary Report on The Impact of Purity Culture on Sexual Minorities

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Q: WHAT IS PURITY CULTURE?
A: An evangelical Christian abstinence-based approach to teaching adolescents about sex.

INTRO

Abstinence-only sexual education neither delays the age of sexual debut, nor reduces risky sexual behavior.¹ Moral disgust² and sex guilt³ both increase sexual disfunction and reduce sexual satisfaction. Purity culture combines guilt, shame, fear, disgust and religion in an attempt to control the sexual desires and exploration of adolescents. Millions of adults between the age of 20 and 45 were impacted by purity culture. Many of those are now seeking help from mental health professionals.

This qualitative study explores how purity culture impacted the sexuality, gender expression, religiosity, and outness of adults who identify as sexual or gender minorities.



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Sexual Orientation/Identity	n	%
Queer	11	79
Bisexual	10	71
Pansexual	4	29
Polyamorous/Non-Monogamous	3	21
Homosexual	2	14
Demisexual	2	14
Lesbian	1	7
Bi-Romantic	1	7
Race		
White	10	71
Black	1	7
Latinx or Hispanic	1	7
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	7
No Response	2	14
Sex/Gender		
Assigned Female at Birth	14	100
Genderqueer	2	14
Non-Binary	1	7
Genderfluid	1	7

Adults raised in purity culture report persistent **fear** of their own sexual desire, intense sexual **shame**, and **revulsion** toward who they are.



LGBTQ folks performed heterosexuality to avoid admitting sexual attraction, found it **difficult to recognize** their sexual orientation, and delayed coming out.



METHODS

- 14 interviews with persons who had been part of purity culture and are sexual or gender minorities are being analyzed
- QCR Methodology was used to code interview data into domains and sub-domains which are being cross-analyzed
- Feminist Theory is being used to analyze the presence or absence of personal power across four domains:
 1. Somatic
 2. Internal
 3. Social/External
 4. Spiritual



RESULTS

Participants experienced many negative impacts of gender and sexual oppression such as:

- Dissociation from their body.
- Isolation to avoid heterosexual attention.
- Fear of damnation ("I'll go to hell if I'm gay.")
- Anxiety about ones' body (breasts, etc.)

Participants used various methods of managing these oppressive experiences such as:

- Over or under-eating.
- Risky sexual behavior.
- Excessive alcohol consumption.
- Fervent religious involvement.

Participants are reclaiming their power in many significant ways:

- Deconversion from their faith of origin.
- Coming out as LGBTQ to family and friends.
- Connecting with their own physical pleasure.
- Wearing clothing they find both comfortable and attractive.

Sources:

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2. de Jong, P. J., van Overveld, M., & Borg, C. (2013). Giving In to Arousal or Staying Stuck in Disgust? Disgust-Based Mechanisms in Sex and Sexual Dysfunction. *Journal of Sex Research, 50*(3–4), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.746280>

3. Leonhardt, N. D., Busby, D. M., & Willoughby, B. J. (2020). Sex guilt or sanctification? The indirect role of religiosity on sexual satisfaction. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 12*(2), 213–222. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000245>