Cultural Daily

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A Woman's Sexuality

Briana Benitez-Mejia · Friday, April 14th, 2023

A woman's sexuality has been debated over for many generations, whether it be argued about in one's culture or in political affairs. A woman's autonomy eventually becomes a topic that is constantly argued over, creating many mishaps and traumatic events for women. The saying that a woman should save herself for marriage becomes a huge concept that many cultures partake in. I believe that a woman should have a right to her own body and have a say in political affairs that involve a woman's autonomy. However, this fact is not always plausible as many people force their way into having a say in a women's sexuality. A woman should have a healthy relationship with her body, to cherish it the way she wishes whether it be to stay pure or not. A woman should not be restricted with her body unless she fully believes in the idea of staying pure for marriage. I believe that a woman who has had sexual relations is not any less pure than a woman who hasn't had any sexual relations.

Purity is not even real—it's a concept that was formed by a person who wanted to restrict women with their bodies and frighten them about the consequences after she participates in these sexual actions. However, in my culture, which stems from El Salvador and Christianity, there are limits on a woman's body and how pure a woman should be. A body which should be praised and cherished for its beautiful qualities is instead belittled for its lack of purity and innocence.

The family I grew up with was the start of my toxic relationship with my body, whether they were ignorant to it or not. The body that should be cherished and praised for its beautiful qualities was ridiculed for the sake of the church. This can be portrayed by the church, in which my family members founded, that I use to go to when I was younger. This church partook in the concept that women should stay pure until marriage; however, it was taken to extreme levels, causing women to lose their independence and freedom. For instance, I remember when my mother was judged and scolded the first time she dyed her hair; this caused my mother to gradually follow the ways of the church, not wanting to be judged or scolded anymore.

This event was the beginning of her loss of independence and freedom within the church. This belief that the church expects women to follow can be seen as normal religious beliefs on the outside, but once someone takes a closer look, the corruptness within the church can be seen. The trust the people have in the church allows them to twist the words of God within the Bible, stating that women cannot do this or that because the Bible said so. The church requires women to limit themselves, from not being able to dye one's hair, to having to cover their bodies to drive off men. If any woman was to undergo these actions, she would be judged for the rest of her time there. They find this custom to be binding. For instance, if a woman were to have sexual relations before

marriage, she will be seen as the product of sin and will always be seen as that for the rest of her time there. This tendency to see women as the product of sin stems from the belief that all women are traced back to Eve when she ate the fruit. This is another misuse of my church using the Bible to lessen a woman's freedom. This perspective has caused many women within my family to leave and escape the church to seek freedom and independence elsewhere. It has also emphasized how corrupt the church is within my family.

The fact that the church can change what the Bible is portraying is unbelievable and heartbreaking. The cultural customs and traditions that are written in the Bible are manipulated for the church's benefit. The people who believe God and his words learn the wrong information because the church takes advantage of them, making them believe that this is what God wants. This illustrates why women suffer and must deal with their actions within the church I used to go to.

The bodies my sisters and I grew up in, the bodies we took care of, became the main problems within our daily lives.

In the early years of each our lives, our parents were influenced by the ideals of the corrupted church. There were days and nights where we hated our bodies and despised the fact that we were women and had to go through this problem. This created a toxic relationship with my body as I perceived it as something that is dreadful and disgusting. I later wished that I were born into a better world where I can be free and be able to be comfortable in my own skin.

However, with time, my parents were able to learn the words within the Bible and were able to differentiate the rights and wrongs within the church. Their new perspectives allowed my sisters and I to be more comfortable with our bodies and be glad that we were women. Their new opinions about the cultural aspect of waiting for marriage were changed as they removed themselves from the church. They believed that waiting to have sexual relations before marriage is still the best thing a woman should do. However, they saw this in an entirely different light.



International Women's Day in El Salvador.

My mother once said, "I want you and your sisters to give yourselves to someone who you will spend the rest of your life with. For both you and your partner, but also for God, so he can see how happy you are." My mother's words portray how virginity is seen as a precious gift, and how it must be protected. When my parents further explained this custom in a religious view, they illustrated how waiting is a moral thought process with God, that once you have sexual relations, you and that person become one. But if you decide to be with another man, it creates difficult

obstacle you must overcome, creating a poor image of yourself to both your partner and God.

Nonetheless, within the article “Imperial Detritus and the Project of Modernity: Sexuality, Honor, and Power in the Bedroom and the courtroom in El Salvador, 1910-1960,” written by Aldo V. Garcia-Guevara, the cultural aspects of women’s sexuality are heightened and stricter. This strictness combined with the government and the Church caused El Salvador to become one of the most rigorous places for women. Within El Salvador, one’s honor and status were the most cherished aspects for Salvadoran families as it displayed their wealth. This is illustrated when the article comments on how “crimes of honor… have much greater standing in the courts” than a woman who was sexually abused (Garcia-Guevara 481). The cruelty behind this fact is unbelievable and it establishes the little amount of power a woman has and the little control she has over her own body. The amount of power the Church had over the government is why women were stuck and did not have any freedom or independence. The article presents the tragedies that women went through and discusses the past and how the Church has affected the government in past years. This is seen within the period 1910-1960, because men and women interacted to eventually get married. For instance, if a woman had sexual relations with a man who she was not married to, she could be prosecuted, and the man would be sent to jail for deflowering the woman. In El Salvador, the Catholic Church “controlled female production and reproduction,” and they did this by restricting women with their bodies and enforcing the belief that women need to defend their honor, stay pure and stay a virgin (Garcia-Guevara 471).

This idea that women need to save themselves to honor themselves and their families creates in a woman a horrible image of her own body, adding to the hardships she already has with the government and Church. In addition, within El Salvador, many court cases surfaced because families in the country did not want to lose their social standing or honor. This lead to women being prosecuted since they were always to blame for any sexual relations. Within the article, Garcia-Guevara states how a woman under the age of twelve who was raped would be saved and protected; however, when it comes to a woman over the age of thirteen, they were prosecuted and forced to marry the rapist (Garcia-Guevara 483).

The cultural belief that a woman must stay pure for marriage is something that is taken into great consideration, whether it be strictly addressed or not. This allows little girls to either be happy to wait until marriage or be disgusted and terrified of their own bodies. The Church’s seems as if they are trying to control women rather than them showcasing God’s true words and what He truly meant by them. Women should be comfortable with their own bodies and not be afraid of the consequences and trauma their bodies could give them. Girls should not be brought up thinking that their bodies are a disgrace, but something that should be cherished whichever way they choose. The cultural aspect behind a woman saving herself for marriage should not be as strict as it is, but rather something a woman could be proud of.

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Work Cited

Garcia-Guevara, Aldo V. “Imperial Detritus and the Project of Modernity: Sexuality, Honor, and Power in the Bedroom and the Courtroom in El Salvador, 1910–1960.” *Journal of World History*, vol. 28, no. 3/4, 2017, pp. 469–487. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26537619.

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