

Every Young Man's Battle

Stephen Arteburn, Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey

My history with this book:

I read this book when it first came out, nearly 2 decades ago. I had heard of the adult male version of it (“Every Man’s Battle”) and was thrilled that a “young man’s” version came out as it was more socially acceptable for me to read that one since I worked with middle and high school students...and I had 3 brothers. I told people I was reading it so that I could know how to better support my brothers in christ. And I suppose in part that was true. There were many more rules that I created for myself based off of this book and learning how men thought. But in reality, I was so ‘in the dark’ in regard to how men thought, acted, etc., and had no way of understanding sexuality at all (except through the villainization of sex) that this book became a sort of text book to try and figure out what was going on.

Full disclosure: when I read it the first time I was disgusted by men. Seriously. I could not believe how they were so unable to control themselves, their thought life and how they wanted to act. But even more than that, I became TERRIFIED of men (and I am sure that men were terrified of themselves after reading this book). As you will see in some of my personal stories, this book led to significant judgement against men as well as constantly being scared of what they were thinking around me. On the one hand I believed it was my duty to help my brothers in christ out by dressing modestly and pursuing biblical womanhood and purity. On the other hand, I was so disgusted and scared by men that I felt like I had to hide myself and increase the standard even more in terms of the type of man I would consider being interested in.

I have mentioned before that I have three brothers and I know that at least two of them read this book a lot—like several times, created accountability groups as a result and also created additional protocols and rules to help avoid lust and pornography (around this time there were many internet programs that came out that you could use for accountability: if you were looking at porn your computer would send an email to your accountability partner to let them know what you had done!) Because they are not my stories to share, I will not go into detail of the impact that this book/these teachings had on my brothers. Truth be told, I don’t know that they even know the full impact. But as a sister who observed from afar while I was in purity culture and now being on the outside of it, my heart is broken for my brothers and for all of the other men who were shamed routinely for being human. The amount of self-hatred that was promoted in this book, under the guise of “living pure” is heartbreaking and devastating.

A couple notes before we get started:

This is a first edition copy of this book, which came out in 2002. I am sure there are other editions of this book—especially since the Internet wasn’t as accessible as it is now.

I purchased this book used and interestingly the first owner of this book put his name in the front cover and makes notes throughout the book. You will see some of his markings (though

underlines and his own writing)—his is the lighter black pen (my markings are, like usual, in dark black ink). This was interesting to read...almost like seeing these teachings through the eyes of someone who was desperately trying to apply these purity culture standards. I caught myself often wondering if he is still immersed in the culture and how he was impacted.

Finally, like all of the other books I have reviewed thus far: the information that I share, both in my own commentary as well as excerpts from the book may be triggering—regardless of your gender or how you were socialized. Please take the time that you need to work through this review (it will be saved in my highlights) and use whatever caution is necessary in reading this information.

Page 12

The author talks here about this miraculous turn around he had when he finally accepted christ and followed him. This is a common sentiment among evangelicals in the sense that these moments typically happen when life is at an all time low, or a high about of stress and chaos. In the author's case he was dating and sleeping with four women who knew nothing about each other, had become engaged to two of them and none of them knew about the other. Talk about stressful. So yeah, when someone gets to these points, it's not unnatural to have a breaking point. However, in fundamentalism, this breaking point is when god gets ahold of your heart and then essentially gives you permission to leave the old life behind without addressing any consequences (like in the author's case, ditching out on all of the women and moving across the country less than a few days after this experience). The author claims this is god's way of getting ahold of him and needing to turn his life around from his sexual sinfulness when in reality this is a way of spiritual and relational bypassing in which someone does not have to deal with the consequences of their actions.

Personal story: This concept of spiritual and relational bypassing was quite common in purity culture and was the go-to excuse for why relationships or courtships needed to end. Pulling the whole “god told me to” card left very little room for someone else to question. The man I thought I was going to marry did this to me when his ex-girlfriend came back into the picture...he strung me along for several months saying he was seeking god until finally one day he said that god had told him he needed to be with the other girl. In a moment of boldness, I pressed him on that and said I felt that god had told me something different. He looked me dead in the face and said “I’m picking the person that I want more”...and when I quoted him back a bible verse about the heart being deceitful (which did NOT go over well), he said he would make no apology for how he treated me over the past several months and that he had to follow god's plan for his life.

Page 19

This is such an interesting concept and actually quite true...in this excerpt one of the “youth group girls” says that it's actually the christian kids—the kids who proclaim to be following god—that are the ones out there not only doing the things they aren't supposed to but pressuring everyone else to do them. This is common with our human nature: when we place things into

binaries (e.g. right or wrong, good or bad) we are almost always tempted to go after the bad/wrong thing. If we say we can't have it, we tend to want it all the more. If we say we can't think about it, we tend to think about it all the more. (Example: don't think about chocolate cake. What are you thinking about most likely? Chocolate cake). This book promotes the idea that living the purity lifestyle means you are different than the world and yet it is "the world" that tends to be more generous, accepting, celebratory of an individual's choices (even when they are different from your own) and less pressuring to do the things that you don't want to do.

Page 26

Here we go back into history of sex and marriage and the authors say something unique—and true—that in biblical times up through the early 1900's it wasn't unusual for people to get married quite young...like 14-16 years old. Waiting to have sex until you were married made sense because of how young you were (not to mention the MANY cultural rules and ramifications for women who had sex prior to being married due to their lack of equality, rights, ability to make their own choices, etc.) The reason this is important is because the authors are trying to build a biblical case for why one must not only wait until they are married to have sex but also many other purity culture rules. However, like any book ever written, interpretation of it must include the context: cultural, gender roles/norms, socioeconomic classes, etc. When we don't include an evaluation of the context we get purity culture rules that are not only incredibly harmful but were never intended for us today. This is further expanded on by suggesting that the problem in today's society is that we don't treat adolescent's as adults (like biblical times...meaning that once you turned 13 you were an adult man/woman) which means that things like marriage, and subsequently sex, are postponed.

Page 29

As we have seen in other purity culture books, the authors promote the idea that the mistakes you make, especially sexually, will haunt you for the rest of your life. While for men the consequence for sexual sin was not nearly as grave or eternal as women, the messaging is still pretty terrifying. The authors make clear statements in regard to everything you do in your teenage years will be replicated in your adult years—so you better start acting godly and pure now. The ability to make mistakes, figure out who you are, learn from your choices, critically think, etc. is completely missing and not only that, there is a language of fear woven throughout all of this that puts an incredible amount of pressure on men to make perfect choices so that they can be the type of perfect man that a perfect woman would want.

Personal Story: I very much bought into this line of thinking in regard to the men that would pique my interest. Because of this book and similar teachings, I was incredibly judgmental towards men for the type of music they listened to, the books they read, the movies they watched. I remember being interested in a guy in my mid-20's and one night he suggested that we (us and a couple other friends) watch the movie "Idiocracy" and I was so put off that it was rated "R" and he thought it was hilarious and an acceptable choice that I quickly deemed that he would not be the type of man I would want to marry as he was not demonstrating godly leadership qualities (*insert big face palm*)

Page 32

What's crazy is that how the authors talk about how dangerous it is to view pornography and how you can't forget these images and how they will stick in your mind forever and yet they go into GREAT DETAIL to explain the pornographic images they viewed as teenagers. The mental picture they are painting, by their standards is dangerous and yet they are using this as an example of why sexual purity is so important (*insert big face palm, but for a different reason*)

Page 36

I wanted to comment on this part because the marking in the book is from the original owner of the book...he highlights the statement that prior to marriage the devil tries to tempt you by having pre-marital sex; after marriage the devil tries to tempt you (sexually) by keeping you from having sex with your wife.

This was a common sentiment I heard growing up in PC. And while this is neither the time, nor space, to discuss sexual dynamics in relationships (e.g. frequency, positions, sex drives), men in PC are taught they should want sex a minimum of all the time and women are taught that sex is for the man and is an obligation. There is minimal, if any, discussion on things like the mechanics of sex, foreplay, different types of sexual intimacy, sex needing to include enthusiastic consent and autonomy, pleasure, etc. Is it any wonder then that women, in an effort to gain some sort of control over their bodies, don't enjoy sex? And this too is a fine line because women are also taught that if they don't have sex with their husband, their husband will not only cheat on them but that she will be partially to blame. This means that many women are having sex out of fear or obligation—neither of which are great foundations for an exciting sex life.

Page 38

I am, again, sharing a passage that the original owner of the book underlined—I remember reading this as a young adult, hearing the descriptions of the inner-workings of a man's life and thinking, like the author's suggested, that men were perverts and weirdos. And as I read this passage again, nearly 2 decades later, seeing the highlights from the original owner, all I could think of was how sad I felt for men for the messages that they were receiving about themselves. For the shame that they had to carry for their bodies doing things beyond their conscious control. For desiring something they were created to desire and for believing that their ability, or inability, to get ahold of this in their thoughts and actions would have an impact on the rest of their lives and relationships. Purity culture, for men, is filled with tons of "no's"... "no, you can't look at that", "no, you can't do that", "no, that's not in line with sexual purity". And yet, there is no recognition not only for the inherent sexual desires and drives that we all have within us, there is almost a taunting that happens by telling these men that they can't have the things they want, making it all the more desirable AND more likely that these desires will be filled in ways that are filled with more shame, more risk, less consent and truly could have long-lasting negative impacts.

Page 55

The “company line” for men in purity culture is that “we were born this way”...in regard to being visual creatures, made to struggle with sexual desires, lust, masturbation...and sexual sin. In this excerpt you can see it quite clearly. Why is there a prevalence of sexual sin among men: because you are a man. The belief that you were born this way (prone towards sexual gratification) is absolutely used against men in PC. It should go without saying that if we were born a certain way, we shouldn't be punished for it (like that is obvious, right!?!). But in PC and all other fundamentalist systems the “born that way” rhetoric is simply the reason we must do everything we can that is opposite of this as the right way to live. Earlier in the book (page 44) the authors use very intimidating language to describe any sort of struggle with any of the rules (or failing to live up to the rules) of PC: sexual bondage. While I am not suggesting that we give in to every whim and urge we have as humans, when we teach people that the way they were born deserves punishment, this does much damage.

The authors go on to explain 3 tendencies that are inherently male:

1. We're rebellious by nature
2. We have a strong, regular sex drive
3. We receive sexual gratification through our eyes

There are many problematic things just with the statements at face value (for example: if you are a man and don't have a strong sex drive, you are less of a man). However, as these statements are fleshed out (like you can see in the above excerpt from the book), there is seriously damaging information. They list off crime statistics in regard to the percentage of gruesome crimes that are committed by men (usually single men) as astronomically high with the reason being: MEN ARE REBELLIOUS and they just believe that they can do things their way. While this leads to a deeper, more foundational conversation of patriarchal values and systems, the authors also imply here that not following god's specific and all encompassing commands and lifestyles actually lead you toward a life of rebelliousness that may result in committing atrocious criminal acts against other humans. Later on in the book (page 66) the authors even give “scientific” reasons (focusing on anatomy and physiology) for why men are like this, deepening the idea that men are powerless over their bodies and sexual desires.

Another example of this (not mentioned in the book but talked about a lot in purity culture) would be the stories of serial killers (Charles Manson is a “favorite” one for people to focus on) and how his viewing of pornography at a very young age is what led to his actions later on in life. What we know now is that while the pornography he was viewing was problematic (NOT because porn is necessarily problematic but because of what he was viewing, the age he was and not having safe/secure attachments to help him process what else was happening in his life), this was absolutely not THE thing that caused his later behaviors. However, people in PC love to talk about stories like this to demonstrate the evilness of all sexual desire outside of marriage, how evil we as humans are and how deeply our sexual drives can get us into trouble.

Page 57

There are major generalizations taught in PC about the sex drives of men and women, including how they think about sex, how frequently, and what turns them on. Generally speaking, PC

teaches that women are not visual (meaning things like porn or other images wouldn't be a turn on) and that they are turned on instead, and only, by the relational/emotional component of sexual relationships (and of course that they will often "give" sex in order to "get" connection/relationship). Men, on the other hand, are taught that they are extremely visual creatures meaning that literally anything and everything can turn them on. Further, as this passage describes, because men and women are so different, women are disgusted and terrified of men and their inner worlds and completely not understanding of them which leads them to make choices (e.g. with the clothes they wear) that are inconsiderate to men who are desiring to live purely. This teaching then is often used to blame women for men's actions. While this book is incredibly hard on men in terms of who they are, we also see that there are many statements that shifts blame towards women and allows men to begin to feel as though they not only have a bit of a right to tell women how to dress or live, but creates a sense of powerlessness within men and allows them to have a built in excuse as to why they are "failing" sexually.

Personal Story: Like the author's wife, I was horrified and disgusted to hear about the inner lives of men; I was discouraged because I believed that if this was what men's internal worlds were like there was no way that I would be able to find a godly man to marry. And because of that, I placed even more rigid rules upon myself for the way I dressed and acted in front of men because I just could not fathom causing a man to sin by something I had done. I absolutely bought into the ideas that because I now knew how men thought that I had a serious responsibility to do everything in my power, to hide myself, to silence myself, and so much more in order to give them a shot at living a life of purity.

Page 58

We are starting to get into the parts of the book where there are very specific and detailed rules and descriptions of what sexual purity is and the things you absolutely cannot do. They also introduce the term/concept of "lust" in a more formal way and for most people socialized as male in the purity culture, lust was often a topic of conversations: how to avoid it, what to do if you were lusting and how lust is an abhorrent sin (and almost exclusively related to sex). What the authors don't talk about, however, is what lust actually is. Lust, by definition is a psychological force that produces intense desire for an object. Most religions, however, have morphed this term into the intense desire having to do only with something sexual. While it is true that the bible does speak to lust, it is in the context of a married man lusting after a woman who is not his wife. The bible is actually fairly evasive in regard to sexual rules mostly because of the time/culture it was written in, the original language and the context. However, in the passage that the author is talking about, we have to take into consideration that women were viewed as objects or property and there was a dynamic of men having power over. So if a man was intensely desiring a woman who wasn't his—because she was someone else's property—the author equated that to adultery (which was discussed and warned against in the bible).

In this book lust is warned against time and time again...and any attraction, desire (no matter how great or small) and certainly any action taken is considered lust. The authors go on to describe, in detail again, various acts that could be considered foreplay (which is coming from lust) and how it absolutely will lead towards sex...if not with a person then sex with yourself (which is also a sin because it is also taught that when one self-pleasures they MUST be thinking

about someone who will likely not be their spouse). We see in this passage also that there is a very prescriptive nature to how sexual activity goes...it is a guarantee that one thing will lead to another. This goes along with other PC teachings that our bodies are created to go from “A to Z” every time. To start and not stop (and yes, that means that at it’s most foundational level, kissing should lead to sex. Every time.) This can be incredibly damaging as it fails to teach natural sexual progression, listening to one’s body, consent, stopping or slowing down or having any sort of control over yourself. It affirms teachings that if a man is turned on he has very little ability to stop (even if the person he is with revokes consent, is unable to give consent, etc.) There is obvious ramifications for potential partners in this situation. But it also does a TON of damage psychologically to men. They begin to believe that they are the sexual animals that PC teaches them they are, they believe that their sexual desires have the ability to take over them in such a way where control can’t be gained (which would/could naturally lead to criminal acts...which is terrifying to think that they would believe they literally have no power to stop themselves). There is much shame surrounding these teachings.

Page 65

The concept of “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” (a verse in the bible) is used in PC frequently. In this case we see that though the authors have presented that men were simply born deviant sexual beings that their calling is not to being a male but instead to being a man. Enter “be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect” where additional mandates are made in regard to thoughts and behaviors. The authors are quick to recognize that these are the true traits of manliness: denying all that is within to be a pure man of god.

Page 69

In many PC books there is a heavy emphasis on involving your parents in your love life—and this book is no exception. Well, kind of. Men are painted so poorly in this book: sex-crazed animals with no conscience or control that they begin floating the idea that you need to disconnect from your parents if they aren’t supporting this lifestyle of yours. (Side note: this is very common cult/high demand and control/fundamentalist religion tactics. The goal is to isolate you from your support system and become the loudest voice and influence in your life.) Additionally, as we see in this passage, the emphasis is, again, on the women (in this case, mothers) to promote purity while the fathers promote the opposite. There is a recognition that “this is just how men are” and so it is, yet again, the role of the women to uphold and promote purity culture standards in order to make it easier for men to live accordingly. Again, this sells men short not only of their own worth but their ability to make good choices, demonstrate self-control and live according to their values.

Personal Story: Purity Culture started to make it’s way onto the scene when I was in late middle school (when the True Love Waits campaign became somewhat of a national phenomenon). Despite growing up in a very fundamentalist home, the topic of sex and sexual purity came in the form of one statement: “Don’t have sex before you’re married, it’s a sin”. I suppose the word “sin” was all I really needed to know because of the ramifications of what that meant: most notably, hell. My parents just refused to talk about it. So when I was in high school and became interested in relationships, there was no space to dialogue about it. All I had were purity culture

teachings (and eventually books) to help me determine what I should do, how to act, etc. I became quite self righteous that the choices I was making were far more spiritual than what my parents made. When I told them I was waiting to kiss until I was married they were, on the one hand proud of me (or probably relieved) and on the other hand laughed at me. They did this multiple times when I shared choices I had made in regard to relationships and sex. In those times I believed I was suffering for christ...even my own parents didn't understand the biblical mandates for purity and I needed to be a witness to them and inspire them to grow more in their faith. (Side note: I was really good at inspiring...because they did see the choices I was making and really began to double down on all fundamentalist teachings and ways of living...to this day).

Page 70-71

I think it's important to highlight these pages because we start to see how common it is to use language of ownership and objectification in regard to how men were taught to view, treat, and act with women. The original owner of this book underlined a passage about Jesus not dishonoring women. Interestingly in this passage when they talk about dishonoring or disparaging a woman, the remorse that is felt/discussed is not remorse for the way they may have violated a woman, it is instead remorse for sinning and the consequences that they would potentially have to deal with for the rest of their lives (e.g. being haunted by images, being held in sexual bondage, failing at marriage).

Additionally, we see a lot of language of ownership and power over. Words like "take", "entitled", "belong". Essentially if a man was to let his eyes linger on a woman who was not his wife, he was TAKING something that didn't BELONG to him. The authors go so far as to call this stealing or being a thief. Of course this can lead to even more of a mindf*ck because as we have learned before, men were created to be this way and now because he is doing the very thing he was created to do, he is not just sinning, he is a thief. There is an endless spiral of psychological shame and damage that can come from these teachings.

Page 104-105

CW: discussion of abortion

In this passage we see one of the authors discuss their experience with getting a woman pregnant and essentially forcing her to have an abortion (one that she didn't want). While there is an underlying concept in this passage that abortion is wrong and killing babies (a conversation far too vast for right now), the author uses his forcing of his girlfriend to have an abortion as the "end result" of a slippery slope of sinfulness that began in 5th grade when he cheated on a test. Multiple times in the chapter he suggests that cheating on the test and getting away with it was THE moment that prepared him to force his girlfriend to get an abortion (among many other poor choices he made). The author uses this story to demonstrate not only what will absolutely happen if you give in to this sin but also the way that sin takes a physical toll on your body and life and eventually ruins your life (in his case, ending up with ulcers, mental health issues, a car accident and dropping out of school).

This is quite common in PC: telling sensationalized stories in order to make a point and get people to commit to a life of sexual purity. Certainly I am not doubting what the author's experience was—merely I am demonstrating that stories like these are not uncommon and are used for the sole purpose of trying to scare people into making choices in order to avoid consequences. The problem with this is, however, that when this is our motivation for changing (fear, shame, etc.) the changes almost never last and the fear, shame, etc., only increase. Changes that are made from internal motivation and a high value of self in accordance to your values are much more likely to stick (and if they don't, that's fine too).

Personal Story: the notion that “bad things happen” when you sin, specifically sexually sin, was something I was taught. I remember hearing a story of some well-known worship pastor that began to have all sorts of physical ailments that were both debilitating and unable to be diagnosed by doctors and he was literally dying. One day, however, this worship pastor confessed that he had a secret “addiction” to pornography. His confession resulted in his physical ailments completely resolving themselves (even his gray hair returned to its normal color) and this story was told as a way to both demonstrate how far god will go to get your attention when you are sinning as well as how damaging sin can be (and truly, I believe there is some truth to this...often times our psychological battles do have physical impacts—in this case, however, I would say that his physical ailments were not BECAUSE of sin but rather because of what he had been taught about sin and how god tries to get your attention). This was something I worried about for a long time—noting the various changes in my physical health after becoming sexually active (without being able to recognize that my body was responding to trauma, not sin)...many times I felt conflicted because it felt like my body was falling apart like the pastor in the story but because I didn't have anything to confess I was constantly panicked that these physical ailments would stick around forever.

Page 108

While the authors recognize that masturbation is not a sin (according to the bible), they connect masturbation and lust, concluding that married men who masturbate (except if their wife is ill or away AND they only fantasize over images of her) is always a sin. For single men, however, this means that unless you can figure out how to masturbate without any sort of sexual image, fantasy or lust (which they believe is nearly impossible) and only masturbate to relieve sexual tension, you are sinning. Further, the authors suggest that if there is sexual tension in the first place, THAT is a sin, so there is really no way you can masturbate and not sin. They go so far as to say that you need to evaluate where the sexual tension comes from—which is usually benign, everyday occurrences—and if it has anything to do with any sort of sexual excitement that you are sinning.

When I read this nearly 20 years ago I was disgusted at how horny men were painted to be—and I believed they were disgusting and out of control. When I read this passage more recently I was heartbroken at how awful it must have been to live inside a man's brain, constantly feeling like the world was a threat and usually trying to make him act in sinful ways. How scary must it have been to feel like they couldn't even walk down the hall at school, watch a female sporting event, or accidentally see something while flipping through TV channels and know that their bodies

might naturally respond to it in a way that indicated they were sexually sinning? The agony they lived in was real.

Personal Story: a man I used to date told me a story once that when he was in high school and desperately trying to live a life of sexual purity, he would wear a hoodie sweatshirt everyday to school, even when it was hot out. As he was passing through the hallways in-between classes he would wear his hood so that it made it impossible to see what was happening on either side of him. He would set his sights on the next classroom that he had to get to and go as fast as he could so that he would reduce the risk of being tempted by women. At the time I thought this was a beautiful indicator of how godly he was. Now I am incredibly saddened to know how scary it was to simply walk the school hallways.

Page 125

Accountability groups...this was something that was very much a part of PC for men especially...women could have them but since we didn't have sex drives, struggle with lust and weren't visual creatures (sense the sarcasm), we didn't need to have accountability groups to deal with lust and masturbation. (Our accountability groups were focused on dressing modestly, becoming a biblical woman, making sure we weren't causing men to sin, boundaries and creative ways to say "no" to our boyfriends when they pressed us to go further physically than we wanted to). As I mentioned before, I have three brothers, two of which were HEAVILY involved in purity culture, including accountability groups, accountability partners and all the things that were supposed to help them stay lust-free. It was not uncommon to hear my brothers discussing their purity and trying to hold each other accountable. And while I can appreciate their desire to be close friends and supportive of one another, they agonized over this: girlfriends, lusting, sexual impurity. They regularly met with mentors, their accountability group, read books, etc., to try and ensure that this would not be something that defined them.

Page 130

Ahhhhh...wet dreams: god's natural release valve for all those hormones and pent up sexual tension. I remember reading about this the first time and thinking that this was proof that men were disgusting and just controlled by sin...god had given them this natural release and yet so many times they chose to take it into their own hands (pun COMPLETELY intended!) On the one hand the authors celebrate that this is available to men (never mind the fact that they believe that men are the only ones who would need to relieve any sexual tension) and on the other hand they move into the territory of shaming the subconscious, dream state because those dreams can get pretty "hot and heavy" and are a result of what you're filling your mind with consciously.

I think what this points out is the overarching point of so many of these purity culture books as well as purity culture as a whole (and fundamentalism): this idea of complete depravity and inherent evilness and propensity to sin from the moment we take our first breath. ...and sin being so rampant that even in our dreams we could be sinning (despite having no conscious control over them). The solution for this is completely hating yourself and turning to god which is not only far easier said than done but actually impossible. All humans that were subjected to this

teaching had to believe such awful things about themselves while simultaneously believing that god was saving them. This is a trauma bond and Stockholm's Syndrome all wrapped into one!

Page 135

What's interesting here in this passage is this oscillation between god being all powerful and in control and you absolutely needing his help to do anything AND this mandate that you must make a choice, stick to it and decide to not do something. It's this subconscious agreement that god's not going to just help you, you have to actually take action. And on the one hand, I completely agree...we can have the greatest intentions to do/not do something but if we don't shift the way we act, live, feel, think, etc., they are just good intentions. However, this flies in the face of so many other fundamentalist teachings where humans are so disparaged that there is literally nothing they can do and need god's help to even pick out an outfit in the morning. But when it comes to lust/masturbation/sexual sin, as this book and so many other's preach, simply reaching out to god for help just isn't good enough. God won't help you not look at a woman who is showing cleavage, god won't help you "bounce your eyes" or think about something different...it's up to you. It's a very mixed message and mindf*ck that leaves men feeling completely powerless and helpless.

Page 139

There are a few interesting things we will start to see in the book now; this next section is built on prescriptive practices that one must engage in, in order to win the battle for sexual purity. Purity culture books directed towards men are rife with what might stereotypically be considered macho language. War, battles, sports references, strong male leads in movies and TV programs, etc. Authors use these fictional characters to promote their biblical principles, resulting in many people believing that these individuals are the real men, the godly men, and the men that they should strive to be. A prime example of this is the book "Wild at Heart" by John Eldridge who's protagonist, William Wallace (aka Braveheart) is set forth as an example of what a real man is. Another great resource that further depicts these ideas of true manhood is "Jesus and John Wayne" by Kristin Kobes du Mez.

Like we have seen in many other purity culture books, PC is much more than the "no sex before marriage" teaching and here we see the authors requiring that true, real, actual purity comes from following very specific rules, prescribed by them. They also indicate that truly being pure means you must follow ALL of the rules; you cannot pick and choose. This, of course, begins to build on the foundation of power and control; this section is filled with specific rules on what you can and cannot look at, how to spend your time, what to do if a woman is coming on to you and much more. And, in stereotypical fashion, this will be a battle that you have to have a defense plan for...because the other thing that you can guarantee is that you will be attacked by the devil, you will struggle and you will be tested.

Page 143

It is not uncommon in PC that men are told, and believe, that they are addicted to pornography. Men frequently will discuss their porn addictions and the negative way that porn has impacted them. Though I cannot say with 100% certainty, it was this book and its parent book, *Every Man's Battle*, that really put pornography addictions “on the map” within fundamentalism and purity culture. These books, written right as the Internet was able to be accessed from homes and personal computers, collided with pornography being available with the click of a button as opposed to having to GO somewhere to get it. In the authors' opinions, this only fueled addictions as well as a lifestyle of impurity. However, the addiction terminology they use is, in my opinion, quite damaging—mainly because of the foundational teachings that go with it. The authors have already fleshed out their ideas that porn always leads to masturbation (double sin!) and that this is not a lifestyle of purity. Later on in the book they overtly say that if a man gets an erection from anything or anyone that is not his wife, he is living impurely. The author's solution to this: cold turkey. Essentially, shut your sexuality down. Any entertainment of sexuality, attraction, desire can quickly lead into the territory of sin, so shut it down. Not only does this lead to extreme fragmentation of oneself, this can create enormous anxiety and shame.

Throughout the rest of this chapter the authors give “practical” tips on how to shut these sin-traps down: the famous “bouncing your eyes”, taking inventory of potential places where you could slip up (e.g. in the shower, lying in bed too long in the morning, where you study OR ANYTIME YOU ARE ALONE) and do whatever you need to do avoid them. The problem with this is that a case could easily be made that everyone and everything is dangerous and therefore a person lives in isolation and shame because they are so fearful that they will be sexually enticed or tempted from literally anything. Though the authors promote having control over your sexual desires and urges, this type of behavior and thinking only leads to your sexual desires and urges having control over you (which can also lead to many problematic, risky and even dangerous outcomes).

Page 156

In this section we see two things: the absence of choice and the idea that attraction and lust are synonymous. The authors, again, use very strong language in order to make a point: that you don't have a right to look at certain people, to ask questions, to do certain things; you don't have the authority to make certain choices. While this is, obviously, a complete stripping of autonomy, it almost always leads to failure. Shaming and demanding almost never has an ideal outcome. While the authors indicate that if you stick to their steps eventually these methods for sexual purity will become second-nature and because you want to, there is still the underlying eternal consequences that are always in the background. Further the book is clear in other places (e.g. page 188) that god needs to and desires to break our wills and our desires in order to follow him. What this lends to then is that even the person who thinks they have a choice in making these principles their standard, aren't actually making a choice. When dynamics of power and control are at play, autonomy and choice are not.

We also see in this passage the absence of choice around lust and attraction: that you do not have a right to lust after someone you find attractive. Here and in many other places, the authors overtly and covertly make lust and attraction synonymous because, in their mind, being attracted to someone is the top of a slippery slope. While the authors acknowledge that attraction is important to a relationship they prescribe specific parameters around attraction and what is pure

and impure. Essentially if the attraction to someone leads you to be sexually attracted to someone, you need to check yourself and possibly eliminate that person from your life. There are obvious problems with that (not least of which is the importance of physical and sexual attraction in a relationship) and can easily lead to literally every person and every scenario being damaging and dangerous. The authors give several examples of everyday things (e.g. watching TV, going to a sporting event with female athletes, walking the halls of school) that are fodder for the mind, filled with images to return to later and use for your filthy, lustful masturbatory practices.

Page 166

An interesting thing that I noticed several times throughout this book is the VERY graphic descriptions of various scenarios and bodies. I caught myself being a bit horrified reading descriptions of events or women in a book that is supposed to be discussing purity of mind and body. In this excerpt here we see a sliver of this graphic rhetoric which, in my opinion, could be quite damaging for a reader who is trying to remain sexually pure (as a side note: I certainly am NOT shaming anyone in these descriptions nor would I shame anyone for being turned on by any of these descriptions. I am merely suggesting that in a book on sexual purity and noting time and time again how much men struggle with visual images, their fantasy world and their thought life, these authors certainly are not making it easy!)

Page 178

In this particular section of the book they decide to get women's perspectives on relationships, men, and their own lifestyles of purity. What's interesting is that when I read these sections of books I read them as things that I needed to be aware of and change more in myself in order to make it easier on the men in my life. While the authors never say that women MUST do these things, the way the book is written and its implications easily suggest that women hold a lot of control in making their 'brothers in christ' stumble and so if there are practical ways that we can help them, we owe it to them (with the reward for us being that our 'brothers in christ' will notice us, see our godliness, be attracted to that and want to marry us). In this passage here, we see that the woman shifts herself in order to make it easier for "him"...she doesn't bend over in front of him (lest he look down her shirt or stare at her hind end), she covers his eyes when a racy scene on a TV show comes on, etc. In other sections of the book we see that even changing your shampoo to a neutral or soap smell may be helpful to men (so that they don't breathe in your sweet smelling shampoo/hair and go wild). While this is clearly problematic, it also invited a level of judgement from men towards women. While most men would likely not have done this consciously or maliciously, there was an understanding that if men saw women who were not prioritize their (the man's) purity that they may not be a good match for them (even though it was common knowledge that men would often try to push the boundaries of a woman).

Page 189

Building off of the previous slide we see more examples (graphic) of things that may turn a man on and get them headed towards lustful thoughts. Again, while the authors do not explicitly indicate that a woman needs to change her shampoo or change her laugh, there is also an

underlying teaching in purity culture that women need to understand men's struggles and should know what they consider flirtatious, seductive, attractive, etc. ...that women should, to an extent, anticipate what a man may or may not be attracted to so that she can contort herself and "help" him stay pure.

Page 192-193

The statement here "if she's a non-Christian she's even more dangerous since she has no moral reason not to go to bed with you" (this statement could be used with he/him pronouns too). Nevermind this statement is coming off the heels from the previous page discussing how women, in general, are dangerous, because hello...boobs, non-Christian women (or men) are even more dangerous because they will try to lure you into sinful situations. This is a common sentiment in PC—that non-Christians have no morals and want to get you involved in the most egregious, risky and sinful behaviors possible. The rest of this section goes on and basically gives a tutorial on how to be a jack ass to a woman in order for her to get the picture that you are not interested...though they don't ever encourage clear communication to state that you're not interested.

Personal Story: Many of the men I knew in my early purity culture days read this book or the "parent" book "Every Man's Battle" and I was on the receiving end of this jackass behavior many times. It was some of the most painful experiences I had. Rather than being treated like an equal and communicating, I had men who would literally shun me, avoid eye contact with me, walk away from me, refuse to talk to me and even not come to events that I would be at in an attempt to "flee" from me because they believed I was coming on too strong (never mind that I was trying really hard to treat everyone equal, never pursue a man and more often than not, was very much NOT interested in them as a potential husband). What I found so interesting as I read this a couple decades later is how these men believed that they were doing the most godly thing they could—they were fleeing from sexual immorality in their minds. In reality, I was the 'sexual immorality'...which really sucked to be on the receiving end of.

All that said, while I never behaved in those ways, I know that I did this to men too, in my own ways. And this is one of the major difficulties in purity culture: there is no permission or teaching on how to be friends with people, how to engage with people beyond a potential future spouse, or how to just relate as humans. There was an assumption with every interaction that it was going to lead to marriage. And in order to not lead someone on, you just had to never interact with them.

Page 198

While it's eluded to many times throughout the book, the authors state it very clearly here: that men are only interested in "getting some" as the reason they pursue relationships with women. In many forms and fashions throughout this book (and many others) men are told that they are out of control sexually, animals, unable to be satiated, controlled by their sex drives, unable to think about anything else except sex...and that this is just how they are because they are a man. I've spoken to many individuals socialized as males in purity culture about the impact this type of teaching had on them and I am left so sad each time I hear a story. I can hear the shame in their

voices, their inability to trust themselves, the fear they have that if they engage in sexual activity that they would assault someone because they wouldn't be able to stop themselves (since they were taught that they couldn't be). The way men were taught about the dangers of their sexuality is devastating—and yet, so many of them adopted these beliefs because they were told to them over and over and over and eventually believed that this is simply who they were.

Page 223-224

This was an especially heartbreaking section to read...if you are “same sex attracted”. In purity culture this is what they call it...or that you struggle with same sex attraction. The amount of misinformation in this chapter is staggering and shameful to start with. However, they promote straight up false information: that the reason someone would struggle with same sex attraction (because they believe this is a sin and that you aren't born gay) is because something happened to you such as abuse, an absent or neglectful father or an overbearing mother. I don't have a lot more to say about this because I will just let the original words spoken speak for themselves.

One final note on this particular passage is that reading this book now and knowing many men who bought into the idea of their own depravity because they were “same sex attracted” feels gut wrenching. It grieves me that in addition to all of this other purity culture bull sh*t, the denial of someone's sexuality was, and still is, such a talking point filled with so much gross misinformation. And I am grieved for the many men and women who read books like these and have still been unable, due to these teachings, to live as they truly are, in the fullness of who they are. Purity culture has done very specific and demonstrative damage to the LGBTQ+ community.

What do the men who read this book think?

Since I am not a man, nor was I socialized as one inside of purity culture, I asked men to send me their thoughts/perspectives on the book and the impact that it had on them. Here are a few of the responses I got:

- One of the insights that always remains with me from Linda Kay Klein's *Pure* is that purity culture makes girls ashamed of their bodies and boys ashamed of their minds. As I have reflected on the effects of purity culture on my own life, something has become clear: Even if I wasn't ashamed of my body, I did hate my body. It was the source of temptation. When I read books like *Every Man's Battle*, I was reminded that the lust of my eyes meant adultery in my heart and a wall of separation between me and the Lord. Lust, manifest in my eyes and originating in my body, was reason I felt guilt and anxiety at all times. Even though I was taught that it wouldn't cause others to lust, it caused me to sin dozens of times every day. The idea in *Every Man's Battle* is that we all clash with sexual sin at one point or another. Looking back, however, I realize that it made created a war with myself—one that taught me self-hatred and constant guilt. Those are things I am still confronting twenty years later.

- I did several bible studies based on the adult version [of this book—Every Man’s Battle]. As a closeted gay man at the time, it just doubled down on my guilt and self loathing related to my attraction to other men.
- As a teenager I was heavily addicted to pornography—my dad, a youth pastor, basically told me to figure out how to beat this on my own—and gave me this book to read on my own, no assistance, nothing. These books made me feel, as a man, I was a sex crazy machine who would forever be tempted with lust every single day of my life, and that every friendship/relationship I had with the opposite sex would be tainted by sexual addiction and that by praying it would go away. ...as a terrified teenager with no one to help talk this out with me [it] felt like this book was shouting at me.
- I first was given the book Every Man’s Battle by my pastor at the time, about 12 years ago. I had gone to him for pastoral counseling as I had been struggling with depression, anxiety, and pornography use. I didn’t realize at the time how damaging this book actually was. Ultimately, this book pathologized healthy sexuality (ie. masturbation) while simultaneously objectifying women. Healthy sexuality and consent were never discussed. The book felt discouraging and gross even as a young 20 something guy trying to be a “good Christian.” Now over a decade later as a licensed therapist myself, I would never recommend this book to anyone other than to be a case study as to how Christian purity culture shows up for young men.

Summary

Ok, so we have come to the end of another purity culture book review! It was difficult to pick out the specific pages to highlight because there were so many terrible ones. Truthfully, even though this book was written to/for men, I struggled to read it because it often brought me back to my own brothers, my male friends and the young men in the youth group that I led at who were indoctrinated with such damaging sh*t and have lived in so much shame as a result. And I struggled too knowing the many young women who read these books in an attempt to understand their “brothers in christ” who became horrified and disgusted at men due to the way the authors painted men to be. There are zero redeeming qualities in this book.