



## Purity Culture and Male Savagery

[00:00:00] **President Donald Trump:** I am officially running for president of the United States. The American dream is dead. Please, please. It's too much winning. We can't take it anymore. We have to keep winning. We have to win more. We're going to win more.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Right. Welcome to Straight White American Jesus. My name's Brad Onishi. I am an associate professor of religion, Skidmore college, and I'm here with my cohost.

My name is Dan Miller. I'm an associate professor of religion and social thought at landmark college. And today our focus we're calling the episode, dating Jesus. It's kind of a weird, weird title, and I'm going to start with a story, a little embarrassing story about once upon a time as an undergrad, and as a reminder, as an undergrad, I was dyed in the wool, hardcore Evangelical Christian.

I was at an Evangelical undergraduate institution and I was crushing pretty hard on this girl there. And I [00:01:00] asked her out one time and she said, she shot me down. And the reason she shot me down is that right now, she said, I'm dating Jesus. Now that's going to sound weird. Well, you'll have stories like this too, but within the Evangelical context, that certainly at the time, that was not a weird notion and it was, it was a euphemism for an Evangelical parlance focusing on their relationship with God as opposed to dating.

But it was also a broader euphemism for me, the purity movement and culture within Evangelicalism. And what we want to talk about today is a little, a little bit about that movement, but more importantly, what that movement is, has to tell us about Evangelicals and politics and broader culture.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** I mean, first of all, it's hard to be mad if someone's dating Jesus.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Okay.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Look, I mean, that's just like, okay. I mean, you can't compete with that and you gotta just say, well, I don't, you know, that's you gotta leave it there. I mean, anyone who's God and human simultaneously.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Literally walks on water.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Yeah. That's just, sorry, just go. Just walk away. More seriously though, Dan [00:02:00] I think some people have heard a lot about purity culture. I think people are aware that Evangelicals are very into the idea of sexual purity. Right. But it's kind of hard

sometimes to understand what that means. Like why would someone say, like, why would someone in college say I'm dating Jesus. Like what kind of, what kind of cultural mores does that, does that come from?

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah, so the, the language of purity, right? It's, it's essentially a movement that says that one has to remain a Virgin until, until marriage. And we should be really clear here. Marriage means heterosexual monogamous marriage right. And we're interested today in some, some issues on gender roles is there understood of Evangelicalism.

We're going to get into some LGBTQ issues in subsequent episodes, but this would be relevant to that as well. But the idea is that you are somehow defiled or sinful if you engage in inappropriate sexual contact, including sexual intercourse before marriage. And there's this, this whole booming industry within evangelicalism movements, like true [00:03:00] love waits, the silver ring thing, pure freedom.

There's a well known book, by a guy named Joshua Harris called I kissed dating goodbye. So there's this whole culture built up around this conception of sexual purity. And one of the things that's interesting about it, and this is what interests us and, and you're going to have a couple really useful anecdotes about this.

I think in a few minutes, is that. On one hand, this is a movement that's supposed to be about all people, all people, men and women are called to be sexually pure until, and unless they get married right. In which case sex becomes okay. But these movements are also structured around really different conceptions of male sexuality, and female sexuality.

And this is really crucial because men or boys are on this discourse by nature they're sexually aggressive. They have a voracious sexual appetite. They are driven by physical desire rather than emotional connection. They're essentially these, these sort of libidinous creatures that have to be controlled. WOMen by [00:04:00] nature or sexually vulnerable.

They're sort of naturally modest. They're emotionally, rather than physical oriented. Chastity is kind of their essential state. And so you get a double standard, right. To be sexually quote, on quote, pure. If you're a man means that you're going against your nature, you're fighting against you, your natural tendencies.

Whereas for women, their natural state is purity and chastity and so forth. And what results in this is that when somebody fails to maintain that purity, if it's a man that's unfortunate and that's bad, and yes, it's soon, they shouldn't have done that. But you know, kind of what do you expect? It's it's, it's there nature.

They're going to have shortcomings. We need to be compassionate. When women fail to maintain purity and so forth. It means that they have violated their nature. They've gone against what they most naturally are. So there's a sense that to stick with this language of purity or defilement, their defilement or impurity is greater than that of men.

And you you've from your ministry days have [00:05:00] a great example of this and illustration.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Yeah, I mean, you know, I was, I was, an Evangelical youth minister for seven years and I remember so clearly this time that. We were at summer camp and often at summer camp, students would sort of renew their faith and Evangelical language.

They would say they re they would recommit themselves to Jesus. And oftentimes that meant that they would share things, that were considered sinful, that they would sort of confess things to counselors or to other people. Yeah. I remember so clearly one counselor being so disturbed because one, it was a female counselor and she had spoken with a young woman who was 14 or 15.

And she was so disturbed because this young woman had confessed. And mind you, this is in the, the late nineties, early odds. there was really no internet then. And, and the ways are now she had confessed that she had found her way to, to reading like dirty stories at night, right. That she had. Somehow gained access to, [00:06:00] you know, what will you consider x-rated.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Erotica kind of, kind of writing.

Totally. Right. What resulted there was this, I remember this so vividly this conversation about the psychological stability of that woman. Now, mind you, there were so many of our boys. Teenage boys from those days in our ministry who would confess. Oh, I found my dad's Playboys or I, you know, went on this Nascent internet thing and I found some dirty pictures or whatever.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** We never blinked. I mean, we said, hey, you know, it's great that you're confessing that. Recommit your life to the Lord, repent from those sins. But you know, we're so proud of you for being, you know, coming clean from that. And this young woman asserted. Well, let me say, say it this way. When she admitted that she had sort of asserted her sexuality in some way, it was like, not that we were questioning her commitment to Jesus.

It was like we were questioning her [00:07:00] psychological stability. And, you know, that's the kind of thing that, as someone now, who's an ex Evangelical keeps you up at night. It keeps you up at night, feeling guilty about the kinds of ways you helped to reinforce some of these standards. But I, but more importantly for our conversation today, it really sort of hits home, the two conceptions of sexuality, between men and women as they're envisioned and Evangelical communities.

Yeah. So

**Dr Dan Miller:** This young woman who comes to you is she's that much more of a problematic case because she's violating sort of her nature. And I was looking at it in some of the. The, the materials about some of these groups.

And another telling point is one of these organizations that emphasize sexual purity, they do kind of workshops for men and for women, but there's like really different curriculum, right?

The men, it's all topics about how to avoid the temptations of pornography and issues of masturbation and lust and things like that.

And for the women, it involves things like the teaching of, of, and this is a quote refusal skills, right? Their role is to protect their virginity [00:08:00] from voracious men. The nature of voracious man is to seek, to, to exercise their sexuality against women.

Yeah. And

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** this, I mean, again, so just going back to my ministry days, this, this issue was clear and present when whenever we would get to the summer and our youth group would have things like beach day or go to have a swimming party or something, there was fierce debates about what, what bathing suits the girls could wear right? Young women, junior high, high school. The debates were about, well, should we have a strict policy about girls needing to wear a shirt over their bathing suit or only wear a one piece bathing suit, et cetera. Right. And you know, you'd always have someone say, well, we always want new kids to come.

And somebody, these kids aren't really familiar with the church. And so we might have a 15 or 16 year old girl who it comes in and only has a bikini to swim in. Do we really want to make her feel uncomfortable or bad about that or tell her, Oh, you can't swim. And so that was kind of persuasive, but there would always be someone who would say, okay, that's great, but what's more important allowing [00:09:00] this new person to swim or protecting our boys from the temptation of lust.

And you know, more often than not, it was that argument that would, when the onus was placed on the young women to dress in a way that would not tempt the boys into, lust or sexual temptation.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah. And I think this brings us to our point, right. So I'd be listening to me like, that's great. That's interesting about it.

Evangelicals sexual mores, whatever. But, so what, right. If you're not in that world, but it's there that point, because part of what, what we would suggest just is that this double standard and this, the technical term to be sort of this gender essential is this notion that these, these fixed immutable genders have these, these completely different biological tendencies is, is actually.

Reflected in broader culture, right? In a culture that still legitimizes predatory, male, sexuality and excuses, male sexual assault. That on the one hand clearly that's reflected within, I think this Evangelical ethos to some extent. Right. [00:10:00] But it also then lends religious legitimation to that ongoing cultural structuring. And it legitimates that culture. And one of the questions that we've considered that we've been looking at is why does it seem like Evangelicals are willing to give a free pass to powerful white men who behave badly? Who assault women who commit sexual assault and so forth. And this has been on really clear display recently.

And I think that this is one of the connections. I think that conception of these fixed gender roles is a central cultural figure and it shows us further entanglement with evangelicalism and broader in particular. Conservative and Republican culture.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Yeah. I mean, this podcast is called straight white American Jesus.

We're trying to figure out and explain, how white evangelicals have pretty much remained Donald Trump's most vehement religious supporters. I mean, one of the things that's implicit in the title is that Jesus is male. And so, you know, one of the things we should say here is that somehow Donald [00:11:00] Trump appears more like Jesus.

To white Evangelicals then Barack Obama or anyone else really well. How was that? So, and, and I mean, we can, we've talked about that at length for, for many episodes. Now, one of the things we're trying to get at today is this. There is a categorical understanding of men as sexually aggressive and a categorical understanding of women as sexually passive women are the protectors of purity.

Men are those who are trying to restrain themselves in order to keep pure. So when there is something like allegations against Brett Kavanaugh, a Supreme court justice. There's a chance that white Evangelicals, including white Evangelical women are going to see that not as a clear cut case of Kavanaugh's unfit nature for the Supreme court bench, but as a sort of a new attack, a new set of lies from what might be a [00:12:00] sexually assertive woman, any time there was a, a male who is the purveyor, or aggressor in a sexual assault. Yes, that's bad, but it fits the categories and therefore it can be forgiven.

It's part of the system of sin and repentance.

**Dr Dan Miller:** It fits into the, and we saw this with Kavanaugh, right? The boys will be boys logic. And this gets exactly what you're talking about this notion. And it's sort of an irony there that on the one hand, men within Evangelicalism are presented as the sexual aggressors, and yet they're sort of somehow passive to their passions or whatever.

So the role of women is to not lead into temptation. Well, I guess for lack of a better term, the secular version of that, or the questions of well, yeah, but what did she wear? Or did she choose to be alone with him? How much had she had to drink? Did they initiate some sort of sexual encounter? And then she says stop.

And this notion that, well, you just can't expect a man to be held responsible in those circumstances, right? It's their nature to do this so much [00:13:00] so that you get Tony Perkins of the family research council who says, and this is a quote that the Trump gets a Mulligan for extramarital affairs, right. It's just as simply a double standard.

And it's not just that it's a double standard that it's so dangerous and pernicious, and you see it in this also this broader cultural backlash against the me too movement.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Well, so I've brought this up. When I'm playing devil's advocate these days with some of my Evangelical friends, you know, I, part of the story I've told about on

this podcast is, is not only that I was an Evangelical growing up and that I was an evangelical minister, but that I actually was married quite young to my high school, sweetheart.

we eventually got divorced and, and that's a whole nother story. We remained friends and everything good there, but one of the things I bring up with my Evangelical friends is. It's very, it's very probable that if I walked into your church and I said, I'm a straight man, and I'm now married to a heterosexual woman.

We'd like to attend your church. [00:14:00] Wouldn't blink. And then I, even if I said, well, I just, so you know, I'm divorced and I didn't get divorced for any other reason, except for the fact that you know, we dated from age 14 and were married until age 24, 25. And we just grew apart. That's why. You wouldn't blink.

Come on in Brad. You're you're in the you're in the fold. You can sing in the choir or do whatever you want. Okay. If I walked in and said, well, I'm here and I'm a gay man. Right? The response would be well, if you're willing to not be gay, if you're willing to not manifest, that sexual identity, then you can join.

**Dr Dan Miller:** If you're willing to be sellable.

Right. Those sort of identify that way. Maybe if you're quiet about it. But as long as you're celibate, you don't express that in any, any concrete, physical way.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** So why is that?

And for me, Right. What I'm trying to do with that sort of playing devil's advocate with evangelical friend is to say categorically, you're saying my sin of divorce is not, it's not great, but it, it makes sense within the theological system.

[00:15:00] Whereas, one, a person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, et cetera. They are categorically they're qualitatively, right. outside of that system. So until they're willing to come into the office logic, of, of Christian sexuality. Right then they're excluded, they cannot be part of the group. I had a student ask me, you know, about the Duggars.

I don't know if you're, if you're familiar with the Duggars, but they're, the fam the reality television, family. I don't know how many kids, there are a lot, maybe 18 kids, but you know, one of them, the kids was, sort of accused and proven to have sexually assaulted his sister.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Siblings.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Yeah. A number of his sisters and was, was quickly forgiven and brought back into the fold.

And I had students just so angry about this and I, and I, you know, they were saying, I just felt it. Oh Nisha, I don't get it. How can this person be brought back into the fold so quickly? And then all of this vitriol I'll be aimed at those in the LGBTQ community. And my answer was yes. What he did [00:16:00] was wrong.

What he did from the evangelical perspective is sinful, but he's a male he's attracted to females. He's the aggressor. And so, yes, it's not okay, but it makes sense within the system. Whereas the LGBTQ identity, any non heterosexual identity is not. It just, it is excised categorically from the Christian sexuality.

And so by nature, it is not allowed, and, Again, I mean, we're just trying to bring this back and I'll just throw it over to you, Dan. And as we conclude here. This, I think helps us make sense of not only the staunch Evangelical support after the Kavanaugh hearings, but the ongoing support for Donald Trump who is we've named.

And several times on this podcast is a, is an adulterer, had an affair, with, adult performer while his, third wife sort of recovering from giving birth to their son, et cetera. I mean, this is not somebody who seems to represent Christian sexual [00:17:00] mores, and yet everything. Every transgression he's committed makes sense

within the Christian sexuality, a system of ethics.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah. And so I want to make sort of two points. The first is bring this, you know, even broader than that. I think it's no, no, actually that then Evangelicals overwhelming support the political party that seeks to roll back women's access to contraception, access to abortion that basically women who want to control their own sexuality express that freely control their bodies, that the party that seems to sort of oppose that is what draws have Evangelicals.

Or that white Evangelicals are disproportionately represented among legislators, right? They're far more legislators who were having Evangelical than the general us population. So it's, it's a really widespread association. And the final point I would make is it's it's worth noting is that we should say that these, these issues are also making really interesting conversations happen within majority white Evangelicalism at present.

There is the church too movement that has started within Evangelicalism really [00:18:00] started to question in a way that I don't think has really happened before these, these categories of gender essentialism that have posed from within the Evangelical community itself questions about whether or not.

This form of Evangelical theology, doesn't plant the seeds and lay the groundwork for these kinds of abuses. So I want to be really clear. We see that that's going on as well as, as always, it's not a monolithic group, but there is still this pervasive logical way.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Well, but what you're saying, what you're pointing to and, and, I think we'll get to this, in the, in the next two episodes is the fact that, there has been.

Pretty strong resistance to the me too movement in a white Evangelical camps. However, the me too movement has brought to bear issues of sexual assault, to the, to the white Evangelical church. And so we are seeing those discussions, right? However, on the whole, our hope is that that our discussion today will, will help our listeners understand not only white Evangelical support, for someone like Trump, who is, seemingly a sexual predator, not only the ongoing support for someone like Brett Kavanaugh, right.

[00:19:00] After the credible accusations made, by Dr. Ford and other women, but also the resistance of white Evangelical system, something like the me too movement. And so, you know, in our mind, this all sadly makes sense from within , the kind of, Christian sexual ethics, that we've outlined today.

And, and, and as I think you can tell that we've both experienced as, as, as young people. I think we'll leave it there and we will go to our interview. Thanks, Dan.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Thank you, Brad. Alright.

So we are here, talking with, the Reverend Sarah Butoh. She is the pastor of this sort of storied and historic first churches of North Hampton, Massachusetts.

For those who don't know, it's kind of a weird name, but it was a union of first Baptist church and first a United church of Christ. And so, first what I want, I want to say is, I'm going to introduce Sarah and, and Sarah like Brad and myself has a background coming from Evangelical context is [00:20:00] now a minister in a progressive church and a progressive denomination.

And so I'll bounce it over Sarah, if you'd introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about how you went from Evangelicalism as a youth, to where you're at now in your ministry.

**Sarah Butoh:** Okay. Well, I did grow up in New York and I just want to say that growing up as an evangelical Christian in New York is very different.

I think from growing up in the Bible belt as an Evangelical Christian, because I think if you grow up in the South, pretty much everybody, you know, is, is, is part of some sort of Evangelical church where I grew up, I was in a high school of 2000 students. There were 12 Protestant students in that high school.

Oh, wow.

So most of my classmates were Jewish or Catholic. And what that meant was that according to, the, the teacher that what I was being taught most, most, if not all of them were not saved. So I grew up, I grew up feeling [00:21:00] like, you know, there were, there were maybe 12 of us that were saved and of those 12, I was pretty sure eight really were.

So we're probably the last. I grew up feeling very much like a minority actually as an Evangelical, which is interesting, interesting, because that plays into that narrative of, of Evangelicals feeling like they're on the margins, even though most of them grow up in places where they are very much the majority.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Right.

**Sarah Butoh:** So anyway, I grew up, and I think in some ways that really forged my faith is something very, very strong because I had to be able to articulate why I believe what I believe. And I took it really, really seriously. And I think I took it so seriously that I actually sort of, was, was hard to handle.



And in my own church context, because. Here was this young woman who was being taught to be submissive and silent and, just kind of holding the line and hopefully grow up to get married someday. And I was, I, really engaged with the ideas and it really engaged with the narrative and I took it very [00:22:00] seriously.

And, so seriously that my, my now brother in law says that the nickname for me and the kids was robo Christian. Like I was just so into it and I carried my Bible everywhere. I would be when they did the C with the pole thing. I don't know if you know that. Parents really, I'm the only kid out of the flagpole on that day at my public high school with my, my youth pastor in his, you know, beat up little Chevy, you know, on this side of the sidewalk.

Go, Sarah, you can do this. Anyway, I, so I grew up in that context and, I, I didn't get my call to ministry till I went off to college. And I'll just say that. I ended up going to Smith college here in North Hampton, which is, a very, very progressive liberal.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah, it's not, it's not exactly an evangelical hot bed, right?

**Sarah Butoh:** No, no. So when I, when I got into college, that's sort of what everybody said when, when I told them that at church that they would pray for me, but they were very concerned, especially that I'd become gay. [00:23:00] But it would happen. and I think it was getting to Smith and meeting people outside of that little bubble that really opened my eyes to there being another way to do things.

And other ways to think, and, you know, meeting all of these, lesbians who don't have hearts entails and they're wonderful people. And I, I really just began to question things. And I think the biggest question for me growing up in my context, going to a place like Smith was actually the question of eternal salvation and who is saved.

And, I was at a campus crusade retreat, and I was talking about this and it was very concerned because it just didn't make sense to me because if you, like I said, if you grew up in the South, pretty much, everybody, you know, is saved. Where I grew up, pretty much everybody I knew was going to hell. And that just didn't jive with my understanding of God.

And, and, and then you grow up singing all of these praise and worship songs. Like, I was saying to Dan, before the say, this is my boyfriend songs. God is love songs. All these songs really, really [00:24:00] touch your heart and, and bring you into this space where God is the most loving thing you could possibly imagine.

But then everybody around me is going to suffer eternal, conscious torment, because they don't believe in Jesus the way I believe in Jesus. That just didn't work for me. So I brought this up again at my campus crusade retreat, and one of the leaders took me outside and she said, Terry, do you know what your problem is?

And I said, what's my problem. And she said, you love people more than you love God, you gotta, you gotta get on the same page or, you know, God will take care of it. You just got to trust that in a public super going to hell. I'll go to hell. Just, just stick with God. You'll learn to love God.

And so I went back to my dorm room and I, I got down on my knees and I actually, I renounced my salvation and I said to God, I, I can't go to heaven and to meet all these people, go to hell. So I'm gonna hang out here on the outside. You know, I love you, but I just cannot go to heaven on those terms, knowing that those, that many people are not going to make it.

So I'm going to stay with those people. [00:25:00] And, and so I renounced my salvation thing. I just can't be saying it that that's what it means. And then some, I call them ministry thing.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Wow.

**Sarah Butoh:** And my call to ministry was to go to all of those people who have been told for whatever reason that they, are not loved, that they're not worthy, that they have a place in the heart of God.

And so the next day I had never seen a woman pastor. I didn't notice as a possibility. I applied to divinity schools and, and it kind of took off from there. And, when I told my pastor back home that I felt called to ministry and I'm was going to go to divinity school. He, he absolutely saw that in me.

And, he couldn't deny that that was there and he said, you go, but you can never come back. You know, you'll, you'll have to leave us to follow that call, but, but he said, go, you go with my blessing, that he could just see that those gifts were there and there was no way to hold me back.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Wow.

**Sarah Butoh:** That's a long story.

**Dr Dan Miller:** No. Oh, and it's, I mean, I can tell you it's, it's a very powerful story. [00:26:00] I'm sitting here listening to it. you, You touched on a number of, of really moving things there that would be worth sort of pursuing, but our, you know, our focus is specifically the gender and gender roles within evangelicalism. And, you're getting into that, right?

There's this notion of a kind of fixed gender differences that in terms of. Church practice mean from any other Evangelicals women, can't be pastors, but we've also been talking about how this, this also plays out in terms of, of sexuality and, and sort of embodied identity. This relates, I think, to your experience with LGBTQ people in college and, these very specific notions that women are one kind of sexual being and men are another, and there, there really isn't within Evangelical culture, a place for it, for people that don't fit into that heterosexist binary.

But one of the, one of the things we talked about in this episode is that there's this sense that the men are kind of sexually aggressive by nature. Women are sexually passive, and we suggest that this, this sort of reflects dominant culture and a lot of really problematic ways, [00:27:00] but also impacts it.

And I'm just wondering, and if you'd be willing to share, how does that play out in your ministry, your ministry, particularly with women who, who struggle with fitting into that, the model of sexuality or this, this notion that the sort of natural role of women is to fend off men. And the way that that can legitimate, you know, sort of violent actions and so on, I'm wondering if, did you encounter that in your ministry?

Do you encounter that in particular in your ministries with, with women?

**Sarah Butoh:** Well, I said I've encountered it very much in my life, as a woman growing up in the, in the church and then, and then moving on, moving to the world. One of the things that became pretty clear to me as as I sort of grew out of the evangelical subculture and it's the larger culture is that we absolutely within the church, I think as a whole need to develop, a new sexual ethic, some, some new way of doing things, because the whole idea of waiting till you're married to have sex [00:28:00] in a culture where people don't marry until their mid to late twenties is really unrealistic.

But also really damaging when you do things like you take teenagers in at a very young age, make them covenant. It, make them promise and swear before God and the family, and everybody had been carrying that they're not going to engage in sex. And then send them out into the world that these messages like that, that's the thing that's like the most it's important thing that you don't break that promise, how you help anybody can make it all the way the finish line without breaking that it is almost impossible.

So I saw. Over and over again, you know, people breaking this, this promise that they made and it made that part made me really angry because it felt like it lacked such integrity. It was putting way too much pressure on these kids, myself included. And also as I liked this, I'll tell you one story about a young woman.

I was talking with who did wait till she was married to have sex and then called me about six [00:29:00] months after she got married. And I said, how's it going? And she said, she was really depressed. And I said, well, what do you think it is? It's been, we've been thinking a lot about it. And I feel like there was something really special about me before I got married, there was something almost magical like I had this power that there was something desirable about me because I was still a Virgin and all of those things. And that, that, that was my thing. Like I was holding onto that and then I got married and now, now that's gone and it's like, all my power's gone. I have nothing. What am I anymore? I'm just wife.

And it made me, let me think, you know, what. Well, we were doing back then, or it's still being done is that we fetishize virginity. We give it all of, all of this power and this, I don't know this cache that doesn't make sense. And then when, once that's taken away, whether it's taken me before marriage or after marriage, if that was the most important thing, then what's left.

Where does that leave you as, as a [00:30:00] woman? And, and I thought, wow, it's such a strange place to play so much worse for a person. I'll stop there.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah. Tell me if I'm wrong about this. I mean, cause you're touching on this and we talked about this earlier as well. I think there's a real double standard in that discourse.

I feel like it's, it's there and what you're talking about, that the purity quote, on quote purity for both men and women, but there's a sense in which it cuts more deeply for women. Right? I feel like there's this often the sense that a woman who doesn't make it to marriage, as you say, or in the case of this, this woman you're talking about, even after that, they're sort of.

I don't know, defiled or broken in a way that is not true for men in the same way. Am I right in that? Do you think?

**Sarah Butoh:** I think that's absolutely true. And I don't, I don't know why that is. I don't understand how that works, but in all my years of marrying couples, I have met a few women who have made it to marriage, but I've never met a man [00:31:00] ever, ever.

And also, there was such a focus on this growing up, you were to use tabs or so I don't know if you've found yourself having focused on it. But I felt like all we ever talked about in this group was how we weren't supposed to be having sex. And I finally blew up one day.

And I just said, could we just stop talking about it if you don't want us to do it? I think we talked about something else., But this is all we talked about. You cram, all these teenagers is the basement. you know, maybe you them all next to each other and then just lecture them for 45 minutes this Sunday about not having sex.

And it's like, all we can think about anyway. And it's all you talk about. So, I, it just, just the most bizarre, bizarre combination serious about this. I was like, like, I don't know, but let's go run a mile or something, but let's not that you're on top of each other, talking about it all the time.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** Well, it is.

It's funny. Cause I, I went to an evangelical university and we had chapel three [00:32:00] times a week. And my roommate, my first year was actually a guy who was not really an Evangelical, but he'd come to the school to play baseball. And he looked at me after the first semester, you know, we're on our way to chapel and he's, he's like, why.

I am so tired of going to these chapels and hearing about how I'm not supposed to have sex. Like, I, I like I'm, I really don't want to talk about this anymore. And it was, it was the same thing, you know, he, he just, he didn't get it. He's like, I don't, I don't want, wanna, I don't want to do this, in terms of, I just don't want to hear about it anymore.

And it, you know, it really points to this preoccupation without which is prohibited in some way. and that, which is, you know. That, which is not allowed in it. Yeah. Go ahead.

**Sarah Butoh:** And that preoccupation, I mean, when, when male voices are the only voices being heard, right. Because the women aren't allowed to speak and that's all they're talking about.

And what they're saying is, that sort of missionary position straight up intercourse is, is the thing you [00:33:00] cannot do. That's really interesting to me because I was thinking about this from, from a female perspective. That's probably the least interesting form of sex you can have. And, and yet amongst all of these I was growing up with that was one thing you couldn't do, but you could pretty much get away with everything else it's still on a technicality, you know, still be a Virgin. So I think probably all of us were sexually active, some extent. But we were thinking that wasn't really sex and then you get married and you actually have sex. And it's like, Oh, that was, that's what we were waiting for. Cause whatever, you know.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** But one of the things we've. No, that's, I mean, that's some of where you're going with that is, it's something we've talked about a little bit today, which has been the idea that right? Yes. You're supposed to, you're supposed to refrain from any sort of lustful interactions and that could be, that could be any number of things. However, it's kind of a, an open [00:34:00] secret in church youth groups that. teenagers are going to somehow slip up and, and, and hopefully right, you don't slip up, but if you do, I'll bring that it's it's it's you do so in a way that technically you remain a Virgin.

And for me, one of the, the, the components there is that. We have a system, right? That, that grades kind of the, the severity of sexual sin. And, and as long as you're in that system, we know how to punish you. We know how to shame you. We know how to forgive you. And yet, and this goes to some of the things you talked about when you about your interactions with, with fellow students when you got to Smith is if you step outside of that system. We will, we will shame you and we will sort of exclude you, but we have no means really of, of understanding the kind of cycle of forgiveness of our pen. So if you fall out of the system, the heterosexual system of, of sexual sinfulness, well, [00:35:00] you're just qualitatively excluded from this whole idea of kind of repentance and forgiveness.

And it's not until you agree to enter into the system that we can understand you. And I guess for Dan and I, that is helps to explain. Some of the sort of ongoing Evangelical support for, powerful men who are sexual predators, and accused of, of sexual assault, people like Donald Trump and people like, now Supreme court justice, Brett Kavanaugh.

I mean, does that make sense in terms of your experience in these kinds of cultures and, and, and as a, as somebody who's, who's kinda transitioned to a ministry in a different community.

**Sarah Butoh:** Yeah, because I think when it comes down to power and control. That if you can control people, you have power over them.

And if you have power over them, you can control them. It's sort of this vicious cycle. And so when you, when you have like women falling in love with women, all of a sudden women have no place in that and men aren't necessary and that's very threatening. And [00:36:00] you know, I, it just seems like lesbianism is like, so it's so outside what they can control that it must be wrong.

That really intense desire to control and manipulate and police, especially women's bodies. And I think it just comes down to just that this the patriarchal needs to keep everybody in line and keep that hierarchy in line and keep women in their place. And women who don't need men at all. Women who need don't men, are the most dangerous women of all.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Yeah. And I jumping back in here, and this, this is Dan again, obviously, You know, you mentioned earlier tying in with what Brad said, this notion of only men's voices, right. Which is, I think present within Evangelicalism to an extent, but as you're indicating, I think it's also been a part of broader cultural conceptions.

Right. Which is why every time there are these accusations, there are those questions of, of what she was wearing or how [00:37:00] much she drank or whatever. And so I guess my question is, you know, from within your ministry context, within your context is when you just sort of plugged in broadly, culturally, what has been the effect of the me too movement?

As you've experienced it as a minister, as a woman, as somebody who is concerned about women's issues, for all women. How, what do you think has been the most notable effects of that as you've experienced it?

**Sarah Butoh:** From a pastoral standpoint and, and just my own personal standpoint. I think the biggest effect has been women realizing that almost all of us can say me too on some level, almost all of us have had to deal with something we shouldn't have had to deal with. And for various reasons, we've just pushed it down and moved forward.

And so from a pastoral standpoint, but the amount of pastoral care I've had to do and the stories that I've been listening to from men and women. Men [00:38:00] confessing women to saying I've been carrying this and, and I, for so long, I don't even know what to do with it anymore. So I, I think the positive effect is that the stories are coming to light so that they can be dealt with is that the concessions are coming to light so they could be repentive. But it, this is, I guess, I guess it's just the pervasiveness of it. I have, I don't think I know any women who don't have a story to share.

**Dr Dan Miller:** Wow.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** One of the things I think some of our listeners might be wondering, you know, and if we have listeners out there who are not Christians who have wondered for a long time, why do I have to, every time I think about politics in my country, confront an Evangelical, usually a white Evangelical. Yeah. And then more broadly, you know, I'm not, I'm not a Christian person.

Maybe I'm not a religious person. Maybe I am. But every time I have to sort of reckon with my own culture, I have to deal with usually Protestants and Christians in general. So there [00:39:00] may, maybe those folks out there, there's also those folks out there who, who are likely in the margins of Evangelicalism and sort of wondering about it's, you know, tenability for their own lives.

And I guess one question I'd love to ask for those folks out there is, what are the resources from your view, Sarah, in the Christian tradition for, a healthy and vibrant and progressive sexual ethic, you know, like. Can you tell us a story about how Christianity is not just about sexual repression and sexual, kind of patriarchal systems, you know, does that make sense?

**Sarah Butoh:** Yes, it does. Well, this is going to sound really ironic. But I think scripture, I think if you go back at scripture and look at it, not, not through the lens you were raised, if I thought through a different lens, you begin to see that. Wow. This is a lot more a egalitarian than hierarchical. I mean, we're, we're taught we, most of us growing up in a tradition, we're taught that, you know, women submit to men and men are the head of the [00:40:00] household and all that stuff.

But when you go back to those verses, especially in the epistles, you see that, that what they're doing, they're they're there the whole patriarchy was the system of the day. And they're saying, you know, wives, wives submit to your husbands or slaves submit to your masters, but they're saying do it freely and there.

And, and, and then husbands used to abuse them into your wives. Do you love your wife the way left Christ loves the church? He's remember that you, you have a master in heaven when you're dealing with your slaves and, and it's been, this is profoundly of turning this patriarchal hierarchical system on its head.

And saying that we're, we all need to submit to one another in Christ there is no male or female slave or free Jew or Greek that we are, whether we are masters or slave husbands or wives, we're all to basically give our lives for one another. And, and that's right there. And somehow, somehow [00:41:00] Christianity for, for eons has just held onto the idea that, oh, okay, well, we're just going to keep doing it the way it was always done.

Men are in charge and masters are in charge, but that's not what those verses are saying at all. They're they're saying, they're saying the exact opposite, actually. It's not about who's in terms, it's about how you can use all of your power to serve one other whether and, and, and that empowers women, then anybody on the underside to say, Oh, I am a human being.

I made an image of God. I have, I have unity and I have agency and I can use that agency to willingly, be kind to willingly, be helpful willingly, be part of the system. So I think scripture is a great resource and there are wonderful writers out there. People like Rachel Held Evans, who I would recommend, you know, go get her latest book inspired and, and read through that.

Sarah Bessey there, there's a lot of wonderful people right now doing this work, who takes scripture very seriously. And I think those answers are right, right there. They're right there.

[00:42:00] **Dr Dan Miller:** Well, Sarah, I think, I think we're gonna, we're gonna wind it down. I want to thank you for your time, and, and for a different perspective, right?

Somebody who is in this world and, and doing this and is not just the ivory ivory tower academic, like, like my friend, Brad and I. I also will say, I feel like growing up with an

evangelicalism, I didn't really outside of Catholicism. I didn't have a view that there were other kinds of Christians really.

And as so far as they came into view at all, it meant that they weren't really Christians rather than really believe things and so on. And so I just want to, I feel like you're giving us a fresh perspective for some of our listeners who may not know that right. When they look at the American religious landscape, if they can get a pretty sort of, limited view of what that entails.

And so I really want to thank you for giving us a very different kind of perspective, and, and sharing so freely with your experiences. So thank you so much.

**Sarah Butoh:** You're welcome. And I guess, I guess as we're reflecting on, if I just say that, I think that's the importance of having other [00:43:00] voices interpreting scripture, having female voices, having LGBTQ voices, having, voices across the racial spectrum.

If you just are hearing white heterosexual, cisgender men, Interpret scripture, you're going to, you're going to get a particular read on it, but when you bring other voices, this is into it. I think that's, the scripture really comes to life. And I don't think we have to be afraid of scripture. I think it has beautiful things, but it takes multiple voices and multiple, multiple eyes and interpretation to really bring it to life.

So I would encourage you if you're out there thinking that it's it's, there's no place for you in the church or it's kind of a walkway. Find some of those other voices there, there are other churches and other voices and, and there is a home for you. So I hope you find it.

**Dr Bradley Onishi:** That's, I mean, that's a great piece of insight and it leads me back to the very first thing Dan said, and Dan mentioned that you are, in ministry at a historic church in North Hampton, but we never really got the story of what makes it [00:44:00] historic.

So just on, on that last note, would you mind just sort of closing with telling us a little bit about the history of your church and how it's it's it's it's pretty. It's pretty wonderful that you get to be administry there.

**Sarah Butoh:** It's pretty amazing. my insurance has over 350 years old. I believe our first pastor was Solomon Stoddard who, was kind of blacklisted by the other Protestant ministers in the area and in Massachusetts because he believe in, in a more open communion table and welcoming more people to the table that got reversed by with Jonathan Edwards, who was one of the instigators.

That'd be great awakening in new England, probably the foremost intellect actual of, of that time. And that's probably. What most people would associate with first churches is Jonathan Edwards, but we've been, we've been in this church and we've been believing that there is more light truth to bring forth in the word of God for 350 years.

And that has brought us to a very, very progressive, so progressive [00:45:00] that if you cross the street to get to our church, you're going to cross over a rainbow crosswalks. Which



is a tribute to the LGBTQ community. and, we're, we're a very progressive congregation now. I don't know what Jonathon Edwards would make of us.

But I think we're actually very true to his legacy because we really are. Mining scripture, continuing to go back to it, seeing it as, as a living word, and I'm using it to minister, to the people in our community and our numbness. So that's a little bit about who we are.

I just

**Dr Dan Miller:** love that story because I mean, I, I no longer identify as a Christian person, but I, when I think of your community, I, I love it or it makes me.

Makes me smile every time. Cause I just love the idea that Jonathan Edwards, most famous sermon is sinners in the hands of an angry God. And now, if one wants to enter your church, they, they, they cross the rainbow sidewalk. And they are greeted by a female minister to me is wonderful. So Sarah, thank you.

**Sarah Butoh:** So. There's two [00:46:00] pastors, a man, and a woman and VR co-pastors senior and associate we share, we share the administry equally.

No, that's yeah, that's great. thank you so much for your time, Sarah. We were truly grateful. And we just appreciate all of your, all your insight.

Alright. Well, good luck .