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Michelle F. Moseley (she/her) is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor in North Carolina. She has been working in the mental health field for almost 10 years, and has been in private practice since 2019. She believes ALL people deserve respect, compassion, and access to mental and physical healthcare. Michelle specializes in working with survivors of religious trauma and spiritual abuse, and with those who are exiting a high-control religion. She also works with folks who are experiencing body image concerns, anxiety, grief, and life transitions. In addition to her clinical work, Michelle provides education about mental health for faith leaders and enjoys exploring all that North Carolina has to offer in her free time. In addition to individual therapy, Michelle facilitates a few groups each year - Body Mindfulness offers a non-diet approach to helping participants reconnect with and heal their relationship with their body and food; Wounded By Faith helps folks who have been harmed within a religious context move forward in their journey with the support of others. Michelle also has trainings and consultation for other mental health professionals. Welcome, Michelle.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Welcome back to Not Boring CEs, I'm your host, Allison Puryear. I'm here with Michelle Moseley, and we are going to be talking about the overlap between purity culture and diet culture. As an eating disorder therapist. I am very excited about this conversation. Especially an eating disorder therapist in the Bible Belt. So thank you so much for being here, Michelle.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): thank you so much for having me. I'm excited about this conversation as well. Yeah. So get us started. What do we need to first start to understand about. Let's start with diet culture.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah, I think first thing is just kind of understanding the terms that we're using. So when I talk about diet culture. I am referring to the myths, the promises that we are given around food and weight and body, size and health.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): That are all around us. And the ways that that creates this hierarchy related to appearance, where generally thin bodies, especially white, thin bodies, are viewed as quote better

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and so that's what I'm talking about when I talk about diet culture, and just all those messages that folks get from media, from social media, from the adults in their lives, even starting when they're children.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Around body size and that type of thing. Okay, can we like crack into diet culture a little bit, cause I'm thinking about like the average American

Allison Puryear (she/her): woman. Let's say, I'm thinking about the average American therapist who isn't trained in this stuff. Who's definitely heard the the term diet culture, but maybe isn't.

Allison Puryear (she/her): hasn't done their work around it, or hasn't dug into it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Can we talk about some of those myths. And just why, they're myths. Yeah, sure, definitely. I think a big one is the whole idea of calories and calories out that if a person is exerting themselves in a way to

Michelle Moseley (she/her): send out more calories than they're taking in. Then, automatically, their body is going to be a smaller size. That's not true.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Bodies are different. Bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Our bodies have a set point, a weight where they want to be and they work darn hard to stay at that weight. You know, research has shown that between 95 and 98% of diets fail.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): That folks may initially

Michelle Moseley (she/her): lose some weight and within 2 to 5 years, they've gained that back and often more

Michelle Moseley (she/her): because our bodies are working to keep us at that set point that they want us at.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): But the whole system is set up to make the person feel like a failure rather than oh, this system is a failure. It's not taking into consideration my individual body and what my body needs absolutely. And I think about the roles of the hormones, ghrelin and leptin, and how, when you don't eat enough.

Allison Puryear (she/her): your hormones get out of whack, and you start to hold on to things like you hold on to the fat

Michelle Moseley (she/her): because your body is protecting itself. It's doing exactly what it evolved to do. Yes, yes. and we don't honor those things. You know that our bodies evolved to survive

Allison Puryear (she/her): right because now, survival for a lot of people, they conceptualize that as

Michelle Moseley (she/her): being the finest period. That's what feels like social survival for a lot of people. Yes, and I completely understand that I am a fat person, and I use that as a completely neutral descriptor. It's taken me a long time to get to the point where I can utilize that as a neutral descriptor. And I can understand the appeal. There are aspects of navigating the world that are easier when you are in a smaller body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You don't have to think about. Will this seat hold me? Can I comfortably go to the theater and sit in a seat, or go to a stadium and watch a sporting event, and fit in the seat comfortably. Don't have to worry about, you know, getting an extender on an airplane, perhaps.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you don't have to worry about folks looking at you and assuming things about your health. Including medical professionals who assume whatever your issue is.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): If you lose weight that will fix it.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah, when you're in a thinner body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Those are things you don't necessarily have to think about absolutely and I think as somebody in a thinner body who works with eating disorders. And it has talked to so many clients, especially airplanes like that is.

Allison Puryear (she/her): a lot of people are afraid of flying, but my clients in bigger bodies have a different

Allison Puryear (she/her): reason that they're afraid of flying. They're not afraid of crashing. They're afraid of like they happen to get the middle seat.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and the hateful looks from the people on either side of them, the asking for an extender.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Sometimes needing to remind somebody that they need an extender. And it just it feels humiliating. Yes, yeah.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): yeah, not being able to put down the tray table. And so you and maybe you get a drink, or like the pretzels, or whatever they. And you're kind of trying to balance everything. All of those things.

yeah, we have. There's an entire other CE about how weight and health are not correlated in the way we all assume. But can we do like a high level overview of that real quick for folks who may not catch that one. Yeah, yeah. So our our American standard medical

Michelle Moseley (she/her): environment makes assumptions that health and weight are correlated, that and those trickle down into society. You know I've I've had personal experiences with many providers that make assumptions about

Michelle Moseley (she/her): what your blood levels might be around things, your sugar levels. How how much you move what you eat just by looking at my body? Without asking any questions around that.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And so there really is. These beliefs that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): if you look a certain way, and as I mentioned, it's that hierarchy, thinner bodies quote better bodies that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): if you're thin you're healthy.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): if you're in a larger body. You're not healthy, and there's no consideration of what does healthy mean?

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know. Yes, health has to do with what kind of nutrition you're getting in? Are you moving your body? But it also has to do with what's your mental health like? What are your connections and your social interactions like. What is your job? Satisfaction like.

you know, there's all of these pieces that are part of health that you can't tell by looking at somebody right right? And our physical health like, if you're looking at labs and things like that isn't correlated with weight either. Right? And that's like a juicy

debate point I get into with a lot of people. But but the data is on on my side, and I can show that and we'll do that in a whole other CE, but I do want that to be on the table as a part of this discussion, because this idea that

Allison Puryear (she/her): health and weight are correlated is part of the

Allison Puryear (she/her): justification that body shamers have for why, they're body shaming and

Michelle Moseley (she/her): part of what fuels diet culture. Yes, yes, you will so often. See, I particularly try to follow a variety of bodies on social media. Just so my feed is varied, and I'm seeing real people. And you will often see folks comment on larger creators content creators like, well, I just care about your health. You don't know this person. You know nothing about their health.

Yeah. All you know is visually what they are presenting to you on their platform. Umhm, I have gotten to the point where I will not look at comments on the feeds of fat creators looking cute like wearing anything that shows any skin or in any way showing themselves. That doesn't

indicate shame about their body. I've just gotten to the point where I'm like, I know what all these people are. Gonna say, you're gonna have a good, a good number of people who are like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you're amazing. Love that top, you know, whatever

Allison Puryear (she/her): you're gonna have some people in middle, not even in the middle. They think they're being nice, but saying things like you're so brave, which is so insulting.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, no, like I'm just wearing a shirt. And then you're gonna have the people who are like

Allison Puryear (she/her): thanks for driving my health insurance premiums up and things like that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So and I think every every fat person who has shame about their body, or even not even a fat person, but people who have shame about their bodies.

who sees those comments. It further drives that shame down into their soul.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): It is another like okay, well that's why I shouldn't put myself out there, like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I don't know if I could handle that. And just as an aside like, I will say that diversifying my social media feeds for me has been

Michelle Moseley (she/her): a game changer, you know, just seeing a variety of bodies in different shapes. Different abilities, different colors, like, just from the reminder of, like the whole world is not, thin white women.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right? Yeah. And if you're if your current feed on Instagram or Tiktok, or if people are still scrolling Facebook, if your whole feed is like thin young white women. Then. I wouldn't be surprised if that was impacting the way you feel about yourself.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah, and that can leak on to clients, too. That can. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. So so diet culture basically says.

Allison Puryear (she/her): this is right, whatever you are is wrong. Like, cause it includes basically everyone that's not malnourished because there's no there's no such thing as too thin in diet culture

Allison Puryear (she/her): which is dangerous for folks. Yes, on so many levels. it. It says this is right. Everything else is wrong.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And and I will say, too, like the ideal is in there, and that is nearly impossible for 99% of the population, and that other 1% would probably still need to have some sort of plastic surgery tweaks to get there. So we're all taught to strive for this impossible thing that we cognitively know isn't possible like we know it. And we also cognitively know, deep down like it doesn't really matter.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But, damn, it, feels like it matters. Yes, yes, it does.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah. And and I think it's so important what you said, that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): there is nobody that naturally fits the ideal like the whole. The whole diet industry is built on. There is something more. There is something better. There's still something for you to strive for. So, regardless of

how you change your body or what you try to do, they're gonna put something else out there for you to reach for absolutely, I mean, even if you just look at the trends like when I was a teenager. It was Kate Moss then, later on we hit the Kardashians. And now the Kardashians are looking more like Kate Moss, as it ebbs and flows, and like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know. Maybe maybe your body, as it is, is somewhere in that process, like maybe there's like a year or 2 where you've got the on trend body.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But don't get too attached to that. If like being on trend is what's feeling really good. If you're getting a lot of validation from that, because soon your ass is gonna be too big, or you know you're too fit like you're too muscly, or whatever it shifts.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Not only does the trend shift our body shift. Yes, and so there's no room for that in diet culture, for the fact that you know your body at 35

Michelle Moseley (she/her): shouldn't and won't look like it did at 18.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And it's interesting as a woman in my forties, like having these conversations with my friends just about our changing bodies. And like

Allison Puryear (she/her): friends are pretty like enlightened folks. We're all trying to like be loving and accepting around these changes. And it's hard. So I also wanna impress upon people that, like

I, you know, I've been an eating disorder therapist for 20 years like this. This should sink into me, too. I feel like we will always be doing the work around this in our own lives. So as therapists, we can help other folks in their work absolutely. And I'll say, like, 20 years ago, in the eating disorder field, you weren't allowed to

Allison Puryear (she/her): insinuate that you weren't 100% in love with your body. There was a lot of shame in the field around like you like this idea that you had to have it all together to be able to help anyone. You could be dissatisfied with

Allison Puryear (she/her): parts of your body or your body as a whole.

And be working on acceptance. We don't have to love it. We'll be working on like this is my body and still help other people in that same process.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Cause, I think 20 years ago we in the eating disorder field, like we were all just faking how in love with our bodies we were which isn't authentic and doesn't.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think it also gives a
a false goal to our clients. I was just thinking that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): for folks coming and thinking. Well, my therapist, you know, is is completely in love with their body. So that's the goal. And if I don't get there, then that's another way. I've failed right exactly. And then why bother if I can't see we get there.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm just going to give into the behaviors that

Allison Puryear (she/her): might help me eventually, if I get thin enough, pull me into

Allison Puryear (she/her): this magical satisfaction with self.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah. Yeah.

Well, let's talk some about purity culture. Can you define that for us? Sure? So purity culture, that phrase is often used to describe a subculture within evangelical Christianity. The concepts of purity culture are present in a lot of

Michelle Moseley (she/her): fundamentalist or high control religious groups. They may not always call them purity culture. But basically. There's a lot of teachings around strict gender norms and roles.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): very much a gender binary there is, you know, male and female. This is what males do. This is what females do. There's a lot of focus on modesty, particularly for women.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know, covering your body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): being pure being virginal.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Big focus on the concept of virginity. And quote, saving that for marriage.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): a lot of purity culture is kind of built on the idea that, especially as a woman as a girl, you belong to your father until you are given to your husband. That is an aspect of it. Focus on abstinence outside of heterosexual marriage. And there's a lot of ways that it

Michelle Moseley (she/her): also sets up. That there's no room for a typical development like we were talking about your bodies changing and developing, and how diet culture doesn't allow for that.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Well, purity culture doesn't allow for that. More on, like the sexuality. Figuring out who I am, what do I want in relationships? Doesn't really leave room for that type of development?

Hmm.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, I think about

Allison Puryear (she/her): So I like our, I like our kids, my partner and I's kids to be exposed to all sorts of different cultural experiences. They? I was not raised religious. We're not raising them religiously. They we all love musicals, and they're like, Oh, there's a new musical on Netflix. It's about a summer camp, and I'm like Sweet. Let's get it going.

And it was all about this Christian summer camp, and I'm fine with all of it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): until the scene where they're all in the lake, and they're wearing like the the boys or men are all wearing like T-shirts and long trunks, and the girls are all wearing one pieces with shorts on top of them, and they're all sopping wet in the lake, and I was like no

Allison Puryear (she/her): in my head. I just realizing like it was the purity culture around that that really got under my skin. Of course, everyone in the movie is thin but it was just like, it's okay to wear bikini like you're 17,

Allison Puryear (she/her): allegedly like, it's okay to. You're a boy like, take your. You don't have to be weighed down by a T-shirt and my kids were like, why are they all wearing weird bathing suits? I find it so intriguing that you notice that I was actually having a reaction to that myself. It doesn't look very comfortable, does it? It's not

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know. And and there are a lot I mean that's just one of the ways that it plays out. And I've seen a lot of times where

Michelle Moseley (she/her): boys may be allowed to wear more typical. Just swim trunks not expected to wear shirt, whereas the girls, it's like it must be a one piece. You may also need to wear a T-shirt over it. You know there's a lot of

Michelle Moseley (she/her): often a lot of expectation put on girls and women to keep your body covered, and that you are responsible.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): If someone

Michelle Moseley (she/her): has quote impure thoughts about your body often will be said. You don't want to cause your brother to stumble, or you don't wanna be the reason somebody else is lusting.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know, and II was a teenager in the nineties. The True Love Waits movement was huge. And for folks that may not know what that is. Is basically this whole movement that encouraged teenagers to

Michelle Moseley (she/her): stay abstinent, they would say, save sex for marriage. Of course, marriage is gonna be heterosexual union between one man and one woman. Folks would sign pledges that, you know I'm going to save myself for marriage. You might be 12. And you're making this pledge. A lot of people would have like rings or some type of jewelry that I'm gonna wear this, and it's my reminder. And if someone chooses to do that.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): that's great.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): However, the way that it was presented, then there was no option for. Okay, well, here are some accurate sex education, and these are things that you may want to explore. Here are ways to do that in a way that is safe, that is healthy.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And so you know, I think that is there's a lot of adults. Now, that we're affected by that piece of purity culture absolutely. It's funny. Because I think, I signed that pledge I wasn't raised religious.

But I was at like a friend's church for a thing. And I'm like, Oh, we're signing something. Yeah, sure, I'll sign on for that. Everybody was signing it. It was such a peer pressure vibe to it that like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): If I hadn't signed it

Allison Puryear (she/her): I would have looked like some sort of slut muffin. I don't know. I would have would have been like, What's wrong with you. so yeah, I still remember, like it was in some church gym. I think there was a dance or something with black lights that I was excited about in middle school or something that sounds about right? Yeah. Yeah. And so I was excited about dancing. But I first needed to pledge my virginity. So.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and for some people it wasn't experience of like, oh, I found this thing because everybody else was signed the thing and it didn't really leave a big impact. And for other people like

Michelle Moseley (she/her): either, they sign something. And it was a huge impact, just because of the way

Michelle Moseley (she/her): they interpret things. And so there might be shame and guilt

Michelle Moseley (she/her): for them years later. It was such a huge part of the culture that they were in that kind of like diet culture is just the water that we swim in for for a lot of folks who are in fundamentalist or high control religions. Purity culture is the water you're swimming in?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah, even when you're no longer in it, you know so many people who are like a decade out from the last time they went to church. But there's still that shame and that lack of freedom around sex that they're they wish that they had and the the being able to let go during sex. They're so worried that like, even if they don't believe in hell. But what if there is a hell, you know, like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): yeah, folks in their thirties, forties, fifties that are still, you know, they don't really know what they'd like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): They're afraid to explore their sexuality or pleasure. They've never had an enjoyable sexual experience because of that, like not being able to let go or feeling like, is this wrong?

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. And and I think about that

Allison Puryear (she/her): the combo of not having a satisf, like a good sexual experience in your life, like having sexual experiences. But they're not good and deep down, wondering if those not great experiences are going to damn you for eternity. What an awful combo! Definitely not worth it. So much shame and fear. Yeah.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): so

Allison Puryear (she/her): let's talk some about how these cultures overlap

Allison Puryear (she/her): because these are really

Allison Puryear (she/her): like the impact of these, I think there's impact

Allison Puryear (she/her): that overlaps. And these cultures overlap also. Yeah, one big overlap that comes to mind for me is just how they both

Michelle Moseley (she/her): create these hierarchies of appearance or hierarchies of judgment. You know we kind of talked about that with diet culture of where the ideal is thin, often a thin white woman, a thin young white woman. And so folks are constantly judging other people and judging themselves.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): That same hierarchy of appearance and judgment happens in purity culture. There is definitely still a hierarchy of appearance. Many folks that have probably been in particularly in evangelical Christian churches, will know about the here's my smoking, hot wife phenomenon, lots of pastors. That is how they introduce

Michelle Moseley (she/her): their wife. And so it gives you the message that, like appearance is the thing that matters. My wife is here to look beautiful. And that is her sole purpose.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): But she's supposed to look beautiful and modest at the same time. And so there's this hierarchy of okay? Am I? Do my clothes cover enough of my body? Am I acting in the appropriate way? Am I fulfilling my role that was assigned, based on

Michelle Moseley (she/her): gender constructs? And binary gender constructs? Again, I often speak of binaries when I talk about in fundamentalist or high control religions, because generally gender is completely viewed in a binary there. Even though we know that that is not true.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): but that's the world you're in. So there's these hierarchies of judgment about yourself and others, and you're always trying to. Okay. Well, where do I fit? You know my body is smaller or bigger than theirs.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): My clothing is more or less modest than theirs. I kept my, you know, promise about abstinence longer than they did.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): so that that's one way that they intersect. Both can foster the belief that pleasure is bad.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): In diet culture. We're thinking about any kind of pleasure around food.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know, enjoying your food, connecting with your culture or celebrations through food. That can be viewed as bad because food shouldn't be pleasurable. It's just fuel and then with purity culture, like we're saying, lots of folks have never had an enjoyable sexual experience. They've never had the freedom to even explore their own bodies and discover like, Hey, this feels good. This doesn't feel so good.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Because that kind of pleasure is bad. There's messages that sex is meant for procreation. If I'm not having sex in a heterosexual marriage with the intent of having a child, then

Michelle Moseley (she/her): there's no place for it. It can't just be something that's fun and pleasurable. So I think that's another another way that they overlap for folks.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I think both cause us to be disconnected from our bodies.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know, when you're not allowing pleasure, and you're trying to to cut that off. You cut off connection. And so you

Michelle Moseley (she/her): may not be aware when you're feeling hungry. Or thirsty. When your body wants to move

Michelle Moseley (she/her): when you're attracted to somebody when clothing doesn't feel good like you were. Your example of swimming with all these clothes on. That doesn't feel good. Nobody enjoys that. But you're completely disconnected like you don't even

Michelle Moseley (she/her): recognize that? Oh, this is like really, literally weighing me down. This is not fun. Because you just okay. Well, the rule is that I have to wear this. So and I've heard of multiple people describe the feeling of that. They're ahead floating around

Michelle Moseley (she/her): like they just live in their head, and there's no connection with their body. And this is both for folks who

Michelle Moseley (she/her): been very affected by diet culture. They have some disordered eating or an eating disorder as well as folks that have been very affected by purity culture, or both.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Just that complete disconnection of. Oh, yeah, I live in my body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And it gives me important information. And then a fourth one that I thought about is that both diet culture and purity culture view morals based language. So with diet culture, things like quote, clean eating

Michelle Moseley (she/her): or junk food. We're putting morality on food.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And we know if we if we've done any deep dive into things like food is food and all food fits

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and it's important to get a variety of nutrition over time. But there's food is not dirty unless you dropped it on the floor, you know. And the same kind of world based language with impurity, culture. Of just the fact of things being pure.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): clean, virginal.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And if you don't fit in those categories like the opposite is that you're sinful or you're dirty or you're a slut

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know. So putting a lot of morality based language around things

Michelle Moseley (she/her): that really does create that dichotomy of what's quote good. And what's quote bad.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I think about, too, like the Type A, our Type A folks, our perfectionistic folks. and there's a right and a wrong with that goes along with what you're saying in each culture

Allison Puryear (she/her): and how like

Allison Puryear (she/her): as a Type A

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, I wanna do things the right way. I wanna like, I know I can if I work hard enough.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): So there's also a a worthiness and a sense of self that gets really wrapped up into doing those things right the way they've been laid out for us. And then it's harder to pry

Allison Puryear (she/her): diet culture and purity culture out of them, because it's so wrapped up in their identity. Yeah, yeah. And there are so many folks that give me the rules.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): What is the right thing to do. What is the wrong thing to do? And when I have those clear cut rules, then I know where I stand. You know. And so if you start exploring that there might be a grey area

Michelle Moseley (she/her): like that's really hard. It's hard for our brains, you know. It's hard for our bodies to sit in that. You mean there's not a clear cut.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): right or wrong. Do this. Don't do this.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And I think for people who aren't

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, like they don't know a lot about how eating disorder therapists work, or how diet culture and and eating disorder treatment are like

Allison Puryear (she/her): enemies. Like. in eating disorder treatment. We're not like, okay, here is your meal plan to follow to the hilt. If somebody needs refining, if they're underweight, and in order to be

Allison Puryear (she/her): like healthy walking around

Michelle Moseley (she/her): we might say, like, we want you to hit this so that you can get to a weight that is stable. Well, we're not saying that their dietitians are, cause that's beyond our

Allison Puryear (she/her): beyond our scope. But but we'll support that

Allison Puryear (she/her): But most of the time. It's about learning to listen to your body's cues, learning to listen to your hunger and your satiety and your cravings, which I would say, almost everybody has been divorced from like, I feel like it's a relearning for everybody. It's not just my clients with disordered eating or eating disorders.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And is something I have to tune into to having even having done this for 20 years and feeling like, Oh, yeah, I'm an intuitive eater, like, I really pay attention. Sometimes I'm like, checked in, you know, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, and we can check in and be like, Yeah, I'm satisfied. But these nachos are freaking good. I'm gonna eat some more, and that's the choice. But there's an awareness to that choice. Instead of

Allison Puryear (she/her): being dragged into a binge that you're not

Allison Puryear (she/her): conscious with so it doesn't mean if you're an intuitive eater, or if you are recovered or recovering from an eating disorder that you don't emotionally over eat sometimes that you don't just eat for pleasure sometimes.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): those things are an important part of learning how to have a normal relationship with food. Yes, yeah, and that that aspect of like checking in with yourself and making the conscious choice like I, even as you were saying that I was thinking about kind of an example. In more of the purity culture realm that a lot of teaching and purity culture, especially toward women, excuse me.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): especially toward women will be that you are to be available for sex for your husband whenever he wants it.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): It's not a conscious choice. You're not. You don't check in with yourself. It's just kind of I am here, whereas a healthier version of that where you are checking in with yourself could be. You know my partner's a little bit more interested in sex or some type of intimacy right now than I am.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I'm gonna check in. And I'm okay with it. And this is something that I want to share with my partner right now, and it's not coerced. It's not, you know. This is something that I have to do. It's okay. I'm checking in with myself.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I feel okay about this like, this is a way that I feel. Okay with hearing from my partner at the moment. Yeah, from the outside. Same result. But the internal experience is vastly different. Yes, yes.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. And I'm thinking, too, about how sometimes, like in my practice. I've had the experience of

Allison Puryear (she/her): like eating disorder recovery being almost stymied by purity culture.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I had an amazing client who was Mormon, and I would say on like the more conservative end of Mormon, who had never worn a skirt without

Allison Puryear (she/her): hose or tights, who always wore long sleeves like we're talking very, very modest.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And part of that was infused with her own body shame. So it was a good way of feeling hidden, and like she wasn't having to show skin at all. And so, as we were working on body image things, there would be some things like, Well, what if

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know your your. The skirt you're wearing tomorrow, you said, is gonna go below your knees. What if you didn't wear hose? How would that feel?

Allison Puryear (she/her): And she was like, why don't

Allison Puryear (she/her): I don't want to be responsible for people having lustful thoughts. I'd be like

Allison Puryear (she/her): having to challenge whether or not that was really it. Or if it was like, I'm really scared

Allison Puryear (she/her): of the way that's gonna feel for me and having to like, I don't wanna challenge somebody's religious belief. She was devout, she loved her religion, it was a source of strength in so many ways for her. But

Allison Puryear (she/her): I also had to ask every time, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): not in these words, but like, is this an excuse to not do some work that scares you? Or is this truly what you feel is

Allison Puryear (she/her): an important part of your religion, and like we had the kind of relationship where we could have that conversation pretty openly once we'd been working together for a while, and there were times when sometimes it was an excuse, and she'd cop to that. And there were times when she was like, No, here's why it's really important to me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): and so that allowed that kind of pause and internal check for her that we were just talking about checking in internally

Michelle Moseley (she/her): to where she got to a point where she could ask herself that without needing to come externally from me. Yeah, yeah, that is so powerful, and to recognize that there may be times. I would imagine for her that that I'm not really sure which it is might be part of both

Allison Puryear (she/her): absolutely. And I mean, I know for myself, I make all sorts of excuses, and then don't realize it until I check in but it feels very legit, and we all do it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): so yeah. And and

I want to talk to you about like honoring religion while not buying into purity culture like, how do we do that cause. That's tricky. Yeah.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I mean, I work with folks that are kind of everywhere related to their religion. I work with a lot of folks who have had some harmful experiences within religion. But some of them very much are committed to their beliefs, and they want to, you know, for that to still be part of their lives all the way to folks that are like no like kind of burn it all down like I'm done with that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and so it can look a little bit different, depending on where a person is religiously. But you know for folks that very much.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Still, that is a part of their life. They find strength in there. There's many ways that their religious beliefs are helpful. But there's ways that you know aspects of purity, culture, may be harmful, or

Michelle Moseley (she/her): holding them back from making the progress or the growth that they want to like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Some of what you were saying with your client of like challenging like, Okay, where is this belief coming from? Is this helpful

Michelle Moseley (she/her): are there possible other ways that this could be interpreted or applied to your life. You know, and it really can be a long process of exploring, depending on how how long purity, culture, and those types of teachings have been a part of their life and depending on where they are

Michelle Moseley (she/her): in their life. You know, if somebody has a partner, and they and that partner is open to exploring, maybe some different ways to view sexuality or some different ways to have pleasure.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Then that can look very different than somebody who, you know, I made this commitment when I was 14/15, that I was, you know, not gonna have sex till marriage. But now I'm 35 or 40, and I'm not married, and so I'm I'm not sure what to do with this. Like almost a feeling of. Am I allowed to now have sex? Because.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know, maybe they're in a monogamous relationship or a committed relationship, and that's something they want to explore. But there's still this piece that's like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): but is that allowed? And you know? And so it's gonna look very different as far as how I explore that with them. But really questioning and leaving leaving room for them to explore.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): without judgment like, let's be curious about you know. What would this be like, what would it be like if you did decide to have sex with this person? Is there a type of intimacy that feels a little less risky than another type. Maybe you want to explore that first

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and just

Michelle Moseley (she/her): not trying to rush the process.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, what I'm thinking about my clients who are raised in purity culture and are still a part of it. Even talking about these things feels shameful and wrong like it's it's.

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, as therapists. We talk about this stuff all the time. And we're so comfortable with those conversations in a way that, like I've brought it up before with a client who is entrenched in purity culture, and it was like I had

Allison Puryear (she/her): I don't even know shot their dog, or something like it, was so jarring to them in a way that I wasn't as aware as I should have been of the impact of even just bringing up sex clinically.

Allison Puryear (she/her): so that's something like Don't do what I did. Y'all look on her face when I don't even remember how what I brought up, but it was like, so it was something that it it was like. It had never been set out loud in front of her before. And it probably had it right right so like to speak freely about sex, to use anatomically correct terms, to say the word masturbation.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): like, you know, those really can be jarring, you know, and I mean, I know from my own experience, I had experience in purity, culture and kind of going through the process of being at a place. Now we're like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Okay, well, we can talk about sex. And like, we can talk about masturbation. You know, it's okay to say penis or clitoris, or whatever it might be that we're talking about.

and to follow along where the client is. So if they need to speak about it in another way for a while to just kinda feel comfortable, even broaching the topic.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Okay, we can do that. And as therapists, we can kind of be on that leading edge of.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): okay, let's see, what is it like to use this term?

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah, it's interesting, too, of like my own flexibility around like the the client I was talking about earlier with the pantyhose, with everything.

Allison Puryear (she/her): There was so much shame around sex. She was single she was never gonna have sex before marriage, like, I'm

Allison Puryear (she/her): pretty sure, unless something big change should probably go to that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): She was dating. She was very interested, and it's dating within her faith. So there wasn't

Allison Puryear (she/her): there wasn't pressure but she felt fine with masturbation. and that was like I couldn't reconcile initially like. But isn't that

Allison Puryear (she/her): just as bad? And purity culture like I couldn't. But I was like whatever I'll take whatever when she can get. She's having some pleasure and that that's something that she can then show her future husband hopefully in order to continue that pleasure with him. But just my own.

like cognitive flexibility around what I think purity culture is, and how I think it's defined, and what's allowed and what's not like. We really do have to listen to our clients about their experience of that that is so important.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know.

even when we think we know what purity culture is like, I try to be very aware of asking clients like, What does that mean for you like? How did that play out

Michelle Moseley (she/her): in your experience? Because you're right? For some people like masturbation would be totally off the table. We do that like that is cheating on our future spouse like that's, you know, and it sounds like that was not the experience for this client, like masturbation, was an acceptable form of sexual expression.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and a way for for her to experience pleasure. You never know that if you don't broach the subject. If you just make assumptions of well, purity culture means this, you were taught XYZ. And this is what it means for you. Yeah, yeah. And and it was counter culture for her

Allison Puryear (she/her): like it wasn't like it was acceptable in her circles

Allison Puryear (she/her): is like she made an exception which to me was like, what other exceptions can you make like? How can we expand this to help you like love your body more to help you?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Not feel so much shame. 24/7. So yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): so let's can we kind of get into some nitty gritty of how to work with folks with purity culture and diet culture, like, I feel like we've touched on some. Are there some big pieces that we're missing? Or

Michelle Moseley (she/her): so we need to talk about? Yeah. So I think one big piece is kind of the ways it can show up for somebody, because very often I mean very rarely. Every once in a while this will happen, but very rarely does somebody come in and be like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I'm experiencing, experiencing the impact of diet culture and purity culture right right now.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And so, being aware of that, like how things might come up as they're talking, and some of the things that can present. So like, we talked about that disconnection from yourself. Kind of feeling like this floating head, not being able to connect with when you're hungry. When you're thirsty, when you

Michelle Moseley (she/her): have any kind of desire or feeling like any sexual desire is bad. Like just kind of trying to numb it or turn it off.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): That's one thing we can be looking for. That shame

Michelle Moseley (she/her): for things that are very typical and developmentally appropriate

Michelle Moseley (she/her): experiences, desires, emotions like, you know, we as therapists, we know something about development. And like, okay, when people are typically experiencing things. So you know, you have an adolescent who is sexually curious.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Okay, well, that is developmentally appropriate. Like. And so just being aware of the shame that can arise around these things that are very part of typical development.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): noticing. Sometimes depression can study on because folks feel like they're not measuring up whether that's with their body or living up to those kind of modesty.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): modesty, rules. And so if somebody's presenting with some symptoms of depression, you know, feeling like a failure or

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know, feeling really disconnected from folks feeling really hopeless.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): doing a little bit of investigating of what might be in play there, particularly if you know

Michelle Moseley (she/her): from their background that there's been some struggles around any kind of disordered eating or you know, they came out of a fundamentalist or high control religious background, just something to kind of pay attention to and then I think, another way. I'm not sure I mentioned this earlier, but another way that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): purity culture, and diet culture can kind of intersect. To impact somebody

Michelle Moseley (she/her): is a person can feel a lack of control because of this purity culture and all of these rules that are put on them.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): but they may feel like the thing I can control is my food or my body, and so I can

Michelle Moseley (she/her): control how much I eat, or what I eat, or how often I'm in my body.

and so paying attention to that coming up as well. If somebody is feeling like this complete

Michelle Moseley (she/her): lack of control. And what are they doing to try to find some control in their life? Right? I think, about how like the converse of that, too, is like

Allison Puryear (she/her): the like lack of control. Maybe they're controlling about everything else in their life. But then

Allison Puryear (she/her): they can't control food is how it feels so they're over. They're overeating, they're bingeing. They're doing things that like that which I think is the. If there were a hierarchy of eating disorders right? It's the folks who binge eat who feel the most shame about their eating disorder. It feels like they're

Allison Puryear (she/her): in residential treatment. It's always like, Oh, I feel for them when they first come in, because they think everybody's gonna judge them and think them so different.

Allison Puryear (she/her): but.

Allison Puryear (she/her): like everything else, feel so in control except this one thing. And it's the one thing that there are 2 cultures are saying like, this is the absolute thing you should have control about. I don't care if you're making straight A's. You are not then enough. You are not good enough. You are having sexual thoughts and feelings that are simple, like, Oh.

yeah, like your body is out of control. Get it under control right? If there's too much, it's too much. Yes.

oh, yes.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): that I think that is so common. That folks get all of these messages, that something about you is too much and and it's kind of interesting how that can morph into. I'm not enough. I've got all these messages that I'm too much.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): But internally I'm not enough, and I have a lot of shame about that. Yeah. So those are just some of the things as therapists. We can kind of be on the lookout for.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Some of the things that I have found to be helpful. Is bringing somatic practices into into therapy. You, I feel like you do have to be

Michelle Moseley (she/her): cautious of what you bring in, and how quickly you bring those things in cause for someone who is very disconnected from their body. Those practices can be

Michelle Moseley (she/her): almost traumatizing in a way. If you're suddenly asking somebody to. Okay, we're gonna take, you know, 20 min and we're gonna reconnect and be in your body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): It might be starting with, okay, we're gonna take a minute and just notice our breathing. So starting slow and kind of seeing like, what is that like for for this person cause, for most of these clients, being in your body is dangerous, like it feels dangerous. It feels risky because the body's not to be trusted. It's betraying you. Yes, exactly.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And so, being aware of that and and approaching

Michelle Moseley (she/her): bringing those somatic experiences with curiosity, I'm like, Hey, we're gonna try something. And we're just gonna see how it feels. And if it feels really bad like, just say, Stop, and we will stop. You are in control of this.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know. But I think it can be really helpful to bring those things in as a way to reconnect with with your body and so common things I'll do are, you know, focusing on breathing? I like to do like a mindful eating exercise. If that feels appropriate

Michelle Moseley (she/her): with a person of just, you know, having something that you enjoy, maybe a piece of chocolate or some type of snack. And we're actually gonna pay attention to the experience of eating this food, you know. Take it in with our senses. What does it smell like? What's the weight of it? What does it feel like in your hand

Michelle Moseley (she/her): like when you put it in your mouth. Not that immediate. I'm gonna chew this and and swallow it, and it's gone. But I'm gonna experience what it is like to have this in my mouth.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And to enjoy that and notice like, what's the reaction? You know. So those are just some, some ways that you can explore connecting with the body, and those are also things that you can teach clients in session.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and they can do them outside of session. To check in

Michelle Moseley (she/her): another one is noticing like, if I have a client that likes to go for walks or walks their dog every day.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Notice what it feels like, as you're, you know, moving one leg and then the other, as your feet hit the ground, just paying attention to an experience in your body.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): So bringing that in with ease. I think I think we kind of touched on this. But like

Michelle Moseley (she/her): coming alongside folks to help them examine and possibly deconstruct unhelpful beliefs things that are not helpful for them. It's not our role to tell somebody what to believe or to try to change their beliefs. But when we notice folks saying like, I have this belief.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and it's causing me problems in this way.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And they probably won't say it that clearly. But when we pick that up like being available as kind of a sounding board to help challenge that you know, and and be supportive if they're like. I don't know if I want to believe this anymore.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): or if I want to practice it in this way.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay, well, what feels like a safe way

Michelle Moseley (she/her): to explore that?

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I think psychoeducation

Michelle Moseley (she/her): has been really important, like

Michelle Moseley (she/her): talking about diet culture. Talking about the impact of purity culture. Talking about what is typical development.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): you know, really kind of normalizing some of the things cause I'll have. I've had folks come in that, you know. Maybe they might be in their early thirties, or even older, and they're like, you know, I just feel like I'm lusting and using a lot of that language. And then, when we talk about it more.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): they never really got to go through the typical developmental stages of exploring relationships and figuring out who they're attracted to and what they might want a relationship to look like.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And so they're kind of going through adolescence in their thirties. And so really normalizing like this is, this is a developmental stage that you didn't get to have. You're having it now. So some psycho ed around that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Talking about intuitive eating I have found can be really helpful like that, reconnecting with your body. And those principles. And even sometimes sex education

Michelle Moseley (she/her): comes into it like, okay, you never got any sex education. Well, let's let's talk about this like, what are the body? Parts that exist? What is their function? How do we take care of them? You know. How do we prevent STIs what are things that are important to you in making decisions about a sexual relationship. So that you're actually making a decision that you're not feeling forced into anything in any direction.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Wow!

Allison Puryear (she/her): Some indications that a client is ready for that kind of like sex ed

Allison Puryear (she/her): Conversation or conversations

Allison Puryear (she/her): cause, I imagine, like the one person that I scared off, you know, like that versus conversations I had with the other client when she was like, Oh, yeah, I still masturbate a few times a week. And I was like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Whoa, okay, great, you know.

Allison Puryear (she/her): But you know that conversation didn't happen until we had a really well established relationship, because I partly because I'd made assumptions about her relationship with masturbation, but she just like volunteered it in the midst of a conversation we were having, but I could have gotten to that earlier if I just asked the question. So how do you? How you know somebody

Michelle Moseley (she/her): isn't gonna be scared off?

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I think a big thing is using our clinical skills to just kind of pay attention to what they're talking about and how they're talking about it.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): A lot of times as the relationship does get stronger in therapy. You'll notice that people may speak about sex a little more freely.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Or they might say things like this could be TMI

Michelle Moseley (she/her): which is a great opportunity to jump in and be like. There's no such thing as TMI in therapy like whatever you want to talk about whatever word you want to use, like you can go there so just as with a lot of things as therapist staying on that leading edge? And sometimes just asking, like, I noticed that it kind of feels like, you know, this sexual topic keeps coming up. Would that be something that you would like to explore further.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): You know, and and giving them the opportunity to even know that's an option. Umhm, like it's possible. In that moment they might be like no. But then, later, they think about it. They're like, I don't know. We could talk about that. Yes, I would like to talk about that.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): So even putting it out on the table is like, Hey, this is an option. If at some point it feels comfortable or appropriate for us to talk about this. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I love it. When people say the TMI thing cause it does give me like, I always say, like, Oh, yeah, there's no such thing as TMI in therapy like in any given week. I may be talking very graphically with someone about sex, or hear about some really painful constipation, or and I'll like name the things that my ideal clients

Michelle Moseley (she/her): might be like, too afraid or too embarrassed to ever bring up. It's a great in for that. Umhm, exactly like, I'm making sure, they know like this is an okay thing to talk about, I'm not going to think you're weird because you brought this up right? Right?

Michelle Moseley (she/her): yeah. So I think that that's a big one weaving in that psycho ed, and then I think trauma treatment can be helpful. I, personally, am Level 1 trained in both EMDR and brain spotting

Michelle Moseley (she/her): personally, have found brain spotting to be more helpful with the clients that I work with that are dealing with like this overlap of diet culture and purity culture.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): But I know other folks have had the of the opposite experience. The EMDR has been more helpful, but being trained in some type of trauma modality to help

help folks really process those things

Michelle Moseley (she/her): in a different way. Help their brains and their bodies like move.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): move forward from whatever is feeling stuck.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Well in both brain spotting and EMDR are both like body based systematic. So interesting thinking about like that bottom up, being so helpful for people who are like floating heads. It helps bring the 2 together.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yes, and but I find that you have to be a little bit slower about bringing them together. Sometimes. Some folks are ready like they they recognize I am

completely disconnected from my body, and I want to do something about that. So let's go, whereas other folks

Michelle Moseley (she/her): okay, we need to take this a little bit slower. The idea of connecting with your body is terrifying, understandably so. And so we're gonna move at a pace that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): is appropriate for you.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): And then I've also found that group therapy is really helpful.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): I enjoy leading groups, and so like, I lead a group for folks around

Michelle Moseley (she/her): reconnecting with your body and like understanding diet culture, and and

Michelle Moseley (she/her): disowning some of that stuff. And so I find that's helpful. I also lead a group for folks that have been harmed within their faith, and they're kind of they're trying to navigate that

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and in both cases I always have. Folks say that it was so healing just to not feel as isolated to hear that like. Oh, there's other people that their their concern may not be exactly what mine is. But there are other people that are also dealing with this and we can navigate this together.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah. And that's I mean, that's how a lot of the

that's the shunning that happens when you start to question your religion or you start to leave your religion. In some of these high control religious groups. It

it works to keep people there because it's so lonely when your entire world has been this one group of people.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, it's heartbreaking. And it takes so much strength

Allison Puryear (she/her): to leave and and

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, trust that it will be okay, and that you will be okay.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yeah. And I think there, there's almost a type of shunning that happens if you start bucking diet culture.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Oh, yeah, you know, if you are suddenly not participating in the oh, it's January. And I created these new rules for you know how I'm gonna eat or my lifestyle plan, or whatever word you use, or if you're like, you know, I don't really want to talk about

Michelle Moseley (she/her): my body. I'm not accepting comments about what I'm eating like, there can be a kind of shunning of like, what's

Michelle Moseley (she/her): what's your deal like?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. So absolutely leave you feeling really isolated, for sure, for sure, especially if every previous year you were also like, Oh, and here's the one I'm doing. Here's the food I'm giving up.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): and I'm gonna be so good, you know, like all that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): yeah. And I think with both like that idea of like, I'm gonna be so good like, so well behaved.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That

Allison Puryear (she/her): we link our goodness to our behaviors which are about denying ourselves the things that we want.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): Yes.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): back to that morals based language and being set up

Michelle Moseley (she/her): for it to not work. But you're the one that feels like a failure. Right?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Oh, it's so juicy like. I mean, there's so much freedom on the other side of it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): but it's it's tough, juicy work.

Michelle Moseley (she/her): it is. Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Oh, thank you so much for talking about this with us. I feel like I hope that for people who didn't know a lot about either diet or purity culture, they got some real understanding. The people who are already seeing people with the overlap maybe didn't think about that overlap, and how similar those 2 are.

Allison Puryear (she/her): or if you're just working with one, and you're like, Oh, wait, diet culture. I see that in so many of my clients. Okay, then, now, you've got this whole other area to explore with your clients.

So yeah, Michelle, I really appreciate it. You are welcome. I'm really excited. I got to share about this, and I hope I hope it is helpful to some folks, and put in putting those pieces together for sure.

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