

Leah

Hello, I'm really happy to be joined today by Christine Emba, whose new book *Rethinking Sex: A Provocation* is coming out and it's just a very thoughtful, kind and curious book about what's a very intimate and often controversial issue.

Christine is an op Ed columnist and editor at *The Washington Post* focusing on ideas and society, and her book is out on March 22nd.

Christine, one of the things I really find interesting about your book, is that it's about the limits of a consent based culture of sexual ethics. It feels like consent is rightly kind of the baseline of sexual ethics. You can't have ethical sex or ethical intimacy without consent, but people are really running into that sense that, "Well. we both agreed," isn't a guarantee. that we're acting well or generously or ethically.

So how do you see this kind of contractualism that people start on and then it feels like they get stuck on? They don't move beyond it versus other parts of our free market-informed, consent-based ethical sensibilities.

Christine

Hi Leah, first of all, thank you so much for having me and for inviting me to talk about this book, which as you know it's been a labor of love and yes, stress at times. I'm really excited that it's going to be out. I'm glad to talk to people about it. I think it's a really important topic. I think that your question really gets at the heart of the book.

What does it mean to have ethical sex? Talking about consent as the baseline and not the ceiling, yes, but also I think in the book I talk about some of the false assumptions that we have come to believe culturally about sex and what sex means.

I talk about the ideas of what freedom means and what privacy means and what sex itself means. And this sort of contractualism that you describe is in some ways at the base of almost all of them. And I actually don't think that this contractualism, this idea that you know while we both consented, we both said yes is even separable from our free market society.

When you think about what consent is sort of the idea that you know there are two individual, maximally free people who get together in sort of a free market vacuum agree to an exchange of goods, right? And they've had they've shaken hands on it and they both say, "Well, I chose to do this so it's fine. I said yes, so it's good," that is literally a contract. Contracts are sort of a market-based operation, a way to ensure a trade in goods and services. And unfortunately, or rather fortunately, I would say our relationships are not goods or services.

And the sort of consent ideal that says, well, we've just both agreed to this exchange that has no moral components. Nothing behind it except our free will, treats what we're exchanging our bodies, our souls, you know, our human existence in a way, and in the way that sex reaches into who we are, as sort of goods to be traded on the marketplace. And then it also,

of course, assumes this idea of, you know, maximal freedom that everyone, sort of owns the things that they have.

They can give them up. They can not give them up. These are again just sort of goods that are separate from us as human persons and that also we know what we're doing, that we're always fully informed, that we always are at the top of our game and making the sharpest exchange and also that the person that we're consenting with or exchanging goods with is sort of an antagonist who we need to figure out and get the best deal from. So I don't think it's separable at all. Actually, I think the sort of free market market based contractual ideology is part and parcel of our culture and it in turn has influenced the way that we think about sex and ethics.

Leah

Yeah, I think in this kind of contractual framework people run into the problem if they can't live up to the things they feel like they ought to be able to promise. And that's where that sense of you know. You can write down "Well, I promise not to have any feelings after we have sex," but that doesn't mean even if you intend that at the time that this is a promise you can credibly make. One of the things I found that was a great summation of the discomfort that people feel not just a discomfort with the sex, but discomfort with how they feel about the sex with someone saying. You know it wasn't rape, but it feels bad. I was so struck because it feels like your book is in many ways about giving people permission to be unhappy.

You know that the person who says that it's not rape, but I'm unhappy has somehow come to believe that if they weren't victimized explicitly. If you know a trust wasn't broken that they know what they signed up for, and maybe the fault is theirs. And people worry that if you can't point to the bad guy who's at fault in a relationship, you know maybe no one is allowed to be unhappy. Or maybe you are the bad person for breaking this contract of agreeing not to regret anything in a recent backlash about, you know whether ghosting is abuse. It seemed to require that the guys who are kind of having sex with women and then not staying in contact or explicitly predators for the women to be allowed to be unhappy. Rather than jerks, right? You know or casually brushing them off without being abusive or trying to do harm.

So why do you think people get stuck here where they have this intense felt sense? You know that something isn't right and they go. No, I I've made a mistake. You know it's my fault for being unhappy.

Christine

Yeah, that's a really good question. And this, this sort of being allowed to say what you really feel and think about sex or sexual culture is kind of at the heart of the book. That was almost the point of writing this book when I began because I felt. You know, like we. Our culture has told us society seems to have told us even the media has told us especially post #metoo and post the sexual revolution that we've fixed sex, you know it's good now, sex is free, the sexual revolution happened, we're liberated.

Women have power they can go after men who hurt them. So we should all be happy. And you know free to do what we will and that's just not really the experience that a lot of men and women are having. And the more people I talked to in both in writing this book and even before I started writing, just in conceiving the idea, the more clear this disjunction became, you know, at the same time as we were saying, yeah, the sexual revolution happened, like, yeah, me too happened.

People were reading the story cat person, which is about just like. A terrible sort of kind of gross soul crushing day to be like. Yeah, yeah, that seems right that I have experienced this. They're unhappy about what dating and sex look like in a way that's at odds with the messaging they're getting. And I dug into this actually quite a bit in this book because again, it was one of their animating sentiments.

I touch on it in almost every chapter, but one of the chapters that I talk about it the most in is about what sex, means the meaning of sex and then another is also a chapter entitled, "We're Liberated and We're Miserable." And I think one concept that really gets to the heart of this disjunction is what the scholar, Robin West. She's a law professor at Georgetown, describes as "hedonic dysphoria."

And it's this experience of. Not having your experience of something that's supposed to be good match up with the good that it's supposed to be, if that makes sense, and it she writes about this in the context of sex and consent. And she talks about this particular disjunction. We have the idea that something that we have consented to, especially sex, is by virtue of that consent a good thing you know it wouldn't agree to it if it was a bad thing. Consent sort of legitimizes whatever we have consented to and makes it fine. And in the case of sex, it probably should make it, you know, pleasurable and fulfilling it. All the things that we wanted sex to be, we consented to that otherwise, why? Why would we have consented in the first place?

And so that's sort of the hedonics part what we're supposed to experience. The happiness we're supposed to experience. But then there's the dysphoria part which comes when you know the thing that you've consented to. Your experience of it doesn't match up to what you've consented to, you know consent was supposed to make sex good. But the sex that I've had is in fact bad or very bad, or makes me feel bad or makes me feel wrong in some way, like I've lost something like something happened to me.

It may not be rape because of course you consent into it, right? But it doesn't feel good. And West talks about It kind of raises the question, was I telling the truth also right? You know, I said I wanted this, then I didn't want it. So was I lying right? And then that unethical or you know, did I learn something? But then how do I trust what I say next?

exactly what West talks about and what she thinks is actually the problem here. Why it's he hedonic dysphoria a real issue? Because it. Results in this sort of like clash of the cell where you're like. Well, I agree to this thing and it's supposed to be good, but I'm not experiencing it as good. So like is there something that I don't understand about what happened or about

myself?

What did I do it wrong somehow? And because sort of our cultural scripts around consent and sex are so strong, like, oh, you consented to it. Consent is good, the sex should be good. We're much more likely to blame ourselves, and it is incredibly destabilizing you think like I must be weird. I must be bad. I didn't experience this correctly. Instead of critiquing the culture or critiquing the idea of consent or actually being able to say. No, I thought it would be good, but it was bad and that is a problem and it's not my fault and that's really painful, especially for young people.

Leah

And men and women often run into different pressures about what they're expected to enjoy first, what they do, where I feel like men more often face the pressure of, well, this woman was up to have sex with me and I didn't feel like it. So was that wrong? Like, is that something off for me? Women more often have the experience of almost this intense self care homework regime of, well, you know, now that we all can have casual sex, it's very important you do your homework so that you're good at sex and you can direct your hookup partner so that you enjoy it physically, which is hard to do in a one night stand, but that's why it's your job to know your body. And if you don't, well, then you need to do more work. You need to do more work on yourself before you're ready to go have sex It sounds exhausting. And it sounds like for both folks, a recipe for if you didn't enjoy this, it wasn't necessarily because it wasn't enjoyable. It's because you fell down on your homework to enjoy casual sex with strangers more.

Christine

Yeah, you've actually, I think, touched on this in *Other Feminisms*. There's a book that came out that I found really interesting. It informs with my thinking called *Tomorrow Sex Will be Good Again* by Catherine Angel and she talks exactly about this sort of sex. Positivity is like work that women are asked to do. And I also talk about that in my book. You know, we're told again that sex should be fun and if you consented to it, you are going through with it. So it's your job to be able to talk to the guy and tell him what you want. It's your job to make sure you can say no when you don't feel sure of something, but part of our human, our humanness are the humanness of our interactions is that, you know, we're contingent beings were contingent upon our contacts on together, individuals' feelings fluctuate. You know, we don't know what we feel. In every moment we don't even always know what we want, and so that's a lot of responsibility for someone and then for men the same thing.

If women you know are kind of oppressed by a consent regime, in one way, men are too. Men are sensitive, men have hearts and feelings. You know, many men want relationships and want care. But the expectation is that men have to be up for it. Men have to be ready to go. Men should take steps if it's on offer. Otherwise they're bad men. That's harmful for men too. That is, as they say, you know toxic masculinity in a in a really real way. And it hurts people. And it hurts both sexes and makes it harder for them to come together as the real humans they are.

Leah

There was a This American Life story years ago that really stood out to me. There were a bunch of frat guys who wanted to be good partners to the girls they knew, and were watching porn to do it right, but not just for gratification but as homework for a sense of what that meant. And I remember one of the boys just had been asking the other guys in the frat like what to do to be good at sex. Someone's like, Oh well, women like it if you nibble on their ear and he did it and a girl said she didn't like it. He's like. I don't understand, you know I asked what to do when people told me and that sense of just having generic sex with women right?

Rather than you're having sex with a particular person you can't be generically, good at this, you can't just ask someone "All right, what are the steps I follow and then sex will have happened successfully," but I think both men and women have the sense of "OK well. I'm not learning this person. I'm learning sex and then I'm just doing sex to this person or with this person"

One of the stories that really stood out to me In your book it was heartbreaking was that tipsy girl who comes up to you at a party and says she's just asking you, she's got this great boyfriend. He's really sensitive. She likes him but she doesn't like that he chokes her during sex, but she doesn't want to be unreasonable.

And she's got the sense that somehow it would be unfair or unreasonable or sex negative just to say. I don't like being choked during sex and she comes up to you, who in my recollection she does not know right? And your book is in some ways doing what you're doing for that girl at the party. It's a permission slip of you're allowed to be unhappy about these things, you know. But why was she coming to you at a party?

Why do people feel like they don't have any place to go to ask for permission to dislike the sex they're having? Why is permission so hard for them to find?

Christine

Yeah. That's a really good question too, and I would agree that was one of the more poignant moments in writing this book because at the time I was still like kind of thinking through the book process and thinking through the chapters that I wanted to have and like what my topics were and talking to that woman it wasn't like book research that I was doing on purpose like I had. I had just gone to a party in DC and I talk about this and in that book chapter you mentioned like the intro. It's like I was just at a Christmas party where everybody was drinking terrible mulled wine and you know you start having weird conversations with people.

And I mentioned I was working on this book. This girl immediately like tug me over. Because she thought I could give her advice or that like, well, I know about she knows about sex or like she's writing a book so. I guess she has authority to tell me that I can do this thing. And it was just depressing and and sad, and I didn't. At the time I wasn't sure what to say because. You know, I'm not necessarily an expert like I don't as you said, I don't know you. I don't

know this person. And it also feels sad that, like you feel like you have to ask to have your own feelings about a thing that seems to me sort of obviously bad that. A man sort of surprised chokes you in your most intimate moments. But again, I think this is kind of a cultural problem. We have this idea that you know sex should be good, that we should be good at sex. That consent legitimate any kind of sex that we have.

And then also this idea that. Preferences are immutable. And that every preference, every sexual preference that somebody has needs to be, you know, respected and maybe even celebrated. And instead of being like you know, some preferences are better or worse than others, we can call everything like, well, that's you know that's their kink like don't yuck, their Yum. And so it begins to feel like almost a moral imperative, like to be a good person.

You have to just accept things to be a good person. You can't criticize or critique.

Leah

Which is wild right to swing so hard on sex positivity and consent that women and men don't feel like they can say no because to say no is in some sense to negate sex or to be a secret reactionary. You go from emphasizing every right to say yes or no to the things they want to say well. But if if you do say no in some sense you're unprogressive or unsupportive so you're know is aid and comfort to the anti sex enemy even for something violent.

Christine

Right exactly so. You know, I wanted to actually read a section from the book here, but my pages are just completely out of order. So I cannot quite

Leah

Much like our society. Christine

Leah

I just I find I find it so striking because I don't even assume her boyfriend enjoys choking her. It's the thing, right that people are so bereft of scripts you can wind up where both people are performing the sex they think is good sex while neither of them enjoys it.

Christine

Yeah so. This is so OK. I found one of the sections that I wanted to read and it's actually just past my introduction to this woman. "Between two consenting adults has become a stock phrase, a conventional yield sign indicating that whatever is detailed next might raise eyebrows, but must remain beyond critique. It's a matter of respect and a sign of enlightenment to accept the sexual preferences of others. But it isn't clear that the growth of uncritical sex positivity is as positive and development as it has been made out to be. Sex is not amoral. Some desires are worse than others. Yet the bias towards unquestioning acceptance makes it difficult to say so, even when something feels obviously wrong. Because apart from non-consent, is it possible for anything to be wrong?"

And one of the problems is that we just don't have an ethic. We don't have a vocabulary for talking about. Whether something is moral or immoral, right or wrong other than that baseline that we started from consent. Consent is just sort of the Iron Curtain. Once you've got that, anything else is sort of behind the veil. You can do whatever you want. And so people rightfully feel. Confused about how to talk about what's behind the veil because we don't have a vocabulary for it.

We don't have any sort of scale of judgment for it, and even more than that, trying to go behind the veil and try to talk about these things that we assume are private and personal is viewed as a kind of a rude interruption. You're getting too personal about someone else's life, you're judging someone else, and we've decided that we don't judge other people. We don't judge other people things. So what are you supposed to say like? How do you say no, this is wrong, because if we've gotten rid of all that because.

Leah

Well, it's also to me. I'm laying my cards on the table. It's a little crazy to say, you know, It's too much to talk about moral philosophy with you. I barely know you, but we're having sex, right? It feels like this this wild way that the intimacy of sex has been set apart as something that can be done just by itself but involving or cleaved off from all other intimacy's it feels like in many ways, the contraceptive mind mindset has been extended from children to feelings that every aspect of sex is supposed to be controllable and both partners are expected to solve the problem of the natural physical consequences of sexual intimacy, you have to make sure you can have sex without anything that would logically follow from us from sex, like a baby. And now, on top of that, on top of, you know there's a problem that sex sometimes does a thing, but we can be responsible and make sure it doesn't. Now you're also expected to kind of bring that contraceptive work to the logical emotional entanglements of sex. You know it's each partner's job to not have feelings. If both people haven't agreed to have feelings.

You know that's more complicated even than taking a daily pill. It's kind of an endless emotional practice. And then again, what you talked about that hedonic dysphoria? The guilt that you've made a promise to someone that you find yourself incapable of keeping of not catching feelings, not having a lasting emotional effect from sex. So just where do we get the idea that these parts have intimacy, are or should be severable from each other?

Christine

Yeah, it's a really strange thing, and one of my. One of the chapters in this book is called. "We Want to Catch Feelings" because honestly, in relationships. Frankly, for most of his feelings are the fun part. The feelings are what we want.

We like them. We don't necessarily just go into sex just because we like want to mash two bodies together, although of course you know they're all kinds of sex and all sorts of reasons to have sex. But the person is part of them. Uhm? Leah, I mean you and I are both Catholic and I think the contraceptive mentality in wayward sort of against that is clear to both of us.

But I think it's also sort of a form of. Almost dualism, sort of a Cartesian dualism. The idea

that the mind or the soul and the body are just sort of like 2 completely separate things that they don't need to bear any relation with each other. What we do with our bodies. It's sort of understood in this materialist culture should have no impact on our minds and our souls because that's that's just like a separate area of life. And I just don't think that's true actually. And you know, we see this in all areas of life, not just in sex. You know our our bodies and our souls combined to make us human people. And So what we what we do with our bodies has an effect on how we feel. It's natural, you know, that's kind of what being human is to have feelings about how we move through the world and what we do with ourselves

Leah

And we don't really have as tight boundaries around our bodies as we might imagine. I was struck by Maggie Nelson in her recent book on Freedom, just talking about how odd she found it to walk by a slut walk. You know, women protesting sexual assault. She's still on board with the general theory of the March, but saw a sign that said my body has nothing to do with your body and that just struck are patently false. You know, especially about sex. But we kind of have this idea that we choose the moment we become entangled rather than operating from a state of entanglement. That's kind of a deeper entanglement during sex. But no, it's not. Even as though sex is so different from the rest of life, whenever we interact with people, there's a level of entanglement that goes up in intensity, not here I am. A sole human being there you are also a sole human being and once we shake hands and agree to become entangled with each other, that's when it starts. Yeah,

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and actually I mean to tack back to. Kind of where this conversation started. The contraceptive mentality, not just in terms of contraception specifically, but this idea of, you know, sort of total separation of parts of of being able to kind of stop or prevent certain parts of life from happening so that you can move forward and other parts of life. That is also, I think a very market related phenomenon, and one of the one of the things one of the complications, one of the addons to our sexual culture, that we don't always realize as they talk about in my book, is this sort of capitalist free market ideology that you know, tells us frankly, for its own purposes that actually. This thing that's not necessarily natural. This separation between you know feelings and body and person and person is good, and it's something that we should strive for.

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And you know, we're told that in some ways by the market, because that just makes us better parts of the market that makes us better machines. If we can have sex with people who we don't love and don't care about and move on quickly, that means that we can keep using all the dating apps and keep meeting more and more people. Which is profitable for the dating apps. Certainly it means it will keep buying like the sex books and sex toys to use on like different people in different places. It means that, you know.

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We could have sex without intimacy sex without children at the end, and so we can, you know, have sex, but also still be good workers. We won't have our lives interrupted by pregnancy or by a relationship that might make us, you know, less flexible and less easy to

move around the market. You know, we would hate to have you know someone fall in love with married and then like. Have to stay in the city that they live in and not move to follow their job so the contraceptive mentality is definitely serving something other than us. Miller

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well, I do want to press a little on the Catholicism here for a second Christine. So as you've been talking to people from a range of backgrounds and philosophical and metaphysical commitments, what part of Catholic sexual teaching do you think is most accessible and helpful to people even outside the church? And what part do you think? Kind of you? Most need the rest of Catholicism to be able to grapple with?

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Oh, that's that's a heart question, I mean. I think the part of sort of Catholic sexual teaching that seems most. Intuitive. To people is simply this idea that. Just that sex is meaningful.

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That sex as an act between two people is not just like this totally physical, you know, as I say in the book, just too watery bags at DNA sort of rubbing up against each other, but that it actually does and can have. Yeah, I mean that's a gross description of sex, but in some ways, like if you think that sex doesn't mean anything at all, that's kind of what it is. But I think most people into it as the Catholic Church teaches that sex is more than that. Sex has to do with the body, yes, but in some ways it has to do with the soul that it has an effect on the people engaged in it. That can be larger than themselves up to and including creating a new life and thus that.

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You know sex is something that we should respect or take seriously. Whether people live up to that commitment is a different story, but I think the intuition that like oh sex is. Like different somehow than other physical acts is something that most people can at least get behind in their minds, even if they don't necessarily act that out in their lives.

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Though again, I think that's a place where people feel like they have that intuition, but they don't quite have permission to believe it, and that's where that tension

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comes up. And that's why they should read my book. The the place where

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people should bring that book you know into the bedroom Christine, and say, well, Christine says I actually have permission to have opinions about sex, so I want us to have a different conversation before anything else happens. I mean, just like prop it up on here. I wasn't sure I was allowed to have opinions, but this book says I can. Yeah, yeah, you know. And I cover.

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It's kind of like a pre raphaelite image. I think it's very central in its own way, so it's a piece of

decor. Yeah, I think the part of the part of Catholic sexual teaching that. People maybe have. Wow, what? There are actually so many elements that are kind of countercultural at this point, and I'll just take off a couple.

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I think the idea that sex does can and maybe should have consequences, not necessarily like painful consequences, but that the idea that like. Pregnancy is a natural outflow from sex, like be aware of that. The idea that some things are better than others when it comes to sex, and that perhaps some kinds of sexual acts or sexual interactions should actually just not be allowed that there should be limits on sex. I think those are two that jump to mind is ones that culturally feel really out of step right now that people push back against pretty hard.

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One that I think is both true, important and neglected, even in the broader Christian sexual ethic rather than in Catholicism, is the idea that sex will never be uncomplicated or UN fraught. That there's a kind of schizophrenic purity culture that kind of takes the approach of well don't do anything till you're married. And then once you're married, everything is on the table. You know, just have so much sexy approve that Christians are the best at sex once you're married. And Catholicism does not take that approach.

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It's not anti sex but it treats sex as potent. Which means especially for people practicing natural family planning. The awareness that sex can make a baby as always there and the awareness that sex kind of never becomes. You know just a blank check. It's always a discussion in some sense both about you and your partner about whether you know you and your husband or wife are interested tonight.

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What you owe to each other, what you want to do for each other, how you feel, and how you feel about children that there's. There's not this. Well now. It's X time. We switched the sex switch when we got married and it's just all sex from here on out.

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But it's uncomplicated now. It's fine. It's licit. And really says, alright yo, you're going to have to. Will the good of the other your whole life in the bedroom.

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You know anywhere else in any other domain of your life and sex doesn't become rote or uncomplicated anymore than any other part of your marriage is uncomplicated. It's always about actively loving someone and that requires talking, thinking, making choices. And I just feel like a lot of the time, the goal and not just in secular culture is, well. How do we get to a point where we don't have to think about this? How do we get to a point where it's clean enough and simple enough that we can just say OK without having to pause and reflect on what we're doing and how we intend it and what my partner's good is?

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Yeah, I think that's a really important point. And this is one of the things that I kind of try and. Dialogue with a little bit in the book I grew up evangelical and I converted to Catholicism. As an adult basically, and you're exactly right about this sort of sexual dualism that I think is unhealthy on both ends, you know, like there's sort of the extreme purity culture end that tells you like don't think about sex ever at all until you're married, and then you'll automatically have the best sex in the world and that. Just doesn't make sense. Like it's not really a light switch that you can, you know, just like you're off sex and then you're on sex and that mindset like hurts people once they get married or once they're in relationships and they realize, like oh, I have to.

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I'm not automatically good at this. Is it my problem and then it also freights sex in a way like it makes it so big, so meaningful, like the sign of being a good married person or a good Christian couples that you're having perfect sex. And then if you're not. You also feel like there's something wrong with you, and it's almost a mirror of what happens on sort of the secular side, where like sex doesn't mean anything like sex is kind of like this thing that we do with our bodies, you know, sort of. Like any mildly dangerous but fun pastime you know, like skiing like mine, the slopes you know get out, you know, don't block the lifts.

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Get a condom, but at the same time sex, check the Avalanche. But then at the same time it's like well, sex is, as I say in the book as as Freud said, and this is like something that has infiltrated our culture. The sign insight of a healthy self. And so you have to be having sex. You have to be having good sex like experimental, sex, free sex. Otherwise there's something wrong with you.

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You're repressed, you're like sick, you're ill. There's just like something a little bit off and you have to fix it. And it's like how on both ends like how can sex mean so much and so little at the same time? That really, just like grabs people. They're stuck in between and they feel like whatever way they're doing it, they're doing it wrong. And there's something wrong with them, and I don't think that's both forms of purity culture.

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This, like sexual intensity, and the sex means nothing, or you shouldn't think about sex can be harmful. In their own different ways.

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And you just you never graduate from ethics in insects or anything else. You never get to the point where well, now this is all easy and I don't have to think about other people. And I think a lot of folks feel like they've had that promise made to them, either by consent culture or by well now you're married. So there are no more rules. But discernment is part of daily life again in the bedroom and everywhere else to care for other people. Christine, I want to ask you one kind of more positive focus question to close us out.

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Where do you see the most hope in the present day dating scene or in kind of weird subcultures there off? If you know the mainstream one is a little less hopeful?

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Well. Yeah, just to just say and agree with your last statement, I think that's why this book is about sexual ethics, right? Because ethics are a continuing process like we're always thinking, or we should always be thinking about. What we should do? How we can be good to ourselves and to each other, and in our current sexual landscape. Uhm? You're right, it doesn't necessarily look that hopeful, but I actually do think that there is an.

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You know, both the secular and religious sides. A daunting a growing interest in. Ethics in. What should sex look like? What should we be doing?

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Like people are actually beginning, you know, they're asking these questions and they may not have the answers yet. But actually being willing to seek out the good and try to understand it in some way, or having that curiosity is a really good starting point. There's conversation right now about kind of a sex recession that's happening. You know that, like young, people aren't getting out there and having as much sex as the boomers did? And in some ways that can be definitely seen as a downside.

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If it means that young people are not going out and forming relationships or getting married, you know one of the reasons why. The rate of sexual activity rises off is that people who are married. Sleep with each other more often than people who are single. But maybe that means that they are actually also stepping back thinking like, hey. I'm not sure that I like this sexual culture.

2 - 0:39:41

I'm not sure that I want to take part in what I'm being asked to take part in. This doesn't jive with me personally or morally or ethically, and so I'm going to sit this out for a little while and like think about my life and think about my choices. I actually think that that is a better thing than rushing headlong into. Sort of a sexual ideal that doesn't fit and isn't healthy for you. And then also the last thing I would say.

2 - 0:40:09

That's also happening a lot during COVID too, as people have been forced to kind of sit in their houses and not date and like thinking out what they really want. The last thing I would say is. This is. I don't know if this is subcultural, but I think it's happening in a lot of separate subcultures in religious subcultures and I'm seeing it in like rationalist communities. People are beginning to sort of way themselves off of dating apps in a way, and we're seeing almost a revival in some small circles of matchmaking.

2 - 0:40:42

People who are like the swiping is not working for me. What I'm going to do is ask seven

friends to each set me up with something, someone or like finding other ways of meeting people in real life through people they know in a way that I think is much more natural. Contextual and grounded in the world than our current swipe regime, and I think that's really promising. I think that that could be really healthy, so I'm excited to see where that goes.

1 - 0:41:20

I both am in favor of this and feel guilty since I offered to do matchmaking once and then fell short 'cause it's very hard, you know. So I understand why people don't do it. But I agree that that sense of I want someone to care for me and do something personal. I want to start dating in a personal way, not in a shopping swiping consumerist mindset. That's a hard way to start a relationship.

1 - 0:41:40

I think one of the most hopeful things about your book is that you're telling people something that's very simple, but I think they've had a lot of trouble believing, and I really hope your book gives them the option to believe it, which is the door isn't locked. You know what's making you unhappy is something you can leave behind, and you may not know exactly what you're going to do next, or whether you'll become Catholic or what the the fullness of truth will be. But when you have this sense of the thinness and unsatisfying Ness of sexual culture. It's not you that's broken. And you have the option simply to desire something better, which is the most potent form of permission to kind of start that journey that I think a lot of people are desperately seeking for.

1 - 0:42:22

But worry, they don't deserve to hear. So I, I hope a lot of people hear that from you, Christine.

2 - 0:42:34

Thanks so much. I mean, this is. Honestly, when I think about the kind of writing that I like to do, the thinking that I like to do this is. One of the key statements that I feel like our discourse overlooks the world doesn't have to look the way that it does now. Like the world can change, we can change ourselves and we can change the world. So what do we want the world to look like?

2 - 0:42:55

And I find that hopeful,

1 - 0:43:02

absolutely. This this is what I always loved about the plough community of writers and readers, just the belief that another life is possible. And sometimes we know exactly what direction we're going to make that happen. And sometimes it's enough just to say I don't know what it is that's different or better. But I know this isn't it, and I'm going to say no to this and then start looking for what I can say yes to. Christine, thank you so much for joining me to talk about your book.

2 - 0:43:33

Thank you for having me. This has been a pleasure.

1 - 0:43:37

Absolutely. My pleasure as well.