



**ARE  
YOU A  
VIRGIN?**

# VIRGINITY, WHAT IS IT???

The term virginity is complicated because it has no official meaning. The entire concept of virginity is a social construct. It can be formed by religion, culture, and education. To simplify the word, it typically referred to as what one has if they have never had any sexual experience before.

# COMMON BELIEFS HELD ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF VIRGINITY AND THEIR FLAWS:

One is a virgin if they have never had sex



If we define virginity in relation to whether one has had sex, then what is sex? The thing is, even sex itself is ambiguous. Sex also cannot be adequately defined because sex is not the same for everyone. For example, only penetrative sex (penis-in-vagina) is considered sex to many. But for others, such as people who do not engage in this type of sex, but participate in anal, oral, and other sexual activities, that is not the only type of sex that has the power to take one's virginity status. Would this make gays and lesbians permanent virgins?

(Planned Parenthood)

A woman's virginity is decimated once the hymen is broken



The hymen can be broken by things other than sex, like riding a bike, exercise, or putting objects other than a penis in the vagina.

Some women are even born with their hymen opened. (Planned Parenthood). Can a bicycle really take a woman's virginity?



# Why is virginity so important anyways?



As a culture, we have been obsessed with the concept of virginity. But what is the purpose of virginity if it is so difficult to define? One could argue that its importance has been emphasized to control women's sexuality. In many ways, men have more power than women, and this applies to sexuality as well. Society demands that women remain pure and consider them tainted and damaged if they are sexual. If a woman is no longer pure, then what man will want her? Women are not rated on experience in bed, they are rated on how easily they can be controlled. This is not the case for men; they are still valuable goods even if they have had sex. Basically, female sexual pleasure is not as important as men's, so why does it matter if the man is a virgin or not? Purity is a key component to femininity. Womanhood is tied to being innocent, fragile, and tame. Of course, this varies culturally; to white society, black women are seen to have undesirable masculine qualities. These and other women who are not able to conform to the standard white version of femininity face dismissal and hypersexualization.

If we examine the history of the deeply ingrained beliefs about women's virginity and how it affects popular views about virginity today, we will see that women's worth has consistently been based on their virgin status. The virginity status of a woman is also linked to her morals. This permits the slut versus virgin dichotomy that serves to rate a woman's worth. Within this binary, a woman is either labelled a whore or a virgin, and thus are treated differently depending on which label they have acquired. Rather than considering a woman's morals that may have little to do with sex, and her individual sexuality that may be much more complex than virgin versus whore, society classifies women as either or.

When we categorize women based on whether or not they are pure, we are commodifying their bodies. Thus, we objectify them and allow them to be seen as existing for men. To sum it up, "Historically, virginity was linked to controlling women's bodies—through monitoring fertility or paternal ownership—and within this system, women's bodies were (and are) presented as products for consumption, tools for labor, and a conduit for the continuity of a bloodline" (d'Avignon 2016).

Encouraging women to remain abstinent until marriage has historically had little to do with protecting women. d'Avignon explains that like how virginity is used to control women's sexuality, it has also been used to control their fertility. For example, a woman with her virginity still intact during the medieval times was highly ideal because with no risk of her having been with another man, once she marries her husband (who probably paid more for her dowry because of her desirable virgin status), he will not have to worry about their future child not being his and threatening his bloodline. We still have strange practices set into place to promote female virginity today. Now we have Purity Balls in which a girl pledges her purity to her father by remaining a virgin until she is married. Her virginity is supposed to be passed from her father to her husband, but it is never hers.







# *Four Reasons We Should Leave the Concept of Virginity in the Past:*

- 1. It objectifies women*
- 2. Dismisses women's sexual pleasure*
- 3. Condone's slut shaming*
- 4. Promotes other sexually risky behaviors*

We should put the concept of virginity behind us; for starters, because it objectifies women. Like discussed in a previous section, the slut/virgin dichotomy objectifies women's bodies and gives men the power to determine whether or not they are worth having a relationship and sex with. Men see women as sluts or virgins, and not as people.

In the process of objectifying women, their pleasure is often dismissed and considered irrelevant. Because obsessing over virginity designates men as in control of women's sexuality, women's sexual pleasure becomes secondary. For example, have you ever wondered why female masturbation is considered taboo while male masturbation is normal? You guessed it, because when women take control of their own sexuality it threatens men. Women and their bodies are solely for the pleasure of men, so when a woman engages in sexual activities at her own will, she is going to be shamed for it (Jones 2013). The idea that women shall remain pure and untouched until men say it's okay (ie. marriage) shows and that men can do whatever they want sexually and that our culture doesn't really care about women's sexual pleasure half as much as it does men's. Shaming women about having sex and masturbating erases the possibility of women knowing themselves sexually. Also, if the belief is that women should save their virginity until they are married, what happens if the newly-weds are not sexually compatible? Do they stay in a sexless marriage or engage in other sexual activities that would further taint their purity, such as sex with other people? When women have sex at times our culture considers inappropriate, such as before marriage and with more than one person ever in their lifetimes, they may be slut-shamed. Almost half of women and girls have been slut-shamed, whether that means being called a slut, hoe, whore, and so forth. This can seriously affect one's mental health (Thorpe 2017). In addition, the common belief that a woman's virginity should be saved for that special man she marries may affect her mental health even more severely if her virginity is taken from her by sexual assault. She may end up feeling worthless, dirty, and unwanted (Filipovic 2013). In addition, it is common for many young people to attempt to remain virgins by participating in sexual activities other than penetrative heterosexual (penis-in-vagina) sex, such as anal and oral sex. What they then become is what Uecker defines as "technical virgins." These activities can also contract STDs, however. What is scary about this method of maintaining one's virgin status is that while people having penetrative (penis-in-vagina) are typically aware of the risks, therefore use protection, there is less knowledge about the potentiality of attaining STDs from other sexual activities. This is harmful to both men and women.

*Overall, one's sexual identity is no one's business but their own. It would be ideal if each gender could express their sexualities without shame, as sex is natural for almost every human being. Sexual freedom is essential if we want gender and sex equality. But remember to be safe!*



Bellesa. (2018, February 20). It's Time To Break Free From The Madonna-Whore Complex (Blog). Retrieved November 29, 2018, from [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/bellesa/madonna-whore-complex-sexist\\_a\\_23362722/](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/bellesa/madonna-whore-complex-sexist_a_23362722/)The dichotomy of virgin versus whore is discussed. This dichotomy restricts the true expression of women's sexuality. Women are expected to find a perfect balance of innocent yet promiscuous to be accepted and not labelled as either a tainted whore or an inexperienced virgin. While reading this article, I tried to think of an example that reflected this, and I thought of the singer, Lana Del Rey's work.

D'Avignon, A. (2016, May 11). Why Have We Always Been So Obsessed With Virginity? Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://medium.com/the-establishment/a-quick-and-dirty-history-of-virginity-9ceb24b7e08a>The history of society's obsession with women's sexuality is explored with examples, one including Purity Balls and traditional marriage. This obsession of a woman's purity has been used to control women's bodies, sexuality, and fertility. Lasting effects of the slut/virgin dichotomy plays a role in this control. Women's virginity status simplifies the women's sexualities and objectifies them.

Filipovic, J. (2013, May 09). 'Purity' culture: Bad for women, worse for survivors of sexual assault | Jill Filipovic. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/09/elizabeth-smart-purity-culture-shames-survivors-sexual-assault>In this article, slut-shaming and its effects are covered. Viewing virginity as one's gift to their future husbands leaves them vulnerable to feeling guilty if they have sex, and even more so if they are raped. Having their virginities forcibly taken from them can result in exceedingly terrible feelings, such as dirtiness, shame, and worthlessness.

Heckel, N. M. (n.d.). Sex, Society and Medieval Women by N. M. Heckel. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.library.rochester.edu/robbins/sex-society>Sections of this article gave me background information about virginity in the medieval times context that d'Avignon mentioned in her article. When looking for a bride, men desired virgins to eliminate the possibility of their wife giving birth to a child who is not his own and discontinuing their bloodline.

Jones, J. (2018, November 13). Female Masturbation = Gross. Says Who? Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.bustle.com/articles/887-why-the-taboo-of-female-masturbation-is-b>This article talked about the double standard when it comes to female masturbation versus male masturbation. Female masturbation is considered taboo and shameful, while men masturbating is much more normalized and even humorous. The shame around women's personal sexual pleasure revolves around men's objectification and control over women and their sexualities.

McKelle, E. (2014, December 10). 5 Reasons Why We Need to Ditch The Concept of Virginity For Good. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://everydayfeminism.com/2013/08/losing-virginity-for-good/>This article listed out the reasons we need to abandon the concept of virginity, and why. One that I used in a similar list in my project was the consequence that is slut-shaming. I did not use the same reasons as this article, but I found theirs helpful in creating my project. However, I agree with their reasons listed.

Parenthood, P. (n.d.). What Is Virginity & The Hymen? | Losing Your Virginity. Retrieved November 29, 2018, from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/virginity>I decided to use Planned Parenthood's website's information to explore the definition of virginity. Of course, there is not one that is perfect because virginity is a social construct. The ambiguous definition of sex itself makes it impossible to correctly define virginity. This page was simply informational, as it provided information about the average age most people lose their virginity, the description of the hymen, etc.

Thorpe, J. (2018, November 13). The Long-Term Effects Of Slut-Shaming. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.bustle.com/p/the-long-term-effects-of-slut-shaming-64302>Slut-shaming can make girls feel isolated, guilty, and shameful. This is a double standard because boys are rarely slut shamed for having sex. Women are taught that their value lies in their sexuality, so when they do have sex, they are a danger to society. Hence, we have shaming to keep them in their place.

Timbol, E. (2012, September 13). The Damage Of Overvaluing Virginity. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/emily-timbol/the-damage-from-overvaluing-virginity\\_b\\_1668113.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/emily-timbol/the-damage-from-overvaluing-virginity_b_1668113.html)In this article, a woman who grew up believing in Christianity discusses how the conception of virginity was extremely harmful to her. She talks about the detriments of virginity from a Christian perspective, and even touches on sexual assault and how many have their virginity taken from them without consent.

Uecker, J. E. (2008, December 1). Going Most of the Way: "Technical Virginity" among American Adolescents. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3153128/>The promotion of abstinence leads to teens becoming "technical virgins." This is when teens engage in sexual activities that are not heterosexual penetrative sex to remain virgins. However, these activities still can be risky, and possibly even more so than penetrative sex because many teens don't know they can still get STDs from other forms of sex. This is one consequence of the virginity myth that overvalues virginity.