

# Losing It: Defining virginity

By **Zosha Millman** *The Daily*

Typically when loss of virginity is portrayed in the media, it's part of a grand experience, with as much baggage attached to it as a commercial flight. It's treated as a special experience; something to be saved for someone who means more than other people.

That's great, if that's what fits; I'm all for someone engaging their sexuality in a way that they feel comfortable. But this idealized first sexual encounter is far from one-size-fits-all.

Our culture's fixation with virginity thrives on heteronormativity, double standards, and the model of sex as a commodity. It's something that people (typically with vaginas) give, and other people (typically with penises) get. This paradigm uses terms like "gatekeepers" and expects that one of the parties isn't supposed to desire sexual activity. The more a person gives, the less it's worth; and therefore, the first time holds a special weight. Within this paradigm, people are valued based on the asinine and puzzling idea of a sexual number.

It's a complicated viewpoint. After all, at what point is someone officially deflowered? Oral? Vaginal? Hand holding? The golden standard of the base system carries with it a huge amount of heteronormativity, or the idea that straight relationships are the norm. What's "stealing home" to a queer couple?

Virginity is not a medical term, although the historical definition was typically enforced on women, and determined by an intact hymen; a thin, membranous wall inside the vagina. Spoiler alert: this is wrong. Hymens come in all shapes and sizes, and they definitely do not always last

to the first sexual experience. People with vaginas can lose their hymen through masturbating, tampons, or even just friction from pants.

When proper sex is rigidly defined as "penis + vagina = penetration," it creates an awkward gray area where basically anything else is concerned. Everyone's line for what they're ready for and how far they want to go is different, and that's totally fine. The idea that penetrative vaginal intercourse is the end-all-be-all is phallogentric, heteronormative, and, frankly, limiting. There are plenty of options for crazy, tantric orgasm sessions without ever penetrating a vagina. Ask any number of gay, lesbian, etc. couples that achieve healthy and satisfying relationships like this every day.

Sexual activity can be a very personal thing for someone to deal with. But by elevating and valuing one form of sex over every other, people are erasing and invalidating a lot of other experiences that are just as legitimately sexual.

The point here being that it's OK if someone's "virginity line" is penetrative sex. But it's also OK if it's not. It's fine if it's somewhere along the road to that, or an entirely different road altogether. Being a virgin doesn't have to be a dirty word, and if it's a word to identify with, there's no shame in sticking to a personal definition.

Any sort of first time can have all sorts of importance to a relationship, and people should be able to recognize it and set up standards. With whatever number of whatever gender identity: Stay safe, aware, and honest, and everything will be just fine. Let people be responsible in a way they find suitable. Screw the rest.

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