

“I Took His V-Card”: An Exploratory Analysis of College Student Stories Involving Male Virginity Loss

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Abstract The focus of this exploratory study was to investigate the experience of male virginity loss involving a sexually experienced (non-virgin) female with an inexperienced (virgin) male. Specifically, this qualitative research focused on the analysis of 237 stories collected from college students. While the stereotypical image is of the experienced male with his inexperienced (virgin) female partner, this study looked at the reverse. Stories described both partners' experience and were coded for common themes. The three most prevalent themes to emerge from the analysis centered around: disclosing his virginity, emotions surrounding the experience, and issues related to gender role expectations. This exploratory study of male virginity loss provides new insight into young people's assumptions, feelings, and gender role expectations. The results provide a greater understanding of the issues young people face while navigating their early sexual experiences. The themes offer guidance for sexuality education programs, as well as directions for future research.

Keywords Virginity · College students · Sexual initiation · Gender roles

Introduction

Virginity has been a topic of interest among both popular media and researchers. The popular media has devoted considerable time and attention to examining, at least on a superficial level, the issue of young people and virginity loss. Contemporary movies like *American Pie*, *Super Bad*, *Easy A*, *40 Year Old Virgin*, and *The Virginity Hit*, as well as television shows such as *Everwood*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Life as We Know It*, and *Glee* have all covered the issue of virginity. Movies

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and television have been found to influence how virginity is viewed, which is often portrayed as a gift, a rite of passage, or a stigma (Carpenter 2005). The typical story line is a boy who desires to be rid of his virginity, along with the peer pressure and stigma associated with male virginity.

Popular media often depicts sexual initiation as based on a culture's sexual scripts, where first sexual experiences are depicted as happening between two virgins or where the virgin female loses her virginity to a sexually experienced male (Carpenter 2001, 2005; Kelly 2010). Rarely in the films or television dramas does one see a storyline of a virgin male losing his virginity to a sexually experienced female. When it is represented in the media, it is often viewed as either comical or inappropriate, and typically involves an older woman, not his peer. For example, in the 1999 movie *American Pie* the character Finch loses his virginity in a comical scene to his friend's hyper-sexualized mother. This is not unlike the storyline in the 1967 movie classic, *The Graduate*, in which an older woman seduces a sexually inexperienced male university graduate. In addition to such rare depictions in the media, few researchers have studied male virginity loss in general, and male virginity loss involving an experienced female more specifically.

Researchers have collected data related to virginity on such issues as the percentage of virgins in high school, typical age of virginity loss, the meaning of virginity loss, and the role of the media in both portrayal and influence on sexual initiation. Studies have found that the vast majority of teens become sexually active prior to graduating from high school, and while the average age of first intercourse varies from study to study, it is typically found to be between the ages of 15 and 17 (Wells and Twenge 2005). About 35 % of teens will experience their first heterosexual intercourse in grade 9, and slightly more than 60 % will have had intercourse by grade 12 (CDC 2009).

Those studies examining attitudes toward virginity and experiences related to virginity loss reveal differences in the responses by men and women. For example, when studying the meaning of their virginity status, Sprecher and Regan (1996) found that not only do men perceive more reinforcement to be sexually active, virgin males more than virgin females perceive a more negative reaction to their virginity status. Findings from their survey of 289 male and female virgins across a 6-year span (1990–1995) revealed that virgin males were more likely to indicate embarrassment and guilt. Their findings support the notion that men tend to feel more positively about their virginity loss, since it removes an undesired stigma (Sprecher and Regan 1996).

Similar findings were supported by Holland et al. (2000) in their analysis of narratives by young people about virginity and first sex. They found that many of the narratives focused on issues of gain and loss. On the one hand, young men's accounts of first sex were described as positive, with some anxiety about their performance, but clearly a gain in their status and feelings of manhood. On the other hand, the stories of young women's first sexual experience often centered on loss of sexual reputation and fears of pregnancy. A decade later, Higgins et al. (2010) published similar findings of gender differences in young people's satisfaction with first sexual intercourse. Based on surveys of over 3,000 college students at four

universities, they found that males had less guilt and greater satisfaction with first intercourse (virginity loss) as compared to women.

In *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences*, Carpenter (2005) discussed the stigma of male virginity and how the common fear for males is that they will be shamed for their sexual inexperience. Her in-depth interviews with 61 young men and women revealed that while men typically view their virginity as a stigma and something to be rid of, women typically view it as a gift and something to be taken or given away (Carpenter 2001, 2005). She describes how this is reflected in society's traditional sexual scripts, which often portray women as virginal and pure, and tells women that their virginity is a virtue that should be saved to give as a "gift" on their wedding night (Carpenter 2005).

Carpenter published a follow-up article (2009) using her in-depth interviews to examine how young people use popular movies that included virginity loss to navigate their own experience. She found that many men and women used the cultural messages found in such films as roadmaps for understanding and interpreting their own experience (Carpenter 2009). Several other researchers have also examined the portrayal of virginity and virginity loss in the media, as well as the influence of television viewing on sexual initiation (Brown et al. 2006; Chandra et al. 2008; Collins et al. 2004; Kelly 2010; Martino et al. 2009). For example, in a study by Martino et al. (2009) examining the role of television viewing on feelings of virginity loss, the researchers found that many teens expressed regret about their first time due to the high expectations portrayed in the media. Males were found to have greater expectations for a positive first-time sexual experience as compared to females based on their exposure to sexual content on television. This is not surprising when one considers the findings of research examining the messages about virginity and virginity loss portrayed in television shows. In an analysis of content in television programs geared for teens, Kelly (2010) revealed that many of the shows reinforce society's sexual scripts and heavily influence teens' perception of virginity and virginity loss. She found that there were three scripts that emerge, including abstinence, management, and urgency. According to Kelly's analysis of teen dramas, "only males experienced an extreme stigma of virginity and the fear of humiliation at virginity loss. Their stress about losing their virginity was accompanied by anxiety about their performance and exposing themselves to additional shaming by their partners" (2010, p. 486). It is not uncommon to see male characters lie about their virginity status in order to maintain their image of traditional masculinity. On the other hand, female characters are often portrayed as 'good girls' who are sexually unknowing, aspire to relationships rather than hook-ups, are passive in sexual initiation, and desire to make their boyfriend happy (Kelly 2010).

It is clear that more research is needed to understand the experience of virginity loss. Further, as Carpenter (2005) explains, "most studies of virginity loss have focused primarily or exclusively on the experiences of young women" (p. 3). This exploratory study focuses on male virginity loss. It offers a unique approach by examining stories involving a sexually inexperienced (virgin) male with a sexually experienced (non-virgin) female, and analyzes both his and her experiences. While several of the previously cited studies have suggested that traditional sexual scripts

of virginity (as a virtue for women and as a negative trait for men) continue to play a role in shaping young people's interpretation of their virginity loss (Holland et al. 2000; Sprecher and Regan 1996), a few studies have suggested that there may be a shift in the sexual scripts (Carpenter 2005; Higgins et al. 2010). This study examines an experience that challenges the traditional sexual script of male as experienced and female as inexperienced, by examining virginity loss in which he is the inexperienced virgin.

It is hoped that the findings will provide a greater understanding of the issues young people face while navigating their early sexual experiences. A better understanding of the range of experiences of male virgins and those of their partners may be useful in designing sexual decision-making lessons within sexuality education programs.

Methods

Stories were solicited from college students attending a large state university in the northeastern United States. Students were enrolled in a large (350 student) undergraduate course in human sexuality in the spring semesters of 2010, 2011, and 2012. Students were invited to submit an experience either they or a close friend had had with virginity loss involving a sexually experienced female with an inexperienced (virgin) male. This was one of five extra credit options offered to students. The university's Human Subjects Committee approved the study. The instructions were as follows:

I took his V-Card—5 points. In an effort to expand our knowledge of various sexual experiences, I would like to focus this semester on Virginity (the V in V-Card). Specifically, I am collecting students' personal stories that involve an experienced (non-virgin) female who has sexual intercourse with an inexperienced (virgin) male. You can submit a description of such an experience you have had or that someone you know well has had. The experience can be written from the man's perspective, woman's perspective, or both people's perspective. While the stereotypical image tends to be of the sexually experienced male initiating his female partner into first sexual intercourse, this project will look at the reverse: she is the more sexually experienced one. There is very little research on this topic. This will serve as an exploratory examination of this topic in order to understand more about this experience.

Remember: I am not asking for your personal experience. Submissions can be about an experience you have had or someone you know well has had.

Do provide as much detail as possible about the sexual experience, such as details about their relationship, how they met, if she knew he was a virgin/if he told her (and if so, when), motivations for having sexual intercourse, and their feelings after.

Do not include information that would identify the people involved (i.e., don't use real names). All submissions will be printed out without your name for anonymous analysis.

A total of 269 stories were submitted by students. The majority of stories (88 %; $n = 237$) were told in the first-person, presumably about the student's own personal experience, and were included in this analysis. Sixty-one percent ($n = 145$) of these stories were submitted by women, while 39 % ($n = 92$) were submitted by men. Other stories submitted by students about their friend's experience (12 %; $n = 32$) were not included in this analysis. Submissions were typically 300-500 words in length.

Although not asked directly about this, over half of the submissions mentioned that the experience occurred in high school (59 %; $n = 140$). Approximately one-third (31 %; $n = 73$) mentioned that alcohol was involved, and less than one-third (28 %; $n = 68$) mentioned the use of protection from pregnancy or infections.

Stories were analyzed using established methods of qualitative inquiry, including coding and categorizing processes that make use of both deductive and inductive approaches (Miles and Huberman 1994). Stories were coded for common themes by the two researchers, compared, differences discussed, and coding categories were created. A specific topic was considered a theme if the majority of stories included it. An inter-rater reliability score of 86 % was found regarding the placement of topics in these categories. Detailed results are presented below.

Results

The common themes discussed in the stories involving an inexperienced (virgin) male losing his virginity to an experienced (non-virgin) female are presented below and in Table 1. As an exploratory study, students were given few guidelines for what to include for details about the sexual experience. However, three major themes emerged from the 237 stories that were examined: disclosing his virginity, emotions surrounding the experience, and issues related to gender role expectations. These themes were further divided into categories and are discussed below.

Disclosing His Virginity

A total of 195 of the 237 stories discussed disclosure of his virginity. These stories ranged from those in which (1) she knew or he told her well in advance that he was a virgin (58 %; $n = 113$), (2) his virginity was revealed during the sexual encounter (11 %; $n = 22$), and (3) she found out or he told her he was a virgin after they had had sex (31 %; $n = 60$).

She Knew/he Told her Beforehand he was a Virgin

More than half (58 %; $n = 113$) of the stories discussed how she knew that he was virgin well before the sexual encounter. In those stories in which she knew in

Table 1 Common themes from college student stories about male virginity loss involving a sexually experienced (non-virgin) female partner (N = 237)

Disclosing his virginity (n = 195 stories; 42 stories did not mention this)
58 % (n = 113) She knew/he told her beforehand he was a virgin
11 % (n = 22) She found out/he told her in the “heat of the moment”
31 % (n = 60) She found out/he told her after-the-fact
Emotions surrounding the experience (n = 219 stories; 18 stories did not mention this)
59 % (n = 128) It was a good first experience
29 % (n = 64) Can you say ‘Awkward’?
12 % (n = 27) That was really bad!
Gender role expectations (n = 191 stories; 46 stories did not mention this) ^a
71 % (n = 135) I felt pressure to conform to traditional roles
49 % (n = 93) I enjoyed the role reversal

^a 37 of the 191 stories coded as gender role expectations mentioned both the pressure to conform to traditional roles *and* enjoyment of the role reversal

advance, it was evenly divided between him telling her (n = 58) or someone else telling her (n = 55) about his virginity. Sample comments include:

I had been hanging out with this guy for over a year...we had talked about what we had done sexually so I had known for a year that he was a virgin before we slept together. (female)

His friends basically told me to have sex with him because he was a virgin. (female)

Through the grapevine I found out he was a virgin. I, on the other hand, was technically not, although fairly inexperienced myself. He never actually told me he was a virgin, probably for obvious reasons. (female)

After almost a year of dating and after having many discussions about it, we both felt it was time to have sex. Now, I may add that during this conversation I was not pushy about having sex and never said, ‘I want to because my friends are’ but said I wanted to because I loved her and felt I was ready. She knew from the beginning that I had been a virgin because I told her, and I hadn’t really had a previous girlfriend or much sexual experience, and had liked her for a long time—this was very important to me, as it was to her. (male)

We had talked about sex and she was known as someone who had “fooled” around with some guys so far in high school. When we started to get to know each other more, she brought it up and I told her I was a virgin. I felt she should know. I thought that because she was more experienced and being younger, that she would laugh but she actually was respectful about it. (male)

I was a virgin and she knew it because I had told her about a month into our relationship. My family is fairly religious and I had decided that I was going to wait until marriage to have sex. (male)

She Found Out/he Told her in the “Heat of the Moment”

Fewer stories (11 %; $n = 22$) discussed that his virginity was revealed in the “heat of the moment.” (i.e., just as they began having sexual intercourse or just as they finished). Sample comments include:

After a few minutes of laying there in silence, he finally said, ‘I have a secret for you: That was my first time.’ I immediately freaked out and was angry with him for not telling me this before we have sex. He asked me to promise that I wouldn’t tell anyone that he was a virgin, (female)

When we got upstairs that night we had gone into one of the bedrooms. We made out for what seemed like an hour. I had started to take off his pants and make the move when he said, ‘I’ve never done this before.’ I said it was ok and I would help him. (female)

He started to get more into it... but for some reason kept telling me he was sorry and asked me a ton of questions about how he was doing. Frustrated, I asked him why he was making this so complicated and he told me I was the first girl he had gotten this close to having sex with before. (female)

I had sex with the girl for about an hour and a half before she said that she was tired. This is when she asked me if I was a virgin. I admitted that I was and she replied by saying ‘I figured’. (male)

Two months into the relationship, we decided to have sex. She had had sex before, so I told her I had had sex too. But I had finished very quickly, and she became curious and started to ask questions. She mentioned how it had been kind of quick, and asked if there was something wrong. I said, ‘I want to be honest with you. I was nervous before, and didn’t want to let you know because I was afraid of how you might react, but I was a virgin’. (male)

Once it was clear that we were building up to sex she handed me a condom. That’s when I had to tell her, ‘Just so you know, I’ve never done this before.’ She replied, thinking I meant that I had never had sex outside of being in a relationship. Sadly, I had to correct her. (male)

She Found Out/he Told her After-the-fact

In those situations (31 %; $n = 60$) in which she found out or he told her well after the sexual encounter that he was a virgin, it was often because he lied to her previously about his virginity ($n = 41$). In some cases, she found out from his friends. Sample comments include:

As we laid in an awkward position on his itchy couch, I asked ‘Do you even know what you’re doing?’ He said ‘Of course I do!’ I confronted him again days later about it. He finally confessed that he lied to me about being a virgin because he was embarrassed and wanted to impress me. (female)

Out of annoyance I mentioned to a friend about his clingy behavior. This is when I learned that when he and I had sex, I had taken his V-card. (female)

He originally told me he had sex with his previous girlfriend. Months later he confessed that he made that up because he felt like a loser for being a virgin. (female)

Six months after we started dating I eventually told her that I lied about having sex with two women and was actually a virgin when we had sex. She was shocked and upset that I lied to her but we continued to date. (male)

It was not until a year after we had sex that she brought up my previous relationships and I blatantly said I was a virgin and that I lied because my ex and I had actually never had sex before. (male)

Afterwards while we layin bed she asked me if I was a virgin. Not wanting to bust my cover, I became very defensive and said absolutely not, and told her I had sex with a lot of girls before her. She was embarrassed for even making the accusation and apologized, and after a few minutes of awkward silence we went to sleep. She did not talk to me again the rest of the time she was home and I guess she was offended by the whole situation. When she got back to school I instant messaged her saying I was sorry for the way I had treated her and that it was actually my first time having sex. (male)

Emotions Surrounding the Experience

A total of 219 of the 237 stories discussed emotions as they relate to his virginity loss were categorized as (1) positive (59 %; n = 128), (2) awkward (29 %; n = 64), or (3) negative (12 %; n = 27).

It was a Good First Experience

More than half of the stories (59 %, n = 128) discussed the experience as positive in that there was satisfaction (e.g., he felt things went well, she felt she was the “chosen one”) and in many cases the couple continued to see each other. Sample comments include:

I could tell by the grin on his face that he felt accomplished and I knew right then that even if we went our separate ways that I’ve impacted his life forever. (female)

I felt special for him to choose me to give his V-card to. (female)

When we had sex I was surprised to learn that he was a natural. The sex was incredible. (female)

Being inside a girl for the first time was amazing. My world was opened to a whole new realm and I never looked back. My emotions were strong. I felt much love for my new girlfriend. Her emotions were also strong. We loved each other for a year and a half. (male)

Once she got on top of me I could not believe how incredible it felt. It was like masturbating $\times 1000$. She was a good sport about it because we were head over heels for each other and she didn't want to ruin my ego. Once we got done with the first time we went on an exhibitionist streak where we had sex out at 2 different fields and after one of my games on a Friday night we went out to the 50-yard line and had sex. I am glad I lost my virginity to her because I loved her and she was a hell of a fuck. (male)

If anything, her taking my V-card made our relationship stronger I think. I remember we both were very clear about how we have never been in love so we didn't want each other to be surprised if neither of us ever said it. But soon after that night she confessed it to me. And I felt the same way. The relationship, while it lasted, was the best one I had ever had. (male)

Can You Say "Awkward"?

About one-third of the stories were coded as awkward (29 %; $n = 64$). In these stories, they were neither positive or negative experiences, but instead something odd happened, ranging from him ejaculating too quickly to extreme nervousness and him appearing not to know quite what to do. Sample comment include:

He was definitely shaking and nervous. He pulled out a condom and struggled to put it on. Then we had what was the most awkward sex I had ever had. I thought it seemed to last forever but it was probably about 5–10 min. I thought it would be much quicker being his first time. (female)

After dating a while the topic of sex came up and he told me he was a virgin, and that he was afraid because he didn't want to disappoint me because he didn't really know what he was doing. Eventually he felt he was ready enough to give it a try and the first time didn't go so well. He was so nervous that he was doing things wrong that he kept asking questions and getting paranoid... he got himself so worked up he had a serious case of "performance anxiety" and shortly after things got going they abruptly stopped. Can you say 'awkward?' (female)

While dialogue wasn't the main focus during our very uncoordinated and predominately awkward sexual experience it soon afterward became obvious to both of us that he had thought I was a virgin and I thought he wasn't a virgin- and we both were wrong. I suddenly felt like I had awkwardly set up some weird special valentine dinner for him to lose his V-card, and I think he suddenly felt embarrassed for his lack of experience. (female)

She took my "V-Card" at my home when my parents were not there. I was very nervous. She didn't have to talk me through it, but I was, as she put it, "a little clumsy." I guess the first time for everyone is always, at least, a little awkward. After that night things between us remained awkward. She contributed the awkwardness to the fact that I was embarrassed at my performance and I agreed. (male)

I felt good that I had finally had sex but also kind of embarrassed that it ended so quick. She kissed me on the cheek and said that it was fine and she didn't expect much since it was my first time. She said, 'It will get better as we do it more'. She was really great and made me feel comfortable. It eased the awkwardness I felt. (male)

She clearly decided that she wanted to go further and honestly did most of the work. Partway through sex—out of nowhere—she suddenly said her knee gave out and we stopped even though neither of us had finished. I really didn't mind but I was left confused as to why losing your virginity was such a big deal and the focus of all my classmates attention. (male)

That was Really Bad!

Few stories (12 %; n = 27) discussed negative feelings such as having the relationship end badly, different expectations, and regret. Sample comments include:

It was sad for me because I had taken something important from him without even knowing about it when it happened....I have a feeling it didn't make him sad though. (female)

I kissed his neck and lips for a few minutes before noticing a wet feeling on my thigh. He had had an orgasm with his pants on. I laughed for nearly an hour while he cleaned himself up. It was horrible. (female)

I had known that he was a virgin and even though I said it didn't matter to me it did a little. We started to have sex, and I realized it wasn't a good idea. I didn't want him to get attached to me and I didn't want to be in a relationship at the time. I told him it wasn't a good idea because we had both been drinking that night. I feel bad that his first experience of sex had to be like that, but I didn't feel like it was the right thing to do. (female)

I explained to my friend that I would only be willing to lose my virginity if she and I were in a relationship. One night when we had been drinking (which was also new to me), she told me that she would be my girlfriend and so I finally agreed to have sex. I had a hard time finishing, and I felt a lot of pressure from her. Since it didn't work that night, we tried again in the morning and while I got an erection and penetrated her, I never came. She was clearly very frustrated with me, which made me uncomfortable. I now thought we were in a relationship, and when I went to talk to her later that day she avoided me, and continued to avoid me for a few days. Finally I asked what was going on and she said she needed space for a while. I left her alone for a week, texted her, and she still did not want anything to do with me. I was extremely upset and angry with myself, and was even depressed for a few months. (male)

It wasn't until I went home and laid down that I realized that I had just lost my virginity. I wanted to throw up. It was awful...My first sexual experience was horrible. I got checked for STDs immediately after because we hadn't used a

condom. After that, if a girl didn't want to have sex with me I didn't make her, and I think that's partly because I didn't really want to have sex my first time, so I couldn't see forcing anyone to have sex with me. (male)

It happened quickly and the next day she said she didn't know what all of this meant. I said I wanted it to be a relationship, but she didn't want that so we didn't speak to each other again. I have always had mixed feelings about that night. I mostly regret it because I wanted to be in love the first time I had sexual intercourse. But I was way too eager to lose my V-card. I had a terrible idea of sex based on that....until I met the woman I would fall in love with next. I wish I had waited for her. (male)

Gender Role Expectations

A total of 191 stories out of 237 submissions discussed (1) the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles (71 %; n = 135) and/or (2) the pleasure of enjoying the role reversal (49 %; n = 93). In some stories (n = 37), both the pressure of gender roles and the pleasure of the role reversal were discussed and this explains why the percentage for the two categories totals more than 100 %.

I Felt Pressure to Conform to Traditional Roles

Two-thirds of the stories (71 %; n = 135) discusses some aspect related to the pressure to conform to traditional roles. Many females were embarrassed (and even felt guilty) around their own sexual experience because they felt he "should" be the experienced one. Other females held onto stereotypes and assumed he was not a virgin because he exhibited certain masculine qualities (e.g., he was good looking, athletic, popular, funny, had been in a relationship). The males were influenced as well. Many of the males described being embarrassed and ashamed because of their lack of experience, which led them to lie about their sexual status. Many of the stories included males experiencing pressure from his peers which were reflected in statements such as wanting to "get it over with," "out of the way," or "just lose it already." Others felt they needed to perform which led to anxiety, early ejaculation, and loss of erection. Sample comments include:

He was a popular, good-looking athlete. I just assumed he had had sex before. (female)

I felt guilty, dirty even; after all, I was two years younger than he was! I really liked him, and I didn't want him to think I was a slut. (female)

He was extremely scared to tell me because it is 'supposed' to be that the girl is the virgin and not the guy. (female)

I was a 17 year old guy in high school and still a virgin... my friends didn't make that very easy on me. I was very relieved to not be a virgin anymore because a lot of my friends were sexually active before me. Unfortunately, a lot of guys feel peer pressure to 'be a man' and I was no different. (male)

Of course all of my friends made fun of me for being the virgin—especially since she was experienced. They said it is supposed to be the other way around! (male)

I was worried that I would not be experienced enough for her, and that I wouldn't last long enough and she would not orgasm—there was a lot of pressure; this, however, turned out to not been issue for me. (male)

I Enjoyed the Role Reversal

Slightly less than half (49 %; $n = 93$) described the experience as enjoyable in terms of gender role reversal. In most stories in which a person described finding pleasure with the role reversal, it was the female who was pleased (in 66 of the 93 stories). She embraced the opportunity to be in the more stereotypical “dominant” role. These stories discussed her enjoyment with taking control, becoming the teacher, and feeling empowered. Fewer males described the experience as pleasureable in terms of being a gender role reversal. Sample comments include:

Taking someone's V-Card is almost like getting a trophy of some sort for doing something great (female)

I didn't care, I really liked this guy and I felt special for him to choose me to give his V-card to. (female)

After realizing that he was telling the truth, it was strange how it made me feel empowered. It felt like I had conquered something and felt dominant and superior to him. It was something I had never felt before in a relationship. I usually felt like the submissive one. It made me feel special to know that he had waited this long for someone to lose his virginity to and had chosen me. (female)

That's when I think that she took a more commanding role with me. She told me that she wanted to have sex with me and I was excited. This is what I wanted—to have a girl to tell me what she wanted to do with me and I wanted to know what it felt like. She was what I needed to get over that fear and pressure. She was the initiator. It was great. Without her I think that I would still be a virgin (male)

I loved not having to be the know-it-all.... I had no idea how to do this and really liked that she was my first time. She was loving and patient and did not expect me to be some kind of casanova. I got to lay back and enjoy her leading the way. (male)

I think it is great when guys let go of the crap we are raised with—I don't want to be the man who is supposed to read her mind and teach her. I like it when my girlfriends are smart, independent and can show me things. When I lost my virginity, my girlfriend showed me what to do. There was no pressure or expectations. It set the stage for my future relationships—where many girls I

have been with say I am a good lover because I know how to share—I am not trying to dominate or be in control. (male)

Discussion

The results of this exploratory study of male virginity loss provide new insight into young people's assumptions, feelings, and gender role expectations when the male partner is the virgin. Young males losing their virginity to a sexually experienced (non-virgin) female peer (versus an older woman) is a realm of sexual experience that is rarely represented in the media or examined in research studies.

The 237 stories analyzed for this study offer a greater understanding of issues related to how his virginity is revealed to his partner and why she may not know about his inexperience until after the sexual encounter. While more than half of the stories discussed that the female partner knew he was a virgin before the encounter, there were some stories in which he lied about his virginity or she did not know until after they had intercourse. Such stories reflect the on-going pressure young males feel about their need to be the sexually experienced one in the relationship, and support previous studies that have addressed the stigma of male virginity (e.g., Carpenter 2001, 2005; Holland et al. 2000).

A range of emotional responses to the experience were also discussed in the stories. While slightly more than half of the stories described a positive interaction in which things went well, many stories described awkward or even negative results attributed to his virginity, along with feelings of pressure from peers. Such feelings of awkwardness or regret are not surprising since these are often how virginity or virginity loss is represented in television (e.g., Kelly 2010; Martino et al. 2009). The findings of these stories add support to the important role of both the media and peer pressure to impact young people's emotional response to such a situation.

The area of gender role expectations was also a major theme discussed in these stories. While many more young females found pleasure in feeling powerful and in control as the sexually experienced "initiator," many young males described their virginity status as embarrassing and shameful, and often led him to feelings of being "less masculine." The analysis revealed that the majority of the stories describing this sexual encounter as pleasurable were from females. This suggests that many females have made more progress in letting go of the traditional sexual scripts in this area as compared to males. However, it is important to acknowledge that there were some females who also described feeling the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and feeling "like a slut" or even feeling guilty for being more sexually experienced than her partner. The findings suggest that the traditional sexual script of a sexual double standard, in which he is to be sexually experienced and she is not, may still be alive and well.

The results of this exploratory study point to the need for more open discussions surrounding sexual behavior and cultural expectations, including the role of the media in representing a more inclusive depiction of young people's first sexual experiences, especially males' experiences. Educational programs that focus on sexual decision-making in order to prepare teens for their first sexual encounter and

which challenge cultural and media expectations will be useful. By allowing teens to think for themselves about what feels right for them, rather than being influenced by gender expectations of what is supposedly the “right way” to be masculine or feminine, could go a long way in alleviating negative feelings of anxiety, shame, and confusion for both males and females.

Further research is needed to understand the experience of male virginity loss in situations in which his female partner is sexually experienced. The limitations of this exploratory study, in terms of soliciting stories from students who not only self-selected to enroll in a human sexuality class on one college campus in the northeast (and further limited by those who self-selected to submit a story), as well as the concern about recall of an experience that may have happened several years ago, point to the need for further research with a larger sample in order to obtain more generalizable results. In addition, as an exploratory study, students were given few guidelines for what exactly to include in their stories; the findings were therefore limited by what students felt were important details to include. Future research might specify exactly what details are needed for analysis.

Despite the limitations, this study provides new insight into issues young people face while navigating their early sexual experiences. The themes emerging from this study provide some guidance for the direction of future research. More importantly, this study adds to our understanding of male virginity loss—an area that has been neglected by sex researchers. A better understanding of the range of experiences of male virgins and those of his partner will be useful in designing more meaningful sexuality education programs, with the hope that this might lead to healthier sexual decision-making.

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