



Can Anyone Tell If I'm a Virgin?

To be taught in parallel with Season 2, Episode 4 of the podcast *This is Probably a Really Weird Question...*

Intended Audience

This educational module is intended for use at an undergraduate level. Students are anticipated to have majors in nursing, pre-medical studies, biological sciences, and other health-related fields.

Therefore, the purpose of this lesson is to help prepare students for a future career in healthcare, with an emphasis on provider-patient relationships and discussing sexuality.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the lesson students will...

- recognize several major misconceptions about virginity, its historical origins, and contemporary popular myths
- have the tools to explain to a patient the nature and function of the hymen
- have practiced patient interactions about this topic

****Note:** prior to this class session and before students read the assigned materials, have the students take the survey used in “The Opaque Language of Sexuality: Medical Students’ and Providers’ Beliefs About Virginity.” The survey can be found as a supplemental document on the “Teach the Pod” section of the RWQ podcast website.**

Required Materials

Season 2 / Episode 4 of *This Is Probably a Really Weird Question...* podcast: [“Can Anyone Tell If I’m a Virgin?”](#)

Walser, S.A., Costigan, H., Stuckey, H.L. *et al.* The Opaque Language of Sexuality: Medical Students’ and Providers’ Beliefs About Virginity. *Arch Sex Behav* **52**, 2619–2638 (2023).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02578-7>

[Averett, Paige, Amy Moore, and Lindsay Price. 2014. “Virginity Definitions and Meaning Among the LGBT Community.” *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 26 \(3\): 259–78. doi:10.1080/10538720.2014.924802.](#)

Anticipated Misconceptions to Address

- **A person can tell by looking at my vagina if I’ve had penetrative sex.** No, there is no way a medical professional can see if you’ve had penetrative sex unless there is trauma.
- **Virginity can be medically defined.** Incorrect, virginity is a social and cultural construction.
- **People with vaginas have hymens as indicators of their virginity.** Nope, we don’t know why people born with vaginas have hymens. There appears to be no physical need. However, some believe it is a barrier in place for vaginal health in infants, to block fecal matter from entering the vagina.
- **It’s normal for there to be pain the first time a person has penetrative sex.** No, there should not be pain. If there is, your body is not relaxed or ready. Similarly, pain might indicate that there is a medical problem that needs to be addressed.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

To begin the class, it may be beneficial to briefly review the podcast episode and reading material, in case any students haven’t completed the assigned readings.

Class Discussion

Next, students will be given an opportunity to discuss the content of the two reading assignments with their classmates and share their opinions about it. Starting with “The Opaque Language of Sexuality” and then moving onto “Virginity Definitions and Meaning Among the LGBT Community,” students will discuss how different groups define virginity and the biases that affect health care providers who care for

people with vaginas. Return the survey results to the students and ask them to discuss their results after reading/listening to the required materials.

Some questions to guide class discussion:

- How would you define virginity? Is this definition the product of science and medicine or of social and cultural understandings?
- Medically speaking, what is virginity?
- Why is virginity a topic that medical professionals encounter?

Interactive Activity: Think, Pair, Share

For this activity, students will arrange themselves into groups of two or three to respond to different role-play scenarios involving questions about virginity within a clinical context. In each round, one student will play the clinician, one will play the patient, and the optional third party could play a patient's parent or clinician's assistant. Students will be given the following scenarios to act out in their small groups. They should consider the available information about the patient's context. After 4 minutes, the class will reconvene to discuss what happened during their role-play and which elements they might want to keep or change for future patient interactions. They will then switch roles and continue with the next scenario!

- Scenario 1:

- Setting: Primary Care Practice
- You are meeting with a new cis female patient in her 20s. The patient is coming in for a prescription for birth control. When discussing her sexual history she notes that she had penetrative sex (penis and vagina) in the past. She mentions that she has a new cis male partner with whom she hasn't yet had sex. This partner doesn't know about her previous sexual experience. She asks the health care provider if her new partner will be able to tell that she has had sex before when they are intimate.
- What questions do you ask about her sexual health and history? What do you tell her about her concerns?

- Scenario 2:

- Setting: Pediatric Practice
- You are meeting with a teenage cis girl and her parent for an annual check-up. When finishing the check-up, the parent mentions that their daughter has a new cis-male boyfriend and is concerned about their (consensual) sexual relationship. The parent

does not want their daughter to initiate sexual intimacy until she is older/out of the house. They ask you if you can “test” or see if their daughter is a virgin.

- What do you tell the parent? What questions do you ask the patient about her sexual health and history? Do you ask the parent to leave the room? What practices do you feel you should recommend to the patient?

Scenario 3:

- Setting: Primary Care Practice
- You are meeting with a 35-year-old cis-woman, who has two children whom she delivered via vaginal births. You know this patient quite well. She says she read something on the internet about medical procedures that can “make her like a virgin again.”
- What do you say to her? What questions do you ask to see why she is asking this question? How do you approach this subject medically?

Scenario 4:

- Setting: Sexual Health Clinic
- You are meeting with a patient from the local community who is at your office for a routine STI screening. They are asymptomatic and are doing the screening as a preventative measure after having penetrative sex for the first time. During the exam and ensuing discussion, they let you know that they felt quite a bit of pain during sex but say “That’s what it’s supposed to be like, right?”
- What questions do you ask about their sexual health and history? What practices do you feel are important or less important to recommend, based on the circumstances of the visit? How do you address their comment?

● Scenario 5:

- Setting: University Student Health Center
- You are meeting with an intersex student in their early 20s who has been questioning their sexuality for a while. They express interest to you in sexual exploration for pleasure with people of various genders and are curious about the definitions of virginity that are associated with sex between people who do not conform to a cis male/cis female pair. They ask if someone can tell if they are a virgin.
- What questions do you ask about their concerns regarding virginity? Do you ask about their sexual preferences to inform your care? Does their identity as intersex influence your questioning at all? What do you recommend?

Additional Resources:

[Carpenter, Laura M. 2001. "The Ambiguity of 'Having Sex': The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States." *The Journal of Sex Research* 38 \(2\): 127–39. doi:10.1080/00224490109552080.](#)

Moussaoui, D., Abdulcadir, J. and Yaron, M. (2022), Hymen and virginity: What every paediatrician should know. *J Paediatr Child Health*, 58: 382-387. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpc.15887>

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003286523-7/concept-significance-virginity-neil-mcarthur>

[Virginity in Healthcare](#)