

Marissa Lang

I am currently in the midst of reading *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women* (by Jessica Valenti). It precludes itself as "A brave call to overhaul the way America measures young women's worth...(and a) call on all of us to put an end to the dangerous burden that falls on our girls to conform to impossible standards of purity." Valenti, founder and editor of Feministin.com – a blog site for the third-wave feminist woman—argues the expectations of virginity are ill founded, and merely the sexualizing of teen bodies, and the de-sexualization of the female adult, and womanhood.

On the one hand, I understand the holding of virginity until marriage. For many, I'm sure it decreases the amount of anxiety involved with emotions of sexual intimacy. It furthermore must create a bond of sanctity and exclusivity with future life-long mates. And, I, in fact do believe that some can adhere to the rules of caution that come with the title of "virgin." On the opposing spectrum, the practicing of virginity portrays a false positive. It implies that the body of an "untouched" woman is pure, Godly, and kept. That she is a dime amongst pennies, a throne of morality and the apple of the married man, is a stark contrast to her de-virginized counterpart. In fact, the sexually active woman -- aware of her choice, cognizant of her body—functions as the devil to the virgin woman's saint. She is the poster child for the unruly, mis-educated, mis-guided "wild child," reared by parents unable to direct their offspring down a path of stability.

This path of stability starts in the formative years, when daughters are offered (without choice) "purity rings" and the committal of practicing sexuality to the agenda of "purity balls," wherein fathers pledge to their daughters a protection as such:

*"I, (daughter's name)'s father, choose before God to cover my daughter as her authority and protection in the area of purity. I will be pure in my own life as a man, husband, and father. I*

Marissa Lang

*will be a man of integrity and accountability as I lead, guide, and pray over my daughters and as the high priest in my home. This covering will be used by God to influence generations to come.”* (Valenti: 66)

Sweet, right? (Minus the fact that 90% of these pledges are false in form because cheating is indicative of most marriages -- but that’s a conversation for a different day). This pledge solidifies the passing of a daughter’s (NEVER the son) sexuality into the hands of an approved second holder – or shall we say owner? The stronghold of the “my daughter MUST be a virgin” community is so overreaching that the allowance of HPV vaccinations are not permitted upon the signing of the pledge. This, as Judith Herman (Harvard clinical professor) argues, is “an abuse of patriarchal power” (Valenti: 69). For me, what is even more problematic than the ownership of young girl’s sexuality is the health risks involved in NOT addressing sexuality. Am I the only person who knows a teenager who conceived on her “first time?” What about when this precious, pure, and sexually unexpressive daughter leaves the confines of the home to attend college? Who will regulate her “between-the-leg” behaviors in terms of sexual safety?

As mentioned, I am mid-way through the book, and will certainly write a second blog upon its completion.

-Marissa

Valenti, Jessica. 2010. *The purity myth: how america's obsession with virginity is hurting young women*. Berkley, Seal press.