

are you too sexually experienced?

100% male perspective

According to some politicians, you should all be twentysomething virgins. By John Bastick

When Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott publicly declared virginity a “gift” in January, it provoked the inevitable shit-storm. Young feminists hit news websites ranting he had no right to be lecturing to anyone’s vagina. Older feminists begrudgingly agreed with him. Deputy PM Julia Gillard chimed in with “these comments will confirm the worst fears of Australian women”. In turn, Abbott supporters labelled Gillard as a childless spinster who didn’t know what she was on about.

For those who happened to miss it, Abbott said young women “should not give themselves away lightly” and was referencing his own teenage daughters. Incendiary or otherwise, what Abbott’s comments did prove was the debate over young people’s sex lives hasn’t quite been put to bed. And was he right? Should we value that “first time” more? Or is virginity more burden than blessing these days?

For most of us, that first sexual encounter is messy, largely forgettable, over in about three minutes, and rarely achieves the special life moment we dreamt of. But, says sexologist and therapist Tanya Koens, if it all goes crooked – we regret the partner or the circumstance – it can have real

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ramifications later on. Koens says a lot of the body image and intimacy issues she sees often relate back to people’s first sexual experiences. “For many women, the first time could be when they’re drunk at a party – it can almost border on sexual assault,” Koens says. “I often see women who had a traumatic time in their teens and they come back to me in their late 20s or early 30s still feeling guilty; they’re having trouble orgasming; they’re not enjoying sex, and it’s all traced back to the start of their sexual lives.”

Annie*, a 30-year-old mother of two, says she didn’t lose her virginity till her mid-twenties, to the man she ultimately married. “I grew up in a strict family, we never talked about sex,” she recalls. “Even now, I’d say I was very sexually inexperienced and, because of that, I don’t like sex, I don’t want sex, I hate it.”

Annie and her husband separated a year ago and she agrees the lack of intimacy was the root cause. “He was the only man I’d ever been with, he taught me, and then he leaves me because I don’t want it five times a day! I look back and have so many regrets. I think if I’d been more sexually adventurous [when I was younger], things wouldn’t have turned out the way they have.”

For blokes, being a virgin has never been cool. And it’s increasingly becoming that way for women too. Koens says, “[Virginity] has become a burden, it’s seen as something you need to get rid of as soon as possible. What I do think is that everybody else thinks everybody else is doing it, when actually there’s far more people in the same boat as them.”

There are no official stats on young Aussie kids’ sexual coming of age. The general consensus is that it’s getting younger, but not as much as the media may have us believe. Recent research found that over a half of first-year uni students were yet to pop their cherries.

Sex therapist and psychologist Bettina Arndt, author of *The Sex Diaries* (Octopus, \$22.98), agrees that we no longer prize virginity – men don’t want virgins, women don’t want to be them. Once viewed as pure and highly desirable, virgins are now seen as sexless and cold – even party-poopers.

“These days, kids will get to a certain age and they’ll do anything to get rid of it,” says Arndt. “But I still think there’s plenty of boy-girl romance going on, it’s still very special. Not everybody has adopted that cynical approach.”

When it comes to men no longer wanting to be with virginal women, Arndt says, “Men used to like the idea that she had nothing to compare him against. But most guys are no longer threatened by women, they want experience; it’s good for men’s egos to know they stack up pretty well. And a more experienced woman is going to result in better sex. Men want feedback in the bedroom and they feel they’re not going to get that from a virgin.”

Koens adds, “Men certainly don’t want their women to have had more partners than them! As a male friend of mine told me recently, ‘Virgins are annoying, they’re boring, they squeal and they stain the sheets.’” □
*Name has been changed.