Emily is a Virgin

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Abstract
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“But you’re like totally into feminism and seem to be so open to sexuality…I just… I just can’t believe you never once had sex!” [excerpt]

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EMILY IS A VIRGIN

September 16, 2013

“…but you, like, went to college for FOUR years–how did you not have sex??”

My friend stared at me, looking more like he’d just gotten back from witnessing a unicorn give birth than back from a night at the bar in St Paul where we had just been celebrating another Thursday under our belts.

“But you’re like totally into feminism and seem to be so open to sexuality…I just…I just can’t believe you never once had sex!”

Being back in my native state of Minnesota, reconnecting with friends I haven’t seen for the past four years has usually led to a series of “recaps” of my time out east, including some conversations (as noted above) where they assume, for multiple reasons, that I’ve had sex. And the conversation usually takes the same “Shock and Awe” path when I disclose the dirty secret that no, really, I haven’t.

Why is that so shocking?

Well, friends, here’s the culprit as I see it: The assumption that college equals sex.

As my friends know, I love talking about sex, sexuality and the gender dynamics of just about any situation. If I could have majored in “Courting Rituals of Humans,” I would have done so and then proceeded to bask in the glory of a PhD based solely on an intensive meditation on Fifty Shades of Grey.

What strikes me, however, is this large scale assumption that the focus of college is not just getting a B.A. in the classroom, but also mastering how to be Bad Ass in the boudoir. As if we didn’t just get accepted into an institution that will better us academically and professionally, but also received a Hogwarts-style invitation scroll to the Pennsylvania sequel of American Pie. That presumption is not even a totally “off base” assessment—a recent study at Harvard shows 72% enter college as virgins, and 73% leave laid and holding a degree.

The problem arises when it’s assumed that we, the unspoken Harvard 27%, who leave unlaid, are leaving unhappy or ashamed of our virginity.
I’ve had multiple conversations with people who have recounted that they were focused on having as much sex as possible during college in order to “get better” at it, or because “you can’t do that in the real world.” And, you know, I get it. If you want to be good at something, you gotta practice. How else would the mighty ducks have been so mighty?

But the overarching issue that seems to arise is that it’s assumed we as ripe “young adults” are wasting our time if we don’t dive head first into the pool of sexual opportunities the second we get back from Opening Convocation. As if every night from that point on that we decide to stay in—or we decide to say no—is another night that has been lost, and another opportunity to get “better” at sex that we stupidly turned down.

That’s some pretty severe pressure.

For dudes, the pressure to be great at sex is ridiculously prominent—car ads, sit-coms, movies—they all promote the belief that masculinity equals having sex and that ensuring your partner orgasms is even more important. Throw in a little added pressure to master your “skills” in the 28 months it takes to get a degree and you’ve got yourself a hefty sex time-crunch.

Many assume that because I’m confident with my sexuality and into feminism that I’ve already had sex. Fortunately, last time I checked the requirements for joining the fight to assure that women everywhere are entitled to rights to their bodies, my own personal vaginal penetration was not a prerequisite. In fact, I’m pretty sure my ability to say “hey, I think you’re sexy as hell, I’m totally digging this hookup, but I’m not going to have sex with you tonight” is something that everyone (regardless of gender) should have the right to say. Yet, the pressure to walk the line between slut-shaming and virgin-shaming wages on. We’ve gotten pretty good at rejecting the slut-blaming game, but when’s the last time we spoke up when insults like “wow, you need to get laid’ or “he’s probably a virgin” are thrown around?

If you’re gonna have sex, go for it. Kudos to you! If you’re ready, then get set and go! Being the unique little sexual snowflakes we are, we have the choice to use our bodies how we see fit. This isn’t about the need for abstinence, or safe sex (even though I hear safe sex is great!), or anything like that. I’m a grown ass woman who didn’t have sex during college and who is tired of explaining that no, it’s not a religious thing, it’s not because I’m a “loser” or “prude” or “scared.”

I really just didn’t feel like it.

And neither did the 27% of Harvard kids who graduated without a roll in the hay. That’s one virgin in four, which doesn’t sound like a unicorn spotting to me.

So I carry on with my 22 year-old virgin self, figuring out how to live without Servo cookies, and neurotically planning my next Instagram just like everyone else.

And remember, we didn’t all write a thesis. We didn’t all jump in the fountain by Stine Lake.

And, no, we didn’t all have sex.

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http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/emily-is-a-virgin/