

**Where Have All The Virgins Gone?**

Constructing and Deconstructing Female Sexual Citizenship in the Late Modern U.S.

Hilary Crowe

Capstone Advisor Dr. William Leap

Spring 2010

University Honors in Anthropology

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## ***Introduction***

***“One way to assess a woman’s autonomy is to ask whether she controls her own sexuality.”***

***—Alice Schlegel (1991: 719)***

For female-bodied individuals, the politics of their chastity is intimately connected to the politics of the nation. In capitalist economies, the best citizen is the most productive citizen—making money, spending money, and, the most important activity for capitalist societies, reproducing the means of production. Forty years ago Louis Althusser conferred on the Ideological State Apparatus the responsibility of such reproduction. In turn, the ISA has conferred that responsibility on women, in this case via procreation.

In late modernity, this fetishization of the procreative female body as the ideal citizen in capitalist societies has reached an observable apogee in the United States. While popular imagery and discourse surrounding the ideal female subject has historically privileged the chaste, submissive virgin, in late modernity, media—from popular film and television to magazines (*Esquire*, *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*) to advertising—attempt to interpellate young women first as sexualized and sexually active subjects. The media-mythologized, globally territorialized and reterritorialized image of the “American woman” is one who is sexually assertive (albeit until marriage). Women striving to reach the “American dream,” construct themselves as the ideal citizen by becoming the ideal consumer—the more one spends on clothing, make-up and hair care, the more desirable one will be.

If “sexually active” is the privileged, prescriptive status for young women in the U.S., then what is the status of those women who are not having sex? It is a recent development in late modernity that the only thing worse for a young woman than being typed promiscuous is being typed a virgin. Where the “slut” once stood, now stands the “virgin,” the new social pariah and bad citizen.

This paper is a discussion of how globalization and the accompanying specter of international homogenization has led to this reterritorialization and resultant fetishization of the “American Woman” in the U.S., how women have tried to rebel against such appropriation of their sexuality, and how holding on to one’s virginity may be an expression of disidentification from the state appropriation of female sexuality to further and fortify nationalism.

### ***Discursively Constructing the “Bad,” Virginal Citizen***

***“... [W]ith the collapse of other social values (religion, patriotism, family and so on) sex has been forced to take up the slack, to become our sole mode of transcendence, and our only touchstone of authenticity.”***

***—Edmund White (1980: 282)***

Both the idea and the fetishization of the “American Woman” is a global phenomenon and point of U.S. national pride aided by what Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong call globally circulated assemblages of technoscience<sup>1</sup> and licit/illicit exchange<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Technoscience can be defined as social, political, and artistic material technologies. It encapsulates everything from the circulation of images via advertising and media, to the circulation of personal information via online dating sites.

<sup>2</sup> Refers to the circulation of ideas, information, products and people, either legally (de facto or de jure) or illegally. Some examples of such exchanges: tourism, sex tourism, online movies, pornography, international trade theaters, and even a cellular phone call.

(2005): television series like “Sex & the City,” “Gossip Girl,” and especially “Baywatch”; Hollywood films like *Pretty Woman*, *American Beauty*, and most recently *Transformers* (specifically Megan Fox’s role); pornography stars like Jenna Jameson and Sasha Grey<sup>3</sup>; music (Lenny Kravitz’s “American Woman,” for one), internet dating, and advertising, etc. These assemblages circulate and eventually “return” (more realistically they are constantly, multi-directionally being amended via commerce of technoscience) to the U.S. and become codified as “truth” in the popular U.S. imagination: the American Woman is a bombshell, dropped from internet, television, and airwaves from East to West with as much fervor and love-of-country as any other Government Issue weapon of destruction. This imagined truth then finds crystallization in systems of administration and governance, as well as the resultant American regime of self-governance, in the form of ethics and values.

Sociologist David T. Evans writes that sexuality in late modernity has become ever more tied to the public life of the state:

There has been a sexualisation of late twentieth-century first world capitalist cultures but, behind the distracting verdicts of experts who claim via labels such as the Sexual Fix (Heath 1982) and Sex Religion (Greer 1984) that sexuality is a private escape from the alienation of the public material world, it is clear that in many and various guises, it is formally and customarily institutionalised and incorporated within the latter. (1993: 2)

For an expression of the late-modern U.S.’s ethics and values, one need look no further than the men’s and women’s magazine industry. The industry is hyper-vigilant of women who do not throw themselves into bed with a man, and takes sexual aspirations as a given among all good, desirable women. Take for example an article titled “Where

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<sup>3</sup> Further muddling the lines of global media exchange, Grey crossed over from porn to Hollywood by starring in Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh’s 2009 film *The Girlfriend Experience*, which followed a high-priced call girl living “the good life” in New York City.

Have All the Loose Women Gone?,” wherein pop culture scholar and Esquire Magazine<sup>4</sup> columnist Stephen Marche laments the rise of the cold, sexually inactive career woman and posits the titular question out of frustration. (June 2009) As a student and practitioner of print journalism, as well as a long time reader of Esquire, I find this article to be the most transparent and rich example of patriarchal ritualistic attack of the bad female sexual citizen, i.e. she whose (hetero)sexuality is neither her chief identity nor the self-definition of her own worth.

Marche brings the brunt of his case against the creator and star of “30 Rock,” Tina Fey. Among her character Liz Lemon’s crimes, “She admits to losing her virginity at twenty-five and accidentally reveals that she doesn’t believe people can have intercourse standing up.” (2009: 48) Instead of pursuing men, the plot of “30 Rock” intimates that Lemon was busy building her television career and worked her way up to executive level; the show is also explicit about the fact that Lemon simply is not interested in sex. Marche cannot—will not, rather—accept this as an identity for modern women:

A mere decade ago, *Seinfeld*’s Elaine Benes was hilarious, smart, familiar with Russian novelists, an aggressive and demanding professional, and a woman who fooled around a lot. The *Sex and the City* fantasia of fin de siècle Manhattan broke women’s desires into separable components — status, career, money — but sooner or later every conversation between the four principals came back to who’s doing what with whom, how well, and how often. Compare that with Liz and her workplace foils: Jenna Maroney, whose attempts to “use her sexuality” ritualistically end in disaster, and the appropriately named Cerie Xerox, full of bra but empty of head. *30 Rock*’s message wouldn’t be out of place in a Bush-era high school abstinence rap session. (2009: 48)

The message to which Marche refers is that sex (with men) need not be a central component to a woman’s fulfilled life. That the blonde sex object-character of Cerie Xerox be utilized as a butt-of-the-joke foil to Lemon’s intelligent, self-satisfied woman,

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<sup>4</sup> Hearst-published since 1933, Esquire is a monthly men’s magazine whose target market is upwardly mobile young and established older professionals.

for Marche, is on par with the intolerant, finger-pointing fundamentalism of Christian evangelicals (as evangelical Christians were among President Bush's main supporters and personal advisers). Further, Marche's concluding paragraph reads like a self-centered eulogy, turning women's battles with the consequences of feminism (for full economic and sexual emancipation in this case, and in late modernity, still assumes the form of Lacan's unattainable desire, *objet petit a*) into the American male's ultimate tragedy:

Until now, feminism has been the best thing that ever happened to us, because it means we get to sleep with people rather than ciphers. And in some places in the world, feminism is still working that magic. (When the Sri Ram Sena, India's version of the Taliban, started attacking single women in bars for immorality, a women's group called the "Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose, and Forward Women" formed in opposition, flooding the religious fanatics' offices with forty thousand pairs of pink panties.) Here in America, with the battle of the sexes more or less over, women now have to struggle against the tide of money fixation and status obsession that threatens to turn them into mannequins distinct from the plastic variety only insofar as they can pose themselves. And for men, it's a struggle against the despair we face when looking over the pickings of the bar, thinking, "They're all the same" because they are. (2009: 54)

Here, Marche's bigotry goes from veiled to explicit. First, he reduces feminism to a movement that concerns itself only with sexual emancipation, a new freedom which benefitted men in that they became more interesting and demanding sexually. This is problematic in the way that even the term "feminism" has become problematic and in late modernity, via chains of equivalence particular to late modernity, an empty signifier. Marche ignores that the specific type of feminism he regards as Feminism with a capital F is sex-positive feminism, which is met with much ire from the sex-negative feminists and other feminists who interpret sexually aggressive feminists as behaving in a way that downplays and even obfuscates the political and economic emancipation that is the other half (at least) of Feminism, which is exactly what Marche does here.

Further, by praising the "Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose, and Forward Women" in India for territorializing the West's regime of ethics and values about acceptable

female behavior, Marche communicates that the only acceptable type of woman in the world is the loose, forward type of woman. As I will elucidate further in a later part of this paper, female sexual emancipation (be that in dress or in behavior) has become the litmus test by which the degree of modernity of all non-Western countries are judged.

It is in the last two sentences, however, that Marche delivers his fatal, hypocritical blow. Just after he proclaims the battle of the sexes to be “more or less over,” Marche attacks women who “have to struggle against the tide of money fixation and status obsession that threatens to turn them into mannequins.” What is this struggle to which Marche refers? Rather than an acknowledgment of the duplicitous consequences of feminism—men refusing to see career woman as sexual and sexual women as career-oriented—and rather than viewing socioeconomically aggressive women as equal to men, Marche intimates that women are only interesting, human even, when they are sexually aggressive. Never mind that *Esquire* is a lifestyle magazine full of luxury goods advertisements, fashion columns, and columns about social and professional status (see *Esquire*’s fiction editor and writer at large Tom Chiarella’s entire body of work for the magazine), for men are allowed to be status-driven and proud to show it via purchasing power. For Marche, who is trying to persuade other male readers of *Esquire* to follow his line of thought, the only acceptable identity for a woman is sexual; it is only by entering into sexual commerce with a man does a woman stand out in the crowd at the bar and render false the accusation that “They are all the same.”

Meanwhile, there is evidence that women are not all the same money-hungry, professional social-ladder climbers, but they might even be all the same sexually. On the cover of the very same issue in which Marche’s eulogy was published, *Transformers* star

and current Hollywood pin-up Megan Fox wears black lingerie barely concealed by a waist-cinching trench coat, legs spread, breasts out, eyes commanding the gaze of potential readers. The accompanying teaser for the cover story reads “Megan Fox-ing: 10 Pages on THE Woman of Summer ’09.” In the article, Fox discusses how she’s extraordinarily sexual, that “nothing’s off limits.” (Katz 2009) Not that that answers Marche’s question, but *Esquire* is full of features which celebrate, if not explicitly “loose” women, women who wear underwear, heavy eye make-up, waist-length hair, and roll around in bed sheets for the magazine’s photo shoots on a monthly basis while discussing their sexual proclivities in thinly veiled innuendo.

Further evidence that loose women are no more an endangered species (so to speak) than “uptight” women is on the June 2009 cover of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. “Gossip Girl” star Leighton Meester poses in strapless, hot pink cocktail dress, one arm bent, hand resting on jutting hip, the other guiding the potential reader’s eye down to her pelvic region, where her hand rests in the hot pink folds of her dress. Teased features include “Your Sexiest Summer” and “Best. Sex. Ever.: Our Gutsy New Tips are Guaranteed to Give Him the Most Bad Ass Orgasm Imaginable. And You Too!” As if the female orgasm were not after thought enough, *Cosmopolitan* explicates as much in this teaser for an article which attempts to further interpellate young women into a code of bedroom conduct which positions the male orgasm as the highest achievement in (hetero)sexual intercourse and as the ultimate validation of, to borrow a term from Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, gender honor. (2006: 47) This “loose” women-serving women’s magazine offers a striking counter point to Marche’s elegy, especially since both *Esquire* and *Cosmopolitan* are published by Hearst Magazines.

Not all consumers of *Cosmopolitan* are sexually active, however, the Magazine joins *Esquire* in attempting to naturalize (hetero)sexually active femininity and interpellate women as naturalized, willing participants in the heterosexual sex act. That Leighton Meester is 23 years old and that “*Gossip Girl*’s” primary audience is young women, teenagers to early-mid twenties is further proof that the targeted audience for this interpellation is college-age young women—their idealized self-portrait is hailing them from newsstands and mailboxes in the form of Meester-as-cover girl.

Such interpellative media develops and perpetuates a code of gender honor and furnishes consumers with rules, tricks, and “tips,” as the *Cosmo* teases, on how to achieve such idealized identity. Taylor writes, “As Bordo (1993) notes, women collude to maintain femininity because social honor is bound up in accepting the confines of their gender.” She continues: (2006: 47)

Women’s gender identity, and so their gender honor, is also strongly linked to sexuality. Most discussions of women’s gender honor have focused on its traditional links to sexual purity and passivity (a woman has traditionally de-gendered, and so dishonored, herself by taking a “promiscuous”, active, or instrumental approach to sexual life). However, women are nonetheless required to have a heterosexual sexual identity in order to attain gender honor, so that investing in social ideals of “femininity” means investing in social ideals of female heterosexuality. Since social honor is awarded to those who uphold the idealized attributes of their perceived gender roles, heterosexual women who are considered undesirable to men, or who are unattached, as well as lesbians, are often at risk of losing honor within their community in just the same way that men who do not conform to masculine norms are often dishonored.

As such, “heterosexual sex remains a medium for social affirmation for women as well as men.” (Taylor 2006: 48) But, as Taylor observes, to achieve gender honor one must be desired by the opposite sex, and to achieve desirability, one must invest (economically and psychologically) in one’s appearances.

In her study of 18<sup>th</sup> century reproductive policy, Ludmilla Jordanova reaches conclusions about popular publications of the time that parallel the trend I have just illustrated in today's mass media. As Jordanova explains,

The large number of popular publications about conception, pregnancy, child rearing, and sexual behavior generally bear testimony to the significance placed on reproduction by powerful interests. Indeed, many of these works stressed the need for a larger or better population (or both), the positive consequences of growing nations made up of healthy people, and the responsibility of parents to reproduce appropriately. (1995: 377)

The first step in each of the listed priorities is becoming sexually desirable and active, qualities in turn stressed by the likes of Cosmo, Esquire, and myriad television programs and films today. The point of such publications, both in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, is that “those who saw safe, healthy, appropriate reproduction as an important political goal promoted their ideas by trying to cultivate powerful emotions, both positive and negative, and then to invest them in particular forms of behavior.” (Jordanova 1995: 377)

### ***Welcome to Modernity: Devaluing Virginity, Monetizing Sex***

*Is the history of sexuality a history of progress and if so what kind?*

—David T. Evans (1993: 12)

Economics and sexual politics go hand in hand. Sociologists David G. Berger and Morton G. Wenger held that “the ideology of virginity seems quite ‘functional’ for both sexes in a society where women have little economic power vis-à-vis men,” and, writing in 1973, that “the ideology will show a progressive decline in support over time and that this will correlate with women's economic rise.” (1973: 667)

Jordanova's analysis of 18<sup>th</sup> century sexual politics provides an interpretive backdrop to Berger and Wenger's hypothesis, as she shows how political economics and the primacy of the heterosexual, reproductive family unit have grown up together. Patrilineal bloodlines have historically reflected the transfer of individual and state wealth, so much so that "the legal system, political theories, and reproductive behavior were simply different aspects of a single line of thought." "This mentality placed a burden on mothers to guarantee the legitimacy of their children in order that property went only to those entitled to it." (1995: 376) Thus, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, women were economically dependent on their reproductive ability. In this respect, the individual family model can be likened to the model of monarchic governmental authority:

If the king was like a father, and vice versa, then begetting children was analogous to the exercise of political power. And if, as some argued, fathers were little kings, their procreative acts endowed them with power over others—wives, children, and servants. (1995: 375)

Until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. post-1950s modernity, many women were economically dependent upon men. There were of course exceptions then, as there are women now who are economically dependent upon men (e.g., housewives without a trust fund/inheritance/individual savings account), but for the most part a woman's status in society was linked to her male counterpart's. Modernity saw the invention and widespread adoption of household appliances and convenience foods that made mothers' housework less time consuming and allowed them to devote more time to developing careers and contributing to the family's finance. In modernity, women no longer relied on their biologically reproductive abilities to afford them a future. To be modern, then, is to adopt increasingly liberal, emancipatory ideology regarding women's sexual, corporeal freedom.

Ayşe Parla offers one example of this in her article about State-sanctioned virginity examinations in Turkey. Parla acknowledges that the examinations are “condemned as proof of our failure in attaining the desirable degree of modernity” even by Turkish citizens, (2001: 66) and that women have been singled out as the “loci of backwardness,” (2001: 71) and as such are the site of much of the nation’s efforts to modernize. Regarding State loosening of the (female) chastity belt as an index of modernity, Parla notes that it is a territorialization of Western assemblages of ethics and values:

Turkey has been acclaimed, by Western and Turkish scholars alike, as having a pioneering role among Middle Eastern countries in the “modernization race.” Some of the most commonly cited achievements of Turkish modernization include reforms pertaining to women and the family, such as the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926 which replaced the Muslim family law, woman’s suffrage in 1934, the nationwide campaign for women’s education, and the shedding of the veil. Whatever their merits, the concomitant rhetoric of these reforms has invariably been our performance in the marathon to modernity. The notion is troubling because it presumes a singular and inevitable trajectory that Western nations seemingly completed, and which all other nations are compelled to follow. (2001: 70)

The U.S.-disseminated assemblage of ethics and values (via technoscience and licit/illicit exchange) is the measuring stick of modernity, and one of the most demonstrable, observable, and frequently cited evidence of non-Western, industrializing nations’ place in the modernization race is degree of female sexual and economic emancipation. (See Marche’s extolment of India’s “Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose, and Forward Women” quoted on page four of this paper.)

In her work twenty years later, anthropologist Alice Schlegel also links cultural devaluation of virginity to the economic emancipation of women in the late modern moment. When female bodied individuals’ intact hymens or tribal marks of honor—tattoos which communicate the marked’s virginity—are no longer swapped and

exchanged as tribal tender, when economic transaction is no longer conflated with marriage, the virgin imperative is lost. “Sexual permissiveness is shown to be associated with ... [structural or cultural features like] high female economic contribution, [and] little or no property exchange at marriage...” (Schlegel 1991: 721)

These three structural cultural factors are undeniably present in the U.S., especially for the population I am specifically analyzing in this paper: young, white, college-age (aged 18 to 25) women. Women have been out of the house and in the workplace for more than four decades now. While their earning power and the infamous glass ceiling restrict economic advancement comparable to male-bodied individuals, there is little to no property exchange at marriage—dowries are not arranged (among my population of study) and prenuptial agreements may even be signed. The extent of the economic transaction via marriage often amounts to a shared residence and a joint bank account.

Schlegel further links female economic independence and reproductive autonomy, concluding “There should be less concern over virginity when sexual intercourse is not likely to lead to pregnancy than when it is.” (1991: 729) In relation to the U.S., she writes:

With readily available contraception and abortion, extramarital sexual relations do not have to result in pregnancy or illegitimate birth. Even if a paternity claim is pressed, there is no obligation in our individual-centered society to honor it, as economic opportunities for women as well as welfare payments by the state make it possible to support a child without a husband.

She continues:

Most commentators on the sexual revolution point to the availability of new contraception and abortion technology as the deciding factor in the changing of our sexual habits. But contraception and abortion have a long history in civilization; techniques to reduce fertility have been known and used in Europe for centuries, albeit clandestinely. Technology alone, without significant changes in social relations, is not

enough to alter such deep-seated cultural values as the value on virginity. As marriage transactions disappear and social status is gained more through achievement than through the family into which one is born or marries, parental control over marriage declines and disappears. The choice of a son-in-law is no longer a central concern, and the virginity of daughters loses its salience. (1991: 732)

Here, Schlegel is careful not to hinge the devaluation of virginity on technoscience alone. Instead, she speaks of “significant changes in social relations.” These ambiguously referenced “changes” can be read as the effects of globalization, i.e. (re)territorialization, in the neoliberal moment. In the last two lines of the above quote, Schlegel illustrates that in cultures where individual achievement of status is prized, self-determination through choice is permitted. Individualism and choice (whether ideologically constructed and perceived or effectually real) are hallmarks of late modern neoliberal subjectivity. According to Helga Leitner, et al, “A neoliberal subjectivity has emerged that normalizes the logics of individualism and entrepreneurialism, equating individual freedom with self-interested choices, making individuals responsible for their own well-being, and redefining citizens as consumers and clients.” (2007: 1-2)

In the interest of honoring thy gender, expressions of sexuality, particularly for women, are wrapped in consumerist ideology by the capitalistic State:

Capitalism encourages us to purchase our sexual identities and lifestyles and impels us to conclude that we are right to do so. In response the state is not a passive actor. It neither simply resists nor retreats. Rather it concedes relative and partial rights to “deviant” sexual minorities, investing them with particular, limited forms of gender/consumer power, i.e. sexual citizenship. (Evans 1993: Foreword)

Again, I return to my own experience with the Hearst publishing empire for print examples of glossy advertisements, wherein women cling to men because they are wearing Giorgio Armani’s cologne and men cling to women because they are wearing Christian Dior’s perfume. On television, women are inundated with similar ads, the hailing quite literal. In a September 2008 CoverGirl television spot, comedian, American

Express spokeswoman, day time talk show host, and out lesbian Ellen DeGeneres quips “Inner beauty is important, but not nearly as important as outer beauty. That’s why I use CoverGirl’s new Simply Ageless make-up with Olay Regenerist serum.” And DeGeneres is correct; CoverGirl uses Ellen’s humor to say what other advertisers only allude to, and capitalist America’s neoliberal subjectivity naturalizes the admission. That an out lesbian could be used to spearhead a campaign aimed at women concerned with looking young and beautiful is a phenomenon of late modernity, furnished by a level of acceptance afforded by capitalism: So long as DeGeneres consumes make-up and sells it—keeps the flow of money from consumer to producer in tact and booming—we can overlook and even forgive her bad sexual citizenry, that is, her expressed lesbian identity and hence rejection of traditional procreative narratives attached to female sexual expression. Under capitalism, the details of her sexuality are irrelevant. For DeGeneres and other would-be offenders, capitalism serves as the great equalizer, the universal solvent by which social sins are dissolved.

These make-up advertisements interpellate women to feel uncomfortable in their own skin, quite literally. Maybelline, CoverGirl, Estee Lauder and Clinique advertisements promise smooth, glowing, youthful (white) skin and glossy, plump red lips if one uses their products intended to conceal, cover, and mask the biological signs of aging, and the diversity of humanity. These ads use women (lesbians included, given Ellen’s example) to interpellate other women to believe that without the proper hair care, clothing, and bath products to signify heightened, binary-adherent sexual difference, it would be impossible for them to inspire (hetero)sexual desire in men and thus achieve the gender honor necessary to become a good (sexual) citizen of the late modern U.S.

For women like “30 Rock’s” fictional Liz Lemon who choose to focus on professional and social aspects of life rather than the sexual, participating in the consumerism required to keep up appearances of heightened sexual difference becomes more of a non-priority; Lemon’s abysmal, indeed “mannish,” wardrobe is a running joke on the show. For every interpellative advertisement, there is a makeover show dedicated to transforming harried career women into pressed, polished, and good, sexy citizens of modernity (“What Not To Wear,” “How Do I Look?,” “Extreme Makeover,” “10 Years Younger,” etc.). By not participating in sexual commerce, these women are seen as not participating in material economic commerce (specifically that of keeping up appearances), and thus are not good capitalist consumers. Without expressed commitment to capitalism via visual cues (coiffure, makeup, dress), the bad sexual citizenry of the non-sexually explicit female cannot be absolved.

### ***Reterritorialization and Fetishization: Safeguarding the Nation in Globalization***

***“...[T]he overarching signifier in the service of which the sign of women functioned was no longer the empire, nor Islam, but rather the nation-state.”***

***—Ayse Parla (2001: 71)***

Stephen J. Colier and Aihwa Ong list four “abstractable, mobile, and dynamic” phenomena responsible for reconstituting “‘society,’ ‘culture,’ and ‘economy,’ those classic social scientific abstractions”: technoscience, circuits of licit and illicit exchange, systems of administration or governance, and regimes of ethics or values. (2005: 4)

These ‘global assemblages’ are sites for the formation and reformation of ... *anthropological problems*. They are domains in which the forms and values of individual

and collective existence are problematized or at stake, in the sense that they are subject to technological, political, and ethical reflection and intervention. (Collier and Ong 2005: 4)

By going to the site and the moment of territorialization—the process of integrating global assemblages with local and/or regional culture—one can analyze what is at stake, which is to say, the perceived specter of cultural homogenization in the face of globalization. In the U.S., all four assemblages become re-territorialized and collude to inform U.S. sexual citizenship, as well as nationalistic pride in a uniquely—that is to say individualistic and independent—American identity. The most circulated image of Americanness is that of the “American Woman.”

I have mentioned “Baywatch” already, but it is a particularly illustrative example of how U.S. media colludes with technoscience and licit and illicit exchange to produce globally territorialized regimes of values. The series, which aired from 1989 to 1999 and was last resyndicated in Hungary in 2005, holds the title of Largest T.V. Audience for a Series in the Guinness Book of World Records: “Tested at its peak of popularity, ‘Baywatch’ (NBC, then syndicated, USA) became the most widely viewed TV series in the world ever, with an estimated weekly audience of more than 1.1 billion in 142 countries in 1996. Covering every continent bar Antarctica, the show has since been seen in 148 countries and translated into 44 languages.” (Guinness World Records 2008)

By now, the series and its star, Pamela Anderson, are known the world over and have enjoyed numerous pop cultural references related to the tongue-in-cheek irony of its exaggerated take on the quintessentially American lives of its lifeguard characters. As a result, Anderson’s character C.J. Parker, and indeed Anderson herself, has become the ideal American Woman: athletic, tan, platinum blonde, and armed with famously fake

breasts. The Anderson-American Woman has become fetishized abroad and reintroduced to U.S. culture as a global symbol of American femininity.

Though “Baywatch” may not be quite as popular in 2009 as in the previous decade, the international cultural/comical significance of the “Baywatch” phenomenon was not lost on British comedian and actor Sacha Baron Cohen. In a filmic example of reterritorialization, the popular and controversial 2006 film *Borat* features Cohen as the titular character, a journalist from Kazakhstan who sets out to live and learn in America. The larger goal of his project is to return to his home country with knowledge of American culture to “Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” as the film’s subtitle suggests. While in the U.S., Borat watches an episode of Baywatch and falls in love with Anderson, culminating in the film’s climax wherein Borat accosts Anderson, tackling her at a book signing and asking for her hand in marriage. For Borat, to marry Anderson and sexually possess the poster woman of American female sexuality is to acquire an authentic U.S. citizenship. Here, Anderson is not woman but metonymy; one part of the whole, she comes to symbolize America herself.

Cohen’s observation and subsequent mockery of an outsider’s conflation of American women and American ideals, indeed of female sexuality and national patriotism, is apt. But such a purposeful conflation also takes place within nation-states by their own sexual citizens. Where I have used Parla’s research to support the claim that a liberal attitude toward female sexual freedom is one index of a nation’s claim to modernity, with regards to unveiling, Parla’s research also offers strong supporting evidence for nationalistic investment in female sexuality, and how the State goes about

regulating and disseminating ideology to meet such ends. Of virginity examinations in Turkey, she writes:

Neither throwbacks to tradition nor protections thereof, virginity examinations must be viewed as a particularly modern form of institutionalized violence used to secure the sign of the modern and/but chaste woman, fashioned by the modernization project embarked on by the Turkish nationalist elite... The state's routinized intrusion into women's bodies comprises a fundamental facet of its sovereign claim over social relations in the name of the nation. (Parla 2001: 66)

In Turkey, the female body does not belong to the female-bodied individual. Rather, it belongs jointly to her male-bodied family members in as much as they are the vanguard of the state, for they must monitor their sisters, wives, and daughters on behalf of the honorable Turkish state. Exercising patriarchal national ownership of the female body—further, female sexuality—comes to a head in the case of sexual assault. “The woman's body under sexual attack ... is construed not as a violation of individual rights, but of the family order.” (Parla 2001: 77) The family order is the Turkish order. In this instance, for female-bodied individuals, the politics of their chastity is intimately connected to the politics of the nation.

Veena Das' study of the official 1947 partition of India reveals a similar linkage between sexual assault or violation and perceived attack on the nation, wherein “the woman's body became a sign through which men communicated with each other.” (1995: 212) Of the conflict's effect on women, Das writes

The lives of women were framed by the notion that they were to bear permanent witness to the violence. Thus the political program of creating two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed on the bodies of women. The sexual and reproductive violence cannot be understood as part of the discourse of family alone. It has to be understood as doubly articulated in the domain of kinship and in the domain of politics. (1995:212)

As Das explains, the messy partition of two nation-states (one Hindu, the other Muslim) led to battles over boundaries' manifestation in the battle over wombs. Pakistani

men abducted Indian women, and Indian men abducted Pakistani women. Since the conflict between Indian Hindus and Pakistani Muslims over national boundaries first began in 1946, thousands of children had been born to abducted women. When the Indian Constituent Assembly on the Abducted Persons Act completed the recovery of Muslim women to Pakistan and Hindu women to India in 1951, the two nations remained unsatisfied: their women had been tainted, and the resultant children belonged to neither nation—refugees by conception and birth. (Das 1995: 216)

Das writes, “For the new nation-states of India and Pakistan, the recovery of abducted women and children was a matter of national honor.” (1995: 219) Das goes on to connect national honor to “the preservation of purity of the population.” (1995: 221) In this instance purity does not mean sexually inexperienced or “virginal,” but untouched by the “wrong” sexual partners—Indian men with Pakistani women, and Pakistani men with Indian women. Indeed, the hope was that recovered women would resume sexual activity with the “right” sexual partners, following nationalistic procreative teleology:

The [Assembly’s] interest in women, however, was premised upon their definition not as citizens but as sexual and reproductive beings. The honor of the nation was at stake because women as sexual and reproductive beings were forcibly held by the other side. This emphasis was explicit in the demands made by several members: not only should the recovery of women on both sides be more or less equal but also women in their reproductive years should be “recovered.” (Das 1995: 221)

Here, Das supports her conclusion that in the partition of India, “Women were redefined as semiotic objects on which the actions of the state were inscribed.” (1995: 222)

However, Das is not alone in identifying state appropriation of women as symbols of national fecundity.

In the U.S., Leith Mullings reaches similarly compelling conclusions about American nationalism’s historical appropriation of symbolic female reproductivity in her

article “Households Headed by Women.” (1995) Mullings writes that xenophobic nationalism’s only defense against the Other(s) lies in the womb. As she explains,

For elite Euro-American women, motherhood has been a major defining element of gender identity. Women as mothers—who are involved in both biological and cultural reproduction—become master symbols of family, race, and civility, and are central to the authorized definition of the national community. When boundaries are threatened, rhetoric about fertility and population control escalates, and native Euro-American women, preferably those of the dominant class, are exhorted to have children. (Mullings 1995: 129)

An oft noted example of urging women to fill their wombs and eventually their nation-state’s streets with the ideal citizens is the Lebensborn program of Nazi Germany, wherein blond-haired, blue-eyed women and men—deemed biologically fit and racially pure—were encouraged to procreate. The mission was to multiply the master race. Founded in 1935, the program seems a distant memory of another country’s demonic leadership. But Mullings illustrates how such procreation-minded nationalism is alive and well in U.S. politics:

In the face of rising discontent with the widening division of wealth and challenges to cultural hegemony, and as international migrations again modify the face of the United States,<sup>5</sup> the oratory of the 1992 Republican Convention bore a striking resemblance to Nazi rhetoric, which demanded motherhood for the “mothers of the master race” versus compulsory sterilization for others, and “race hygienic sterilization ... [as] a prelude to mass murder.” Along with a call to arms for “a culture war ... for the soul of America,” “family values” became a ringing slogan at the Republican Convention. (1995: 130)

Both going along with and beyond Mullings, I would argue that women do not just “become” symbols of American patriarchal ideals of family, race and civility but are interpellated and created as such; to describe the process as a becoming is to remove and desensitize subjects of the power the State holds over such symbolic appropriation.

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<sup>5</sup> In February 1998, the New York Times reported that the number of babies being born to Hispanic women in the U.S. had reached 18 percent of the total number of births, the headline announcing “Hispanic Births in U.S. Reach Record High.” In December 2006, in a story headlined “Katrina Begets a Baby Boom by Immigrants,” the Times reported that a rising “uninsured and indigent” population was reconfiguring the social demographics of New Orleans, a “historically black and white city.”

Virginity examinations and resultant honor killings are neither explicitly legally nor tacitly sanctioned in U.S. culture. The U.S. instead relies on the interpellation of women by less explicit ideological mandates on sexuality, as I have previously outlined.

Rather than relying on a legal system to control women, homegrown and re-circulated assemblages of technoscience and licit/illicit exchange (television, Hollywood films, pornography, internet dating, advertising, etc.) keep women in line, marching steadily, obediently toward nationalistic, symbolic, sexually active ends. Here, consequences and mechanisms of globalization are both cause and cure of the threat of the Other(s). As Mullings observes,

Today, with labor and capital moving around the globe, race, class, and gender, as well as nationality, define boundaries to be held, reclaimed, or challenged. In the global context of population policies, disease, and disasters of all kinds, local populations seek to envision continuity through children and act to ensure that continuity. (1995: 122-3)

I would, however, add sexuality to this list of battlegrounds, thus foregrounding the importance of sexual activity in defining and continuing the nation-state's army of "good" citizens. Overt sexuality—and the Western imperative to be sexually active to be a "good" woman—is a culturally readable sign of the female-bodied individual's commitment of said body to fulfilling the will of her globalized nation-state.

But what if some women break free from the phalanx? Why and how might they disidentify with the national calling to be a good, sexually active citizen? According to Althusser, "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing." (1970) That some young, college-age women remain virgins—they choose to abstain from sexual activity—is proof that ideology and interpellation are not always simultaneous. Rather, the subject/citizen of the late modern State does retain some Sartrean choice in self-determination.

***P.K.'s Interview: Virginity as Disidentification***

***“I resent that some women feel that they should have to... get all like, dressed up sexy, to attract members of the opposite sex to, like, partake in this ridiculous fantasy of like, glitz-and-glam sex.”***

**—P.K.**

I argue that conscious virginity<sup>6</sup>, which is to say that it is a personal choice outside of a religious vow<sup>7</sup> to abstain from sexual activity, is an available form of disidentification and may be evidence of a degree of self-determination exercised by young heterosexual women. Linguist and student of Althusser, Michel Pêcheux posits multiple subject positions in reaction to ideology, in this case articulated through discursive formations (DFs). (1982) Where Althusser holds that subjects are to a large extent predetermined by ideology, Pêcheux extends the caveat that although some subjects may identify/accept a dominant DF, i.e. ideology, (“identification,” i.e. “good” subjectivity), others may distance themselves by discursively marking a DF as other. Here, in “counteridentification,” subjects deny the situational validity of a DF, but do not actively displace it with a new, more particular one. In doing so, they reify the power of dominant ideology by accepting and relying upon the “evidentness of meaning” by which the dominant DF functions, and so do not completely disidentify with the ideology.

Where replacement of a dominant DF by a new one occurs, a third subject position is possible: “disidentification.” Disidentification for Pêcheux involves “the

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<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this section, I will adopt P.K.’s definition of “virgin”, which is a female-bodied heterosexual woman who has not been vaginally penetrated and stimulated by a penis to the point of climax. Virginity, here, is the state of being a virgin.

<sup>7</sup> I exclude virginity rooted in religious commitment because religion is historically a key characteristic of the nation state. A religious commitment to abstain from sexual intercourse is a commitment made not to oneself but to one’s deity, and in some cases one’s nation as well, thereby ascribing to rather than rejecting dominant discursive formations and a subjectivity required for “good” sexual citizenship.

‘overthrow-rearrangement’ of the complex of ideological formations (and of the discursive formations which are imbricated with them)’; it “constitutes a working (transformation-displacement) of the subject form and not just its abolition.” (1982: 159)

Studying such disidentification at the site and in the moment furnishes concrete, primary examples of how young women negotiate expression of their sexualities in late modernity. I decided to interview two heterosexual, female-bodied individuals with whom I am closest and who inspired my interest in analyzing this relatively new discourse on “good” and “bad” female sexual citizenship. In my interview with P.K., a 21-year-old heterosexual female college student who still has her virginity<sup>8</sup> and is someone I have known for nearly three years now, P.K. exhibited a complex re-working of the dominant ideology, which in her view compels young, heterosexual women her age to be sexually active.

**HC** Do you think there is a place in society for those who some people would label virgins, I know you don’t like that label, but do you think there is a place for people like that? And or a place for people such as yourself who just haven’t had sex yet, such that they can be understood aside from the stereotype that “But you’re too normal to be a virgin?”

**P.K.** That is generally the reaction, that is “But you’re so normal!” and that’s not what it’s about, and I think you’re misunderstanding it. I mean like, I don’t even know, cause it’s one of those things where it’s like... there’s a certain age where you reach—I don’t know what that age would be—where people—like *The 40 Year Old Virgin* is a movie, and like, yeah there’s a reason that that’s funny, like it’s, he’s ridiculous, he’s like socially awkward and stuff, but like, there are totally people who are 40 and haven’t had sex, and it’s not because they’re like weird and awkward. And like, I mean, I don’t know, I guess our purpose is to mate, right? So if you’re not mating then there’s something wrong with you. So like, in a society where marriage is becoming less of a focus, we rather that you just have sex. If you’re not going to get married then that’s fine, but please have sex because it’s confusing to us otherwise.

Here, P.K. acknowledges that to be understood in U.S. society, that is to be an intelligible sexual subject, one must be a good, sexually active citizen. If one is not, if one

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<sup>8</sup> P.K. prefers not to call herself a virgin, as she views the label as limiting: “I just think that that’s a word that’s too strong because I think it’s defining a person by their sexual status, which I think is bullshit.”

instead exhibits characteristics of a bad sexual citizen, one risks being a social pariah, an outlier. Here, much of P.K.'s response is similar to Taylor's idea of gender honor and heterosexual sex<sup>9</sup>. As Taylor has noted, "heterosexual sex remains a medium for social affirmation for women as well as men." (2006: 48) If one is not having sex, P.K. states, one is unreadable not only as a validated member of society but as a woman, as well. I asked her how still having her virginity makes her feel about her status as "woman."

**P.K.** I don't know, 'cause, I don't know how much... [sighs] I don't know, it's kind of like the Madonna and the whore thing. Um, I kind of think that... I think that I'm in a weird situation because, the general perception seems to be that I have copious amounts of sex that I don't talk about because... I can't be put into the Madonna mold. Like, I'm not the like quiet, motherly girl that ... people would assume would be, like, be the virgin role in that dichotomy.

Um... but, that said, I kind of... I feel like, personally—like obviously that's crap, but I mean I think that, even though I think it's hard for people to place me into a mold, I think that, I mean the whore half of it is probably more true... otherwise aside from the sexual aspect of it, like the overt sexual—the... implicit sexual aspect of it, like, I don't think that the fact that I haven't *had* sex changes that that much. Personality-wise I am like a sexual person, so it's not like... incorrect, it's just like an element's missing from that. So I, I don't really feel like... I...

Again I feel like, I feel like it's a personal choice, it's not like, it's not like I decided "Yeah I'm gonna be a virgin," it's just like, like, I don't have time for this, and I'm not the type of girl—I'm just not the type of person, actually—I don't wanna keep saying girl—I'm not the type of person that just hooks up with people, it's just like *not* something I do. I don't think it's fun, and... it just sucks. And like, I would rather, like... I'm waiting until I have a boyfriend, or whatever, to do that, and like I... haven't. So, it's not... I don't know, I don't really feel like, yeah, I don't feel like it affects if I'm a *woman* or not, I guess. And I don't really think... [sighs] personally I don't think it is. I feel like in general there are definitely girls that like—I *know*—girls that feel pressure to have sex, because it's something that's expected of them for a woman of their age, class, and race, to behave sexually in a certain way. But, it's just not a pressure that I really feel.

P.K.'s speech pattern—interjections, stammering, pauses—indicates that much cognitive rationalizing is taking place in explaining her relationship to her sexuality and positionality as a woman, as she is aware that her peers cannot figure her out, cannot place her in an intelligible mold. (Still, she insists that she does not feel pressure to lose

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<sup>9</sup> When I use the term "sex," I am referring to that which constitutes losing one's virginity, by P.K.'s standards.

her virginity, perhaps because she is so private about her sex life.) She instead constructs herself as someone who is more intelligent about who she becomes romantically, and by extension, sexually involved with. I ask her to what extent she feels that having the autonomy to choose who she has sex with for the first time represents, for her, a unique position of power.

**HC** To what extent do you feel like having this sort of autonomy over who you have sex with for the first time is a unique position of power for you, in some ways?

**P.K.** It kind of is because, I guess—you asked me before if I value my virginity, and it's like I value *myself* enough, and that's like an element of me, I guess. It is, like, it's also the same reason that I haven't had a boyfriend, that it's like too much effort and it's too much time on someone else, and it's like, having sex with another person is the same time and effort that I'd have to put in and like, I feel like, I have the privilege to choose who I want that to be with, and I like, I know a lot of people who probably regret who they first had sex with. And I don't feel like it has to be this thing where like, I'm just going to keep fucking people until I find the right one. Like that's stupid, and like, I guess, maybe for some people it's a more necessary thing, or something, like maybe you have a significantly stronger sex drive, but I also think that that's a silly thing to be really interested in. Like I really think there are much better things you could be focusing your time and energy on. Instead of getting all tarted up.

**HC** When you say “getting all tarted up,” what do you mean by that?

**P.K.** I think that, I guess, the other thing is that like, probably a good part of the reason that, I mean aside from me ending up sabotaging every single relationship I'm ever in because I'm not really interested in having a relationship, I just find it exciting... like, yeah, and it never ends up turning out well, um.... But like I guess what I want out of a relationship, and like part of the reason I haven't been in one is that I wanna be... I want someone to love me for the person that I am, not because I am a woman. And, like, I resent having, like, I resent that some women feel that they should have to... get all like, dressed up sexy, to attract members of the opposite sex to, like, partake in this ridiculous fantasy of like, glitz-and-glam sex. Like, I just think that, like, I have no problem with someone getting dressed up to go out. I do have a problem with someone getting dressed—like, like I don't like the idea of being able to look at someone and going “You wanna get fucked tonight,” male or female. Like I just think that's stupid, and I think that's a dumb objective for your night, and I shouldn't be able to tell by looking at you that that is your objective.

**HC** Can you describe someone who would look like they wanna get fucked? A woman who looks like she wants to get fucked.

**P.K.** Like... lots of skin showing, and like, like an unnecessarily large amount—items that are considered like overtly sexual too, like wearing all black with lots of cleavage and fishnets and boots, because for some reason those are a sexual item of clothing. And like, it also bothers me that there are like expectations for women to have long hair

because that's sexy. Or like, wearing a lot of make-up, specifically a lot of eyeliner and lipstick, or like, yeah... stuffing your bra, or like, things that are supposed to attract a mate. 'Cause it's like, it's like things that are so base that like, like, I just feel like you're above that. You're above that on the evolutionary chain, you shouldn't feel like you have to be so overtly sexualized.

In this portion of the interview, P.K. constructs herself as possessing a desirable proclivity for choice, agency, and a particular level of sensibility and moral intelligence that those who she discursively constructs as “other”—those looking to “get fucked”—do not possess. When she says, “I want someone to love me for who I am, not because I am a woman,” she slips this casually into her statement, perhaps not realizing that she has just constructed herself as someone who is performing publicly and purposefully in a manner that is not meant to be read as “woman,” but instead as something uniquely P.K. That P.K. discursively constructs the sexually promiscuous woman—and later man, too—as the odd individual, the “other” represents a reworking and recontextualizing of her own sexual inexperience<sup>10</sup> as privileged rather than disadvantaged; she makes her own space via the speech act wherein she constructs herself not as sexually experienced, but wise when it comes to sexual relations nonetheless. I asked her about her passive construction of the individual who looks to “get fucked.”

**HC** I also think it's interesting that you keep saying “get fucked,” it puts yourself in a very passive way, like, is that the way you view the way that women have sex—

**P.K.** No.

**HC** Or like how you would lose your virginity in that way—

**P.K.** It's neither of those things. I, I'm definitely using it in a really derogatory way. And it, it's because I'm saying, I guess, like, I just, I really look down on people, like, whose ambition is to have sex with another individual. I'm definitely using “get fucked” in like

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<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I define sexual inexperience as never having had heterosexual intercourse. This is not to say that one is sexually inexperienced in a naïve and asexual way; PK has had relations with men that have stopped short of sexual intercourse. It is to say that she is inexperienced in the sexual act that would change her identification as a woman who still has her virginity.

a really—and I guess like, I guess that is, it's like... because it's like, if you're, I guess I'm saying it as like if people whose primary ambition, in the way they are dressing or acting, is to have sex with another individual, then they are trying to get fucked.

Earlier in the interview, P.K. stated that virgins in U.S. culture are viewed as either religious freaks or losers, both derogatory descriptors of the “other.” Now, P.K. has turned the tables on her accusers, consciously referring to their sexually promiscuous behavior, which she has chosen not to engage in, in a derogatory manner.

As Schlegel writes, “One way to assess a woman's autonomy is to ask whether she controls her own sexuality.” (1991: 719) In P.K.'s mind, she is very much in control of her own sexuality—it is a private aspect of her life, which she keeps out of the public eye and discourse. However, she expresses that the way that film and television portrays women is such that they have limited control over the way their sex life is viewed by the public. As a relatively anonymous individual, P.K. has more control over her own sexual image, but that for T.V. and film personalities, maintaining such autonomy is difficult.

**P.K.** I was just reading a thing about Megan Fox too, like an article about how she's carefully crafted an image, so her publicists are having problems now because she's put up this front where it makes her seem like this huge whore when in reality she's been dating the same guy for like six years, um, and is actually kind of a nerd and whatever. But um, she just knows how to play the system, which she doesn't seem to totally understand because she's great in men's magazines, she can get any job that requires her to be quote unquote sexy, but she's having so much trouble appealing to women. Like *Jennifer's Body* everyone forgets was like targeted at women, which was a movie about a lesbian cheerleader, which is like really weird anyway, like, I don't know why [screenwriter] Diablo Cody thought that was a great idea, but whatever. But like, it was supposed to be about like “Yeah, girl power!” but like, Fox's overt sexiness made that unappealing to women.

And it's like there's this separation between power and sex for women a lot of times, like Liz Lemon on “30 Rock,” too, that's another good one. Like, it's a running joke that she is asexual, basically, but she's like the only powerful female character on the show. And that's generally true, like, you can't, like... because sex has to be something emotional for women, because, like whatever, society decided that, an emotion is not a powerful thing, you can't be emotional and powerful. Women can't both be sexual and powerful. In the media. And in, like, general in American society that seems to be the prevailing opinion.

Like, on “Grey’s Anatomy,” the main character, who’s like Meredith or whatever, I don’t remember her name, but she like, is only—when love’s involved, god forbid she should have to do anything important, oh no, she might be ragging, kind of thing. It’s like the same argument that women can’t be in powerful positions because they might, their PMS is too bad. It’s like that kind of shit that still permeates society and still like, yeah... because if you’re a good woman, emotion will be involved in your sex. You can’t have sex like a man.

**HC** Do you consider yourself a powerful woman?

**P.K.** I mean, I better be. Considering I’m not sexual right?

P.K. points out the struggle which many modern women in the U.S. have today: the ideology that a woman must either portray herself as a sexual being or powerful being, but cannot be both and command the respect of (heterosexual) men. In this sense, P.K. echoes much of Marche’s column for *Esquire*. That P.K. jokingly submits to the conclusion that she must be a powerful woman, since she is neither sexually active nor interested in getting fucked, says that women are just as much defined by what they are as what they are not, and usually defined as much by others. Similarly, her unwillingness to discuss her virginity with others communicates if not embarrassment, as she insists is not the case, then a general lack of dialogue on the subject.

However, when prompted to speak openly about her virginity, P.K. actively constructs a discursive space wherein her sexual inexperience is the privileged subjectivity, and where she reworks the dominant notion of a sexually active, young heterosexual woman into an othered position. For P.K., being a woman, or a sexual being, has little to do with actually engaging in sexual intercourse. Instead, it has more to do with her public persona as a sexual person, i.e. someone who engages in bawdy humor, loves attention, and flirts shamelessly, as she has described herself to me many times over the course of our three-year friendship. She acknowledges that the public

personas available to women are either “Madonna” or “Whore” (again, see my analysis of Marche), and that she does not neatly fit into either mold:

even though I think it’s hard for people to place me into a mold, I think that, I mean the whore half of it is probably more true... otherwise aside from the sexual aspect of it, like the overt sexual—the... implicit sexual aspect of it, like, I don’t think that the fact that I haven’t *had* sex changes that that much. Personality-wise I am like a sexual person, so it’s not like... incorrect, it’s just like an element’s missing from that.

Here, P.K. refashions the popular dichotomy of woman as either virgin or whore into a hybrid of her publicly performed and private executed sexual identities.

Similarly, she refashions the concept of “virgin” to suit such hybrid identity, preferring to eschew what she views as a limiting label in favor of distancing her sexual inexperience to an othered entity, a part of her identity that she can shed at will. Of the label “virgin,” she expressed to me, “I just think that that’s a word that’s too strong because I think it’s defining a person by their sexual status, which I think is bullshit.” P.K. thus refuses to be socially defined by her sexual status, i.e. her inexperience with (hetero)sexual intercourse.

Therefore, P.K. is publicly engaged in disidentification from societal expectations of “normal (sexual) behavior” for a woman of her age and social standing, but in a way that is only intelligible as disidentification if one is privy to P.K.’s sexual status as still having her virginity.

Can one be said to be engaged in disidentification, the breaking of dominant discursive formations, if one is neither engaging in nor initiating an alternate discourse? Pêcheux is unclear on the matter, although since disidentification is a linguistic response to certain discursive formations, expression through language, or at least omniscient understanding of P.K.’s public-private persona, appears to be essential. PK’s silence means she is not contributing to the visible refashioning of the globally assembled and

locally reterritorialized ideal of “American Woman.” Her desire to conceal her virgin status, as well as her marked distaste for publicly discussing sexual status, both hers and her friends’, marks P.K. as a tacit subject.

In his article “Tacit Subjects,” Carlos Decena analyzes the Western, “social activist” imperative of gay subjects to “come out” to friends and family as gay, and how such a model is refuted in the Dominican immigrant gay and bisexual community in New York City:

Taking for granted that all LGBTQ people should come out of the closet is consistent with a neoliberal interpretation of coming out characteristic of the current political climate in the United States. Instead of being the beginning of a project of social transformation—as coming out was understood in the early days of gay liberation—individual self-realization through speech has been severed from collective social change. (2008: 339)

The men in Decena’s study instead practice *lo tacito*. “The *sujeto tacito* suggests that coming out may sometimes be redundant.” (Decena 2008: 340) According to Decena’s research, many of the tacit subjects’ friends and family already know that the subjects are gay, and coming out brings a private issue unnecessarily to the fore. Therefore, “what is tacit is neither secret nor silent.” (Decena 2008: 340) If one replaces *homosexuality* with *sexuality* in the following sentence, it is evident that P.K.’s tacit subjectivity does not preclude her disidentification: “We must take seriously the distinction between refusing to discuss an openly lived *sexuality* and silence.” (Decena 2008: 340)

For Decena’s “informants,” and, I argue, for P.K. as well, tacit subjectivity is “an analytic framework that draws attention to the range, interaction, and intersection of the meanings and contexts that structure their social relations.” (Decena 2008: 340)

They understand that their own bodies traverse the social world and signify in ways that exceed (and often betray) the intention of those who inhabit them... In the case of my

informants, the concept shifts the analysis away from self-definition toward an investigation of the way they refuse the reductionism gayness engenders in the public sphere. (Decena 2008: 340-41)

Like Decena's subjects, P.K. refuses the label "virgin" and the reductionism it engenders. By reworking her own definitions of what it means to be a woman, a woman who has her virginity, and by openly living her life by such redefined identities, P.K. shows that Decena's tacit subjectivity has wide ranging applications beyond LGBTQ identities.

So, how many more young women like P.K. are there? To posit a question similar to Marche's, Where have all the virgins gone? They are undoubtedly among us, but remain tacit subjects, part of the landscape and readable to those socially close enough or interested enough to try to understand them. They are tacit, but not silent.

### ***A.K.'s Interview: Identification as the "Good" Sexually Active Citizen***

*"There's obviously a part of me in the back of my mind that's like, 'Well, I'm gonna go out tonight and I can meet a guy...' So, yeah, I'm sort of thinking that I would wanna wear something a prospective boyfriend, mate, whatever, would find attractive."*  
—A.K.

To provide some perspective on the uniqueness of P.K.'s sexual subjectivity, I interviewed A.K., a friend who I have known for two years. The evenings I spent with P.K. and A.K. talking about dating and college life over dinner are what inspired me to take a closer look at young female sexual citizenship in the late modern U.S.

In contrast to the way P.K. negotiates her "bad" sexual citizenship, A.K. actively and consciously engages in sexual behavior expected of "good" women. During our second interview, A.K. revealed that when she posed a question from our first

interview—"What do you think when you hear the word 'virgin'?"—to her sister, her sister laughed and shouted "Loser!" A.K. admitted that she "sort of" agreed with her sister. Therefore, my choice to include another voice on contemporary female sexual citizenship is also a desire to further illustrate how P.K. is reworking what it means to be a young American woman by her rejecting A.K.'s that many young, college-age heterosexual women are performing today, much to the pleasure of the patriarchal nation-state.

A.K.'s current sexual status is that she is unattached and dating, with no commitment to one individual partner. She has sex<sup>11</sup> "a few times a month" with one male friend, and occasionally sleeps with the individuals she dates. I asked her when in a relationship is it appropriate to have sex.

**A.K.** I guess... for me... I don't know, I guess I just kind of feel like when it's right. Like if I feel comfortable enough with a guy... that I feel like I am attracted to him, and I feel like I feel comfortable opening myself up to him in that sense, then... I would be open to like having sex, but... um... it's... I mean, it's really is different for, it really is different for every guy, I think. Every relationship, the past like few relationships that I've had um... it's been different every time. Like I don't know. Like my first time, was a completely different story, and then um, my first boyfriend in college was um... we probably waited... I don't know, a couple months before we had sex for the first time—like a couple months from when we first met. Um. And then... and then my boyfriend from last year, we kind of like slept together for a while, but we didn't have sex, and then like finally we did have sex—it really is like, it really is dependent on the circumstances, I think. I don't think that there's a hard fast rule in my mind, or any one thing that really makes me feel like "Okay, it's time." It really is like, dependent on a lot of different things.

If I met a guy who... you know, was hesitant to have sex and wanted to get to know me really well, and, and you know, wait, even though I felt ready and he wanted to wait, then I would wait. If I felt like he was the one for me.

**H.C.** So you don't have, like, "No kissing on the first date," "No like sleeping together after—" it depends on the person?

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<sup>11</sup> A.K.'s conception of sex is even more heteronormative than P.K.'s, as she considers oral sex to be "not real sex," does not include non-heterosexual sex in her definition of "real sex," and excludes as "real sex" anything that does not involve vaginal penetration with a penis. Unlike P.K., A.K. does not consider climax necessary to constitute the act as sex or loss of virginity.

**A.K.** Yeah, like, I'll kiss on the first date, but I don't... If I... usually if I'm into a guy, I don't mind kissing on the first date 'cause I want them to know that I'm into them. Um. But I don't really have, I don't, I tend to not, I don't want to get too physical right away because I think that sends the wrong sort of message about what my intentions are with the relationship.

**H.C.** What kind of message do you think that sends?

**A.K.** It, I mean, it, this didn't really click to me until... you know, very recently, but um, I just know like, from the past if I um... you know, don't hold back like my physical urges to do more than, you know, kiss or whatever, then I think it kind of sends a message to a guy that that might be all I'm interested in or that maybe all that *they* might be interested in me for.

**H.C.** And that's bad?

**A.K.** Yeah. Typically. 'Cause then it's sort of just a waste of my time. If it's a guy that I'm not really like... you know, interested in getting to know more, then... why am I, like, why am I wasting my time I guess.

Here, A.K. expresses that her sexual activity is not indiscriminate, and by no means promiscuous. Instead, A.K. deploys and treats sex as a tool. This is reminiscent of Berger and Wenger's linkage of sex and economics, in that withholding sex is "quite 'functional' ... in a society where women have little economic power vis-à-vis men." However, writing in 1973, Berger and Wenger predicted that such a valuation of chastity would decline as women's economic independence rises. That A.K. still uses sex for leverage in social exchanges (rather than purely economic ones) may not communicate an "outdated" valuation of chastity (if one is to believe that women have achieved greater economic power than in the past) so much as a valuation of sex as a means to an end. This idea that sex is something one does to get something or someone else—to serve the self in a less direct manner than immediate physical pleasure—has been present in A.K.'s practice since before she engaged in "real sex" and lost her virginity.

**H.C.** So prior to you losing your virginity, what had been your experience and how did that make you feel, emotionally?

**A.K.** There had probably been only... I'm trying to remember... I think there was one guy... maybe one or two, definitely one—I remember the first time I gave a guy head, that was... like... yeah, I was 16. Yeah, 16 I think. But that didn't feel like... That was completely, one hundred percent different than the first time I had sex, like, it didn't feel like any... Like when I first had sex it felt very emotional, very like, he was the kinda guy that would refer to that as "the first time we made love" kinda thing, and like... I don't know.

I think the guy that I first kinda gave a blowjob to was like, pretty much like *teaching me* how to give a blowjob. He was like, "Oh you've never done this before? Oh, okay, I'll tell you how to do it and blah blah blah," you know?

**H.C.** And how did that make you feel?

**A.K.** Um. I think I kinda knew that I was gonna hafta—sounds really awful—but I think I sorta knew in my mind that I would have to slash wanted to learn how to do it, and I might as well learn on someone that... like I wasn't gonna... like I might as well learn to do it well, so that later on, when I actually care about someone, I could like, really be able to pleasure them? But I didn't really care about the guy that I was—I mean I though the was, like, hot, but I didn't really have like any other feelings beyond that.

**H.C.** So would you say that you just used him as practice for when it really "counted"?

**A.K.** Yeah. Yeah, I think so, basically.

**A.K.** goes on to discuss how she treats some relationships as if they do not "count," and instead are test runs or performances of assumed and interpellated gender roles intended as practice for the "real thing."

**H.C.** And is that how you look at some of your relationships? Like they don't count?

**A.K.** Um... sort of. I mean, sometimes, like, with certain people, I kinda know, or at least I think I know, that it doesn't, that we're never gonna really work out or I don't actually have feelings for them. Like in the... you know, like in my heart, I don't have that really there, but sometimes, like I'll, you know, still go along with it because I feel like every kind of relationship you have teaches you things about yourself and how to, and how to be a better, like, how to be better at a relationship.

**H.C.** So this practice. What is your ideal end? What are you building up to? Why are you looking at all these experiences as useful?

**A.K.** Um... I mean, to be in like a healthy, rewarding relationship or a relationship where eventually I would end up getting married. But, I think in my mind, I know that marriage is so far from now, that I have time to sort of meet different people, and you know... not um... I mean, you know ask me the same question in two months I might have a completely different answer, but like, right now, it's sort of meet different people, feel them out, don't settle for someone, and, you know. As much as it would be nice to be in a

serious relationship, and I can see a lot of perks that would come from that, I guess like... it's not something that I'm like, completely focused on. I don't really have time for it right now. But, I do like... you know, I do like the feeling that I get when I'm with a guy. Not just in like a physical sense, but in like the emotionally rewarding sense when you have someone you can, like, have conversations with, and kind of be intimate with, and you know. Have like—I guess have like physical contact with, but not just like sexual contact.

A.K.'s discussion of sex as something one must practice with the hope of someday pleasing a potentially long term (via marriage) male partner is reflective of the idea that to be a good woman, to live up to one's gender honor, one must be good at sexually satisfying a man. In her article debunking the myth of Victorian sexual repression, Christina Simmons elucidates how the nation-state rewrites women's sexual behaviors and bodies to favor a patriarchal, procreative, nationalistic narrative: (1989: 170)

[Judge Ben B.] Lindsey urged less censure and more sympathy for the red-lipped, "apparently oversexed" flappers on grounds that they were not in fact "fresh bodies offered for the pleasure of men but bodies offered to the agony and bloody sweat of motherhood. That is what it really means with most of them, whether they and we are conscious of it or not." It seemed impossible to deny that young women were exhibiting what by older standards was an immodest interest in sex, but these definitions reassured apprehensive observers that young women were still guided more by traditional nurturing qualities than by an untamed sexuality. The lesbian was threatening precisely because she could enjoy a sexual life of the intensity and self-interest unconnected to reproduction, and reproduction represented the payment, the sacrifice that symbolically drained female sexuality of its frightening powers.

A.K. says her sexual activity is both practice for when she is married and the means by which she hopes to become married, conceptions of female sexual subjectivity that make palatable "loose" behavior. A.K. recognizes as much and chooses to rework her self-identification as sexually active in a manner that reflects more (gender) honor in her search of a mate than a promiscuous, independent search for pleasure.

I ask A.K. why she has sex.

**A.K.** Um, I feel like... Like, sex, like sex is something that I enjoy doing. I mean, it's like, really not all that complicated beyond that. I like the... I mean I guess like the actual act of sex is not something that I—it's, I mean it's more, you know, everyth—foreplay and everything leads up to sex, is like probably more fun for me than, than actually doing it, but I mean there is like a certain release that comes from... the like, being with someone like that. And... as far as like *waiting*, I just, I just feel like I would never wanna... I don't know, I don't wanna say like *deprive* myself of that, but I think it's a, you know, expressing your sexuality is something that if you feel like you... are feeling drawn to do, I don't think that's something you should like stifle. That's just how I feel.

**H.C.** So what do you hope to get out of sex?

**A.K.** Um... well. Usually... pleasure. And also, I guess like the satisfaction of knowing that you, knowing that I gave someone else pleasure, makes me, it just like makes me feel happy. Like, if I made someone else that I care for, or you know, that I enjoy being with or whatever, have like that satisfaction, that just like makes me, it like provides happiness for me.

Later, A.K. tells me she has a vibrator, and that she has sex for “satisfaction,” but uses her vibrator for “pleasure.” A.K. says the two are different, i.e. mutually exclusive for her. A.K. admittedly has sex without expectation of climax, and instead feels fulfilled in her ability to please a man and experience “the closeness that comes from being able to give someone I care about pleasure.” It seems then that A.K. derives social pleasure from having sex with men to satisfy her need for gender honor, and even views it as practice for her ultimate goal—marriage. Indeed, A.K. says she most feels like a woman when she is babysitting, and doing “housewife work.”

**H.C.** When do you feel most like a woman?

**A.K.** Um... I feel most like a woman... I mean, I know this is really what you're getting at, but I probably feel most like a woman when I'm... um... when I'm like babysitting? I mean, like, I babysit, so, when I'm like cooking, and when I'm picking the kids up from school, and like, doing grocery shopping and doing those kind of like... stereotypical like, woman, like, uh, wife-mother roles, like, it makes me feel most like... fulfilling my womanly duty. I feel like I feel the most... I feel like I feel like a huge female when I do that kind of stuff. Cooking and being domestic.

**H.C.** And how do you feel about that?

**A.K.** I mean... I don't really feel all that bad about it. Just because it's a part of my life that—and I like to do that kind of stuff, and I hope to be a mother one day. And it's

something that I'm... I'm, I feel fine with, I feel comfortable with. It's something that I... but no, I feel definitely comf—good about it. Like I feel, like I mean obviously there're some days where I'm just like, "Ugh. I don't wanna do this." But that's mostly just 'cause I'm, don't wanna do that job like in general, but like when I'm actually in the midst of... acting like a housewife, I... kinda enjoy it. I think.

Also related to A.K.'s desire to honor her gender is A.K.'s frequent use of the modifier "real" in describing sex, which indexes a larger discourse of female authenticity which A.K. references in her performance of young heterosexual woman in late modern U.S. "Real," for A.K. takes on the quality of being natural, or assumed, much in the same way A.K. naturalizes and normalizes sexual activity and experience. Some of that naturalization is evident in her construction of going to bars to meet guys as fulfilling a heteronormative, primal urge to compete for mates with the eventual end goal being monogamous procreative sexual activity. In the following exchange, A.K. elucidates how beyond being unnatural, maintaining one's virginity is unintelligible.

**H.C.** Is there, like, is there a right time in general for someone to have sex, is there a point where you're gonna be like, too old to be a virgin? Like there's this imperative to not be beyond a certain age and still be sexually inexperienced.

**A.K.** Um... that's hard for me to really answer, because I'm speaking from a viewpoint of someone that does have sexual experience. Um, I think that if I were to be my age and to have never had sex before, I feel like there'd be a huge area in my mind that was like, like a huge grey area in my mind, like what is that? People talk about sex all the time. And I just feel like to not have that um... to not have had that experience would make me like a little bit—I don't know if I wanna say like confused, or... um... just, and I don't wanna say like "missing out" because then that sort of implies that you should start having sex as soon as possible so you're not missing out. I don't agree with that. But, I think that—I don't know as far as when a time would be, as far as like "Oh, you waited so long, you just need to just have sex." Because... [exhales] um... I think that... if someone is completely comfortable in their, like, virginity, like if they still feel completely fulfilled in it, then there's no reason for them to have sex. But if they have met someone that they want to experience that with, then I think that they should. I mean, then that gets into the whole religious thing, but I don't subscribe to that, I mean, that didn't really have any affect on my decisions. But I, um, I feel like if someone wants to, I don't think that there should be something holding anybody back. But at the same time, if it's just that a person hasn't found someone that's like, willing to have sex with them... I mean, I don't know if it's a really high percent of the population that's like *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, I mean, like, he kinda just gave up after a while.

Here, it is evident that A.K. thinks sexual activity essential to living a fulfilled life, and cannot imagine someone who is able to understand life without being sexually experienced. A.K.'s conception is not uncommon, and reflects how virgins are discursively constructed as not just bad sexual citizens but unintelligible as subjects even, due to their perceived abstinence from any understanding of sexual(ly active) citizenship. A.K. makes the mistake of assuming that all virgins are interested in sex, are curious about it, and are actively denying a natural need for engaging in and understanding "real sex."

A.K.'s interview illuminates that the virgin-whore dichotomy is false. Just as P.K. reworks the virgin identity, A.K. too reworks the idea of a sexually active young woman, but she fails to recognize how individuals like P.K. who still "have their virginity" are actively, discursively reworking their sexual subjectivity, as well. While still overtly and openly sexual in behavior and practice, A.K. proves to be not as "loose" as Marche may prefer, deploying sex strategically in search of a monogamous heterosexual relationship with intent to procreate, instead of that hedonistic goddess that Marche imagines *Seinfeld's* Elaine Benes to be.

## **Conclusion**

P.K. and A.K. are negotiating their sexualities and either identifying with or rejecting discursive constructions of what it means to be a young heterosexual woman in the late-modern U.S. Again, I have chosen to include two primary sources from my group of friends, because I believe that while my friends' experiences may not be widely

applicable to all young women, they may reveal attitudes and identities to which many young women can relate.

Both interviewees echo and cite media perpetuated images of good and bad sexual citizenship as touchstones for the formation of identities. In her interview, A.K. references *Women's Health* on Twitter and how the social media presence of the monthly magazine contributes to the pressure A.K. feels to maintain a sense of gender honor.

**H.C.** Do you feel any pressure to be sexually active in a certain way or to carry yourself in a certain way to be attractive to men?

**A.K.** Um... ye—I guess I'd be lying if I didn't say yes.

**H.C.** Why would you say that?

**A.K.** Because, I feel like just, um... just like going out, just like going to a bar or whatever, for me is like often, I mean I like to go to bars and hang out with my friends. But at the same time, I'm, I can hang out with my friends at home, and a huge draw to like going to a bar, I mean yeah you're getting out and there's people around, and it creates a funner atmosphere and stuff, and I definitely, I can understand that that's, that is a reason that I do like to do that. But at the same time, another huge draw is that there's this opportunity to meet new guys, and potentially meet a guy that I would maybe date, or whatever. And I do think that there's a pressure to like look good for them, because... otherwise, like, why... [exhales] otherwise, like, why bother? Because, um... if you're, I mean I guess, it's, it's almost like a competition, it's almost like a primal urge to like, find... not only find like an attractive mate but also to be attractive for them. I mean, I can't even, I can't think of any other way to describe it besides like I just like, an innate, like... feeling. Like urge.

I, I follow *Women's Health* on Twitter. And their tweets, I *swear* must be at least, between fifty to seventy-five percent—they're *often* about sexual positions. Like, just positions! And I know another huge portion is just dieting. And like, that alone, like... says a lot. It's *Women's Health*, you know? *Health*. Like, we're not talking about, like... I mean not to mention the fact that creating that sense that, not, not just women should be having sex, but they should be doing crazy positions and, like, not really spending enough attention on like safe sex, finding men that you actually should be having sex with, you know? I mean... yeah.

No, it's hard to say that that's... it's rather, it's... clear that those kind of messages create like an atmosphere of this is something that's acceptable and this is something you need to be doing to fit in.

Further illuminating a dearth of media representation of virgins, let alone positive representation, both P.K. and A.K. cite *The 40 Year Old Virgin* in their

(re)construction of the public image of the virgin. I do not see this as coincidental. Rather, it is an example of how media colludes with national ideology to (successfully) perpetuate popular understandings of good and bad sexual subjectivities, as I have previously noted Jordanova observed in her study of 18<sup>th</sup> century reproductive policy and how it influenced and was influenced by nationalistic narratives of female-centered procreation spun by popular media of the era. Indeed, I would argue that *The 40 Year Old Virgin* serves as a monolithic understanding of “the virgin experience” for most young college-age individuals. A.K. admits that to be a virgin is to be unintelligible, and unusual past a certain age.

However, there was a time and place where the nation-state sanctioned and encouraged virginity—the safety of the state itself in virgins’ hands. I am referring to the vestal and sworn virgins of ancient Rome, “daughters of the state” and keepers of their city’s guardian flame. The sacred fire of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, was regarded as the household fire for the entire state, specifically the emperor. If the virgins left the fire untended and allowed the flame to go out, the safety of the nation from intrusion was thought to be at stake: Vesta had revoked her protection of Rome. As such, vestal virgins were viewed as essential to the continuation of the nation, and understood their role in society. Upon swearing allegiance to Vesta and making a vow of chastity, vestal virgins became daughters of the state, and any sex between a vestal and a citizen was seen as incest and punished as treason. In other words, their sexual citizenship was beyond intelligible—it was good, and deemed quite necessary to the continued functioning of the Roman state.

As such, female sexuality is the subject of much historical revision, in the form of popular media to ancient mythology. Such rewriting appears to have always been in the service of nation-perpetuating, patriarchal objectives, much in the same way that A.K. rationalizes her sexual activity in terms of practice for marriage, a rationalization supported decades earlier by Judge Lindsey. Further evidenced by P.K.'s silence, or her tacit subjectivity, it seems that a woman's autonomy to openly express an identity of virginity or "other" mode of sexual expression without the fear of retribution, social exclusion, or appropriation is limited at best, and determined by her patriarchal nation-state at worst.

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## **Appendices**

### **P.K. Interview Transcript**

**H.C.** What's your relationship to the word "virgin"?

**P.K.** I guess I don't think of myself as a virgin. Like, I, like, that's like, this is a terrible analogy because it's not what I think but its like saying someone is blind instead of saying someone has a sight disability. I don't mean it like its equally negative but I just think that that's a word that's too strong because I think it's defining a person by their sexual status, which I think is bullshit.... So I have no problem saying that I have my virginity, but I that saying I'm a virgin is like, defining myself solely by that characteristic, which is stupid... It's like, and there's a lot of stereotypes around being a virgin that I think are really wrong and stupid, like that's like saying you're an asexual person or that you're not interested in sex, which is not true.

**H.C.** What gives you that impression that that's the popular conception?

**P.K.** I mean, like, virginity is something that's really looked down upon, I definitely think, and I think that, like virgins are either, in our culture, seen as religious freaks or losers.

**H.C.** Can you give me an instance where that has been crystallized for you?

**P.K.** Um, in Mean Girls there's the girl that doesn't have her virginity because she has a wide-set vagina and uses super wide tampons, and her friends are like—like that's what I think about the kind of people that argue about that kind of shit are like... the people that... are, have way too much time to think about it kind of almost. Like I just, I think that, like.... The popular conception in pop culture is that virginity is not cool, just in general, and I can't think of a specific movie in general or anything. And I also think a lot of porn revolves around the idea of naïve virgins, which I think is silly.

**H.C.** Do you have like a memory of anything, like looking at it and going Huh I guess that... It's just something that you just have been—

**P.K.** No it's like, it's not a specific thing. I think it's just a universal truth. In our culture.

**H.C.** Has there ever been a time where you were made to feel uncomfortable because you have your virginity? Has there ever been a time where you have lied?

**P.K.** I mean, I don't know if "lied" is the right word, but it's one of those things I don't wanna—it's like a lie of omission kind of thing where it's just like I *don't* wanna talk about it, like, frankly I don't think it's anyone's business. I actually don't enjoy talking about my love life in general, which I think is probably a cyclical thing, like it's kind of like, being a virgin makes it more of a pain in the ass to talk about my love life, because then it's like, that's like a thing you need to explain to people, but then it's also a thing

where it's like, I'm probably—probably part of the reason I am a virgin is that it's not a central focus of my life and it is very private. I just don't care, like, about that. So...

**H.C.** So if someone came out and asked you “Are you a virgin?” how would you handle that situation?

**P.K.** I would just say yes. I mean, it's like one of those things where it's just like, it's not a big deal, but I don't see why it's important.

**H.C.** Can you define virginity or virgin? Or, at what point is a person no longer a virgin, or lose their virginity? If you would even say such a thing.

**P.K.** I don't know 'cause I guess the general definition I would give would be that, like, would involve vaginal penetration, but the other thing is that like, if that's the case, okay, if you're saying vaginal penetration with a penis, that's really limiting because that's saying that a lesbian could never not be a virgin, basically. Which I think is stupid. But if you define it as, just like in general vaginal penetration, then I'm not a virgin. Which I think is wrong.

**H.C.** So how do *you* define it?

**P.K.** I guess for me personally it would be vaginal penetration with a penis. But like, but I don't think that's like a universal definition of it. And I do think that's also true, I think it means very different things to very different people because I think that, if you're holding... like I'm sure there are some very religious people and people with very high moral standards that would think that like... like oral sex would not make you a virgin anymore. So... and also I don't even know how, like, I almost feel like it's irrelevant, but I don't even know how a guy would define losing their virginity, necessarily. I can't even imagine that because from my standpoint, I don't know what that would mean for a guy. And I also feel like virginity is something a girl possesses, not something a guy possesses.

**H.C.** Why do you feel that?

**P.K.** I mean, I know that it's not true, but I feel that it's something that has more, historically been more guarded for women. Like, it doesn't matter if a guy loses his virginity because there's no risk of like, paternal loss or spoilage for your future, like there are other possibilities for you other than carrying a child. So I think like historically, virginity is something more important and like I mean, it's also something like it's not even that historically a woman would have possessed, it's something her father possessed. So, I just think that, like, I just don't even know... what losing your virginity would mean for a guy. I don't know what the historical background of that would *be* for a guy.

**H.C.** Could you talk a little about your sexual history?... As little or as much as that may encompass.

**P.K.** Okay. Um, I'm not really the type of girl to hook up with guys, but, but I mean I've kissed a couple guys, but I've hooked up with like one dude, really. Um, and I was really drunk. And I really regret it. Not because of like, what happened necessarily, but mostly because he's an asshole and, like, it was a bad situation. Like it was definitely consensual, but it was just like, it was really stupid. Like, he had a girlfriend, who I knew, and he had also hooked up with my other friend while he had a girlfriend...

**H.C.** When you say "hooked up" you mean more than "make-out"?

**P.K.** Yeah.

**H.C.** But, not sex.

**P.K.** No.

**H.C.** Not vaginal penetration sex.

**P.K.** Yeah.

**H.C.** So what you would define as losing your virginity, you did not lose your virginity to him.

**P.K.** Yes, I did not lose my virginity to him.

**H.C.** Do you feel at all, I guess, do you feel more or less feminine because you—

**P.K.** Have my virginity? Umm...

**H.C.** How does that make you feel about your status as a woman?

**P.K.** I don't know, 'cause, I don't know how much... [sighs] I don't know, it's kind of like the Madonna and the whore thing. Um, I kind of think that... I think that I'm in a weird situation because, the general perception seems to be that I have copious amounts of sex that I don't talk about because... I can't be put into the Madonna mold. Like, I'm not the like quiet, motherly girl that ... people would assume would be, like, be the virgin role in that dichotomy. Um... but, that said, I kind of... I feel like, personally—like obviously that's crap, but I mean I think that, even though I think it's hard for people to place me into a mold, I think that, I mean the whore half of it is probably more true... otherwise aside from the sexual aspect of it, like the overt sexual—the... implicit sexual aspect of it, like, I don't think that the fact that I haven't *had* sex changes that that much. Personality-wise I am like a sexual person, so it's not like... incorrect, it's just like an element's missing from that. So I, I don't really feel like... I... again I feel like, I feel like it's a personal choice, it's not like , it's not like I decided "Yeah I'm gonna be a virgin," it's just like, like, I don't have time for this, and I'm not the type of girl—I'm just not the type of person, actually—I don't wanna keep saying girl—I'm not the type of person that

just hooks up with people, it's just like *not* something I do. I don't think it's fun, and... it just sucks. And like, I would rather, like... I'm waiting until I have a boyfriend, or whatever, to do that, and like I... haven't. So, it's not... I don't know, I don't really feel like, yeah, I don't feel like it affects if I'm a *woman* or not, I guess. And I don't really think... [sighs] personally I don't think it is. I feel like in general there are definitely girls that like—I *know*—girls that feel pressure to have sex, because it's something that's expected of them for a woman of their age, class, and race, to behave sexually in a certain way. But, it's just not a pressure that I really feel.

**H.C.** You don't feel pressured to lose your virginity?

**P.K.** Not really.

**H.C.** So you've talked about how it's like no big deal, it is what it is, but are you at a point where maybe you value it? Is that something that you like about yourself or is it something that you continue to hold as just a non-issue.

**P.K.** It's , it's like *not* something I ever really think about.

**H.C.** Why do you think that is for you personally, if so many other girls feel all this pressure?

**P.K.** I...think that it probably does have something to do with like... my adolescent relations with men and like... So after my dad died—and like my parents' relationship wasn't good, my dad was, I mean like he was my dad and whatever, but he was kind of an asshole, like, he was old, and didn't want to have kids anymore, so was not always that nice. So like one, that's not a great place to start out from, but like I mean it was not that bad, it was typical, like, it wasn't out of the ordinary kind of stuff. But then my mom did end up dating, like a guy that very seriously did verbally and physically abuse me and my mom specifically, and to some extent my brother, and like that was just like, really annoying, and my mom like *definitely* has issues with men, like the fact that she like even dated my dad—when my mom and dad got married my mom was significantly younger than my dad. Um, and even them getting married is like weird, and my dad was really clingy to my mom when they first got married, like when they were first dating, like she just has issues with men, she tends to put herself in abusive relationships. My aunt was in an abusive relationship for... 30 years almost. Both of my sisters have huge problems with guys, like they've both been married at least once, my one sister's been married several times. They've both had children out of wedlock, they both feel like men are necessary to their success. But I'm—the weird part is, I guess, seeing all of that—I also like, despite, I relate to my mom a lot but feel that I've ended up being more masculine than she is, and I think it's like a having to step up kind of thing, to fill a role. (45:15)

**P.K.** I was just reading a thing about Megan Fox too, like an article about how she's carefully crafted an image, so her publicists are having problems now because she's put up this front where it makes her seem like this huge whore when in reality she's been dating the same guy for like six years, um, and is actually kind of a nerd and whatever.

But um, she just knows how to play the system, which she doesn't seem to totally understand because she's great in men's magazines, she can get any job that requires her to be quote unquote sexy, but she's having so much trouble appealing to women. Like *Jennifer's Body* everyone forgets was like targeted at women, which was a movie about a lesbian cheerleader, which is like really weird anyway, like, I don't know why [screenwriter] Diablo Cody thought that was a great idea, but whatever. But like, it was supposed to be about like "Yeah, girl power!" but like, Fox's overt sexiness made that unappealing to women. And it's like there's this separation between power and sex for women a lot of times, like Liz Lemon on "30 Rock," too, that's another good one. Like, it's a running joke that she is asexual, basically, but she's like the only powerful female character on the show. And that's generally true, like, you can't, like... because sex has to be something emotional for women, because, like whatever, society decided that, an emotion is not a powerful thing, you can't be emotional and powerful. Women can't both be sexual and powerful. In the media. And in, like, general in American society that seems to be the prevailing opinion. Like, on "Grey's Anatomy," the main character, who's like Meredith or whatever, I don't remember her name, but she like, is only—when love's involved, god forbid she should have to do anything important, oh no, she might be ragging, kind of thing. It's like the same argument that women can't be in powerful positions because they might, their PMS is too bad. It's like that kind of shit that still permeates society and still like, yeah... because if you're a good woman, emotion will be involved in your sex. You can't have sex like a man.

**H.C.** Do you consider yourself a powerful woman?

**P.K.** I mean, I better be. Considering I'm not sexual right? Based on... (33:40)

**H.C.** To what extent do you feel like having this sort of autonomy over who you have sex with for the first time is a unique position of power for you in some ways?

**P.K.** It kind of is because, I guess—you asked me before if I value my virginity, and it's like I value *myself* enough, and that's like an element of me, I guess. It is, like, it's also the same reason that I haven't had a boyfriend, that it's like too much effort and it's too much time on someone else, and it's like, having sex with another person is the same time and effort that I'd have to put in and like, I feel like, I have the privilege to choose who I want that to be with, and I like, I know a lot of people who probably regret who they first had sex with. And I don't feel like it has to be this thing where like, I'm just going to keep fucking people until I find the right one. Like that's stupid, and like, I guess, maybe for some people it's a more necessary thing, or something, like maybe you have a significantly stronger sex drive, but I also think that that's a silly thing to be really interested in. Like I really think there are much better things you could be focusing your time and energy on. Instead of getting all tarted up.

**H.C.** When you say "getting all tarted up," what do you mean by that?

**P.K.** I think that, I guess, the other thing is that like, probably a good part of the reason that, I mean aside from me ending up sabotaging every single relationship I'm ever in

because I'm not really interested in having a relationship, I just find it exciting to like, yeah, and it never ends up turning out well, um.... But like I guess what I want out of a relationship, and like part of the reason I haven't been in one is that I wanna be... I want someone to love me for the person that I am, not because I am a woman. And, like, I resent having, like, I resent that some women feel that they should have to... get all like, dressed up sexy, to attract members of the opposite sex to, like, partake in this ridiculous fantasy of like, glitz-and-glam sex. Like, I just think that, like, I have no problem with someone getting dressed up to go out. I do have a problem with someone getting dressed— like, like I don't like the idea of being able to look at someone and going "You wanna get fucked tonight," male or female. Like I just think that's stupid, and I think that's a dumb objective for your night, and I shouldn't be able to tell by looking at you that that is your objective.

**H.C.** Can you describe someone who would look like they wanna get fucked? A woman who looks like she wants to get fucked.

**P.K.** Like... lots of skin showing, and like, like an unnecessarily large amount—items that are considered like overtly sexual too, like wearing all black with lots of cleavage and fishnets and boots, because for some reason those are a sexual item of clothing. And like, it also bothers me that there are like expectations for women to have long hair because that's sexy. Or like, wearing a lot of make-up, specifically a lot of eyeliner and lipstick, or like, yeah... stuffing your bra, or like, things that are supposed to attract a mate. 'Cause it's like, it's like things that are so base that like, like, I just feel like you're above that. You're above that on the evolutionary chain, you shouldn't feel like you have to be so overtly sexualized.

**H.C.** So superficial upkeep you would class—

**P.K.** But it's not upkeep, like, cause it's not like I go out and I—like I like to look nice, but there's a difference between looking nice and good for yourself and looking good for other people. And it's not like I don't adhere to standards of female beauty, it's just that I shouldn't have to get all tarted up.

**H.C.** Well, also it seems to me that when you say "get all tarted up there seems to be an implication of, not just like the process of dressing up in your stuff before you go out, but the ore-process of going out and accumulating products like that. Do you participate in accumulating products for the purpose of ... looking to get fucked?

**P.K.** To be clear, though, the other thing is like, I have no problem with someone going out and looking to get fucked, it's like, a certain attitude that goes with this kind of thing. That it's like, that is stemming from like... I don't know, that it is like Lauren Conrad [of "The Hills"] wore those boots, I should wear them, too.

**H.C.** What do you mean?

**P.K.** Where it's like, trying to emulate a high status individual through like, consumerism or like... behavior to try to win yourself a mate. Like, yes, I do go out and buy things where I'm like "That would look great on me, perhaps some nice young man would like to fuck me if I wear that," but it's also like, but it's also different from like... I saw Britney Spears wearing that denim boustier and Justin Timberlake looked great with her when he was wearing his denim tuxedo, I bet that's why they're together" kind of thing. It's just like, it's different, and like... I don't know, it's just like what your intentions are when you get dressed. (34:15 into it)

**H.C.** I also think it's interesting that you keep saying "get fucked," it puts yourself in a very passive way, like, is that the way you view (A) the way that women have sex—

**P.K.** No.

**H.C.** Or like you would lose your virginity in that way—

**P.K.** It's neither of those things. I, I'm definitely using it in a really derogatory way. And it, it's because I'm saying, I guess, like, I just, I really look down on people, like, whose ambition is to have sex with another individual. I'm definitely using "get fucked" in like a really—and I guess like, I guess that is, it's like... because it's like, if you're, I guess I'm saying it as like if people whose primary ambition, in the way they are dressing or acting, is to have sex with another individual, then they are trying to get fucked.

**H.C.** How would you refer to that act, in terms of yourself?

**P.K.** Like, "have sex with"... Not, it's like just, it's less severe. And I'm not, like, "make love to" is not what I'm going for either. It's not, it's just like... Yeah but you're right, I am phrasing it passive. And I think it's because, I guess I see the sex act in that context as a thing of ... I just can't imagine—there are definitely women and men who go out with the intention to have sex, and it has nothing to do with low self esteem or societal expectations, they just want to enjoy themselves, but I feel like there's a difference between them and the people I'm talking about. And they're, the people who are like, who understand what they are doing, the consequences of their actions, and are smart about it, are not going out to, necessarily, quote unquote, get fucked. But the people who are going out and like, "I feel terrible about myself, do you know what would make me feel better? Having sex with a stranger," they're going out to get fucked.

**H.C.** And I know that you said earlier that there was this assumption of playing the field now, with women, and whether that means promiscuity or just, vague, sexualness... do you think that the popular perception of a woman now is that she *can* go out and she *can* have the authority to enjoy sex, this new sexual woman?

**P.K.** I don't think young women can, because... I mean women under the age of 25 are the perpetual sex objects of society. And like no matter—which is interesting because people always think that I'm older than I am, which is probably has something to do with that. I'm not flighty and I'm not like trying to find a husband. But I mean like, I guess the

stereotype that that would be is like a cougar. Like an older woman who's experienced and knows what she wants, who's looking for a younger man who she can train. (42:21)

**H.C.** Do you think there is a place in society for those who some people would label virgins, I know you don't like that label, but do you think there is a place for people like that? And or a place for people such as yourself who just haven't had sex yet, such that they can be understood aside from the stereotype that "But you're too normal to be a virgin?"

**P.K.** That is generally the reaction, that is "But you're so normal!" and that's not what it's about, and I think you're misunderstanding it. I mean like, I don't even know, cause it's one of those things where it's like... there's a certain age where you reach—I don't know what that age would be—where people—like *The 40 Year Old Virgin* is a movie, and like, yeah there's a reason that that's funny, like it's, he's ridiculous, he's like socially awkward and stuff, but like, there are totally people who are 40 and haven't had sex, and it's not because they're like weird and awkward. And like, I mean, I don't know, I guess our purpose is to mate, right? So if you're not mating then there's something wrong with you. So like, in a society where marriage is becoming less of a focus, we rather that you just have sex. If you're not going to get married then that's fine, but please have sex because it's confusing to us otherwise.

**H.C.** And what about people who don't do that?

**P.K.** I think there are people like that, but they end up inhabiting a desexualized position in society, or, it's one of those things where like, it's your personal life, you can get away with it being personal, like it doesn't have to be an issue. Like, god only knows what Anderson Cooper's sexual life is like, I mean I'm sure a lot of people are interested, but like, of course there's speculation that he's gay but there's no confirmation of that. It's just not something he talks about. (45:32)

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**A.K. Interview Transcript**

**H.C.** What's your relationship to the word "virgin"?

**A.K.** I don't know, I guess when I think of the word virgin I would have to think of ... it would probably be like when I lost my virginity, so I would think of when that was. I was 17 and like, I can remember basically everything about it completely vividly.

I was at Boston College, and it was a guy that I was like totally in love with, and he was a year older than me, and we were in his dorm room, and I remember being really terrified that it was going to be really painful and then being really surprised that it wasn't that painful. And... like I don't know, there was a lot of things that I was scared and nervous about but it ended up being like, actually a, I mean I wouldn't say like an *enjoyable* experience, but at the time, there was like no one else that I would have rather done it with, so I had like a, like when I look back on that it's not like, something I ever wanna push out of my mind, or like, I have like any sort of like painful memory about. So I guess when I think of virginity, it would be like that, 'cause it was kinda like the transition point.

**H.C.** How did you feel about yourself after you were no longer a virgin versus before?

**A.K.** Um... I think like, unfortunately, I sort of... I mean after he and I... I kinda had expectations that maybe something would develop between, like further, as far as relationship-wise with a guy, in part because of that. I don't know if I thought maybe he would think "Oh, you know, if she's willing to have sex with me, then maybe I'm willing to like... date her or whatever." But, I think after that, and he and I didn't really drift apart so much as I just didn't really see him anymore, I mean, we stayed relatively close, we just never really had a chance together—he was a freshman in colleges, so...

But I think, unfortunately, as far as how much I changed, I kind of looked—I didn't, like hold sex in such a high, like I didn't hold myself to such high standards about who I would like, you know, sleep with or who I would hook up with or whatever. Um... because I kind of was like, "Well, I made my first time really good, so... I..." You know, it's not like I was just like hooking up with every person I met, but, I mean, when I look back on it there was a couple times where I look back and I can't understand why I would've like slept with that person, but it just like didn't mean as much to me anymore.

**H.C.** So would you say that you are a little bit ashamed of the stuff you'd done after?

**A.K.** Um, not like ashamed, but... and I can't even really say that I regret it, but I just don't really understand it. Like, I don't, at the time, I either look at it... I either look at it now as I was very insecure, and that was, like, my way of feeling like I... um... could feel like I was attractive to other people, or I was just like, wanted to feel like I had that control over someone else. I can't—I don't know what it was for me, though. Because I wasn't trying to... be like a "maneater" or whatever, but um... I didn't... I don't know. It's hard to really say. Because I, I look back on it and I'm like, I didn't do

anyth—I didn’t put myself in harm’s way sleeping with strangers, It’s just that I was like... making choices that were silly. Like, just kinda like, silly. It was probably more immaturity, just like, “Well, I can have sex if I wanna have sex.” So, like, why not?

**H.C.** When was this period of time that you were behaving this way?

**A.K.** Probably from... like, the summer of um, like after my last year of high school into... when I started dating my first boyfriend in college, which was around November freshman year of college.

**H.C.** And what was your relationship to the guy you lost your virginity to? Was he just a friend? (6 mins.)

**A.K.** Well you know him, it’s Andrew. I met him at a leadership conference....

**H.C.** You had your first boyfriend in college?

**A.K.** Basically.

**H.C.** How do you define... what “counts” as losing one’s virginity to you?

**A.K.** Penetration. Like, vaginal penetration. Like, real sex.

**H.C.** Real sex?

**A.K.** Not oral sex.

**H.C.** So you mean, vaginal penetration with a penis?

**A.K.** Yeah.

**H.C.** Fingers don’t count?

**A.K.** No. That doesn’t count.

**H.C.** Okay.

**A.K.** If that counted, then, he wasn’t my first.

**H.C.** Okay. And then you say, “real sex”—how do you define sex?

**A.K.** When I say sex, that means like, having sex, like, penis, vagina. Yeah.

**H.C.** So prior to you losing your virginity, what had been your experience and how did that make you feel, emotionally? (12 mins.)

**A.K.** There had probably been only... I'm trying to remember... I think there was one guy... maybe one or two, definitely one—I remember the first time I gave a guy head, that was... like... yeah, I was 16. Yeah, 16 I think. But that didn't feel like... That was completely, one hundred percent different than the first time I had sex, like, it didn't feel like any... Like when I first had sex it felt very emotional, very like, he was the kinda guy that would refer to that as "the first time we made love" kinda thing, and like... I don't know.

I think the guy that I first kinda gave a blowjob to was like, pretty much like *teaching me* how to give a blowjob. He was like, "Oh you've never done this before? Oh, okay, I'll tell you how to do it and blah blah blah," you know?

**H.C.** And how did that make you feel?

**A.K.** Um. I think I kinda knew that I was gonna hafta—sounds really awful—but I think I sorta knew in my mind that I would have to slash wanted to learn how to do it, and I might as well learn on someone that... like I wasn't gonna... like I might as well learn to do it well, so that later on, when I actually care about someone, I could like, really be able to pleasure them? But I didn't really care about the guy that I was—I mean I thought he was, like, hot, but I didn't really have like any other feelings beyond that. [voice gets really quiet, fast, and mumbly here, as sentence trails off...]

**H.C.** So would you say that you just used him as practice for when it really "counted"?

**A.K.** Yeah. Yeah, I think so, basically.

**H.C.** And is that how you look at some of your relationships? Like they don't count?

**A.K.** Um... sort of. I mean, sometimes, like, with certain people, I kinda know, or at least I think I know, that it doesn't, that we're never gonna really work out or I don't actually have feelings for them. Like in the... you know, like in my heart, I don't have that really there, but sometimes, like I'll, you know, still go along with it because I feel like every kind of relationship you have teaches you things about yourself and how to, and how to be a better, like, how to be better at a relationship.

**H.C.** And is that a useful skill, you think?

**A.K.** Um, yeah, no I, I think so. I think, 'cause sometimes, from my past, like, there are some past relationships that I actually thought were going well, and then I did something to screw it up.

**H.C.** What do you mean?

**A.K.** Like one in particular, I was dating a guy, and we'd been dating for, probably not that long, maybe a month. We had been on, I don't know, three dates or something, and um... and then one night he had like a thing that he had to do with his fraternity, and I

like turned into this jealous, like, possessive, like, girl, that obviously freaked him out. And he basically like, didn't, he basically almost stopped talking to me. He stopped returning my phone calls and then he, when he finally did talk, he was basically like, "Listen, the other night, like, I just didn't really like the way that you were acting and blah blah blah." And I kinda learned from that that I need to sort of... take, take things slower with people and give people more space. And not expect so much from people that like... that I'm not... that I shouldn't yet, you know? And by the same token, although I've never been in this situation before, to not, you know, tolerate that from a guy that was being too controlling. But I've never had a guy be too controlling in a relationship, I'm always the controlling one.

**H.C.** So this practice. What is your ideal end? What are you building up to? Why are you looking at all these experiences as useful?

**A.K.** Um... I mean, to be in like a healthy, rewarding relationship or a relationship where eventually I would end up getting married. But, I think in my mind, I know that marriage is so far from now, that I have time to sort of meet different people, and you know... not um... I mean, you know ask me the same question in two months I might have a completely different answer, but like, right now, it's sort of meet different people, feel them out, don't settle for someone, and, you know. As much as it would be nice to be in a serious relationship, and I can see a lot of perks that would come from that, I guess like... it's not something that I'm like, completely focused on. I don't really have time for it right now. But, I do like... you know, I do like the feeling that I get when I'm with a guy. Not just in like a physical sense, but in like the emotionally rewarding sense when you have someone you can, like, have conversations with, and kind of be intimate with, and you know. Have like—I guess have like physical contact with, but not just like sexual contact.

**H.C.** And do you feel like you can't get the same kind of compassionate, supportive, friendship aspect of it in the same way, with a girl?

**A.K.** I mean, I think so. It's different but, I mean... I don't... I guess, I guess I've always had a wall up around having relationships with girls, I've been more drawn to, like, having relationships with guys. The problem with that is that often, I end up liking a guy or the guy ends up liking me. So at the same time it's hard for me to be friends with guys. Just friends with them. But um, I mean... like, as far as... [exhales] wait, what's the question?

**H.C.** I'm asking if there's a specific reason you value that kind of friendship more from a guy than a woman.

**A.K.** I don't think that I value that kind of friendship more. Um... I just think that... it's harder for me to—I, I have probably better, like as far as like, my relationship with my sister or my mom, um, or, like, a few close friends that I have, and like, I mean I don't know if this is like the same thing, but like, one of my best friends who's a man but he's gay, I mean I don't wanna call him like a girl, but like, it's almost like the same thing

‘cause like there’s no... sexual tension there at all like there... you know. I don’t wanna say I value friendships with men more than women, that’s really not true at all.

**H.C.** I guess... you said you tend to be, tend to have more guy friends than girl friends, and I just wondered if you knew why that was. If it was something that you were trying to do, or if it was something that just happens, or maybe you have a thought why that is the case.

**A.K.** Um... I don’t know if it’s like a jealous thing, where I have a hard time being friends with girls. Because I feel like, I feel like a lot of times with girls, at least in my past experience, I have a lot of negative associations with friends of mine, girlfriends of mine, that used to be my best friends that no longer speak to me. And I just feel like girls are very... they can get very jealous and they can get very catty, and... I already am a jealous person and I don’t want to become more like that by having that kind of influence in my life.

Two of my best friends from high school... um... were, they were like my best friends, pretty much my two only friends other than like my gay best friend. They, and I don’t wanna say that just because I had like this one, negative experience that, you know, I’ll never be friends with girls again, which isn’t true—I do have girlfriends—but they were great, and then when I went to college they were roommates and then, it wasn’t just that like, I didn’t keep in contact with them, but they didn’t keep in contact with me. And I feel like a lot of times I did try to keep in contact with them, but they didn’t return my phone calls and whatnot, and things like that, and um, I think a part of—and I could just be pulling this out of thin air because obviously I’ve never had this conversation with them, because they don’t talk to me anymore—but they... I feel like maybe resented the fact that I kind of moved away from my hometown, and they were kinda still there, and I was in a different place meeting new people, and I mean not like this is something to be jealous of, but I had a really fun freshman year, and I had a boyfriend, and all this stuff. And I think that, like, as much as I didn’t have a lot of time to be chatting it up on the phone with them every single night, my phone wasn’t ringing off the hook either. And I just feel like when I went back the summer after, and hung out with them, things were a little bit different but things were still okay and a little bit normal, but after that things fell apart. And when I started talking about going to Australia, they really fell apart and my friend Jody just stopped talking to me basically, because she had an experience where her boyfriend, um, went to Australia and cheated on her while he was there, and she just had this like, negative feelings towards the entire continent or whatever. And um, I... you know, decided to still go, despite her negative feelings, and she—honestly this sounds really dramatic, but she just did stop talking to me. She wrote back to one Facebook message I sent her, this like nasty message.

I just feel like girls, and I’m not trying to put girls into boxes, but I don’t have a lot of bad experiences with guys in that respect. I have a lot more with girls.

**H.C.** Well I guess that kind of relates to the blog post you were talking about earlier. Can you talk a little bit more about what you were saying earlier? (26:32)

**A.K.** Um, I was just saying that I feel like, well, what I read was about how women, women with body image problems, whether it be body dysmorphia or whether it be anorexia or bulimia or some other kinda disordered eating, um... have... society in general tends to kind of point to men being the culprit of all of that because, you know it's, like, the standard of beauty that the fashion industry sets or the mainstream media sets, and you've got all these men's magazines with girls in like, skinny, big boobs, and all these, like, standards to live up to. And at the same time, you meet just as many guys that would much rather have like a curvy girl. And would much rather have a girl that had meat on her bones or whatever. And just as many guys would much rather have a girl that they can have like a conversation with. And I... recently—it kinda struck a chord with me because recently, when I had seen, I saw, the first guy that I had sex with, I saw him for the first time in three years recently, I was expecting him to no longer be attracted to me. I was like, “Well, I look totally different, you know, I’m not 16 anymore, I’ve put on weight, I have a mind of my own now, and, like, he might now like me anymore.” And I told him that, like a week ago when we were hanging out, I was like “I didn’t think that you would like, like me anymore,” and he was like “If anything I like you more.” And I was just like, wow, like, and I don’t think that he’s like a rare case. And I just, I think that that’s something that, like, society tends to kind of apply just as much as like, these are male magazines, there’s still women working at them. And I think women place a lot of the pressure on each other to, like, live up to those kind of standards. And I think that men oftentimes don’t like agree or force those standards on like the women in their life at all. In fact I think they often do the opposite.

**H.C.** Well I think it’s interesting that you mention that women do work at those magazines. I’m just thinking about my experience reading women’s magazines, which are created by women for women, and there’s a lot of literature in there about how to please guys in bed and stuff, and it doesn’t seem... it seems to just assume that a lot of the readership is sexually active, which, I guess why would you buy that if you weren’t.

**A.K.** Yeah, why would you want to have to read through all that.

**H.C.** Do you feel any pressure to be sexually active in a certain way or to carry yourself in a certain way to be attractive to men?

**A.K.** Um... ye—I guess I’d be lying if I didn’t say yes.

**H.C.** Why would you say that?

**A.K.** Because, I feel like just, um... just like going out, just like going to a bar or whatever, for me is like often, I mean I like to go to bars and hang out with my friends. But at the same time, I’m, I can hang out with my friends at home, and a huge draw to like going to a bar, I mean yeah you’re getting out and there’s people around, and it creates a funner atmosphere and stuff, and I definitely, I can understand that that’s, that is a reason that I do like to do that. But at the same time, another huge draw is that there’s this opportunity to meet new guys, and potentially meet a guy that I would maybe date, or

whatever. And I do think that there's a pressure to like look good for them, because... otherwise, like, why... [exhales] otherwise, like, why bother? Because, um... if you're, I mean I guess, it's, it's almost like a competition, it's almost like a primal urge to like, find... not only find like an attractive mate but also to be attractive for them. I mean, I can't even, I can't think of any other way to describe it besides like I just like, an innate, like... feeling. Like urge.

**H.C.** So— (32:00)

**A.K.** But I have to, I have to say that by the same... I, I follow Women's Health on Twitter. And their tweets, I *swear* must be at least, between fifty to seventy-five percent—they're *often* about sexual positions. Like, just positions! And I know another huge portion is just dieting. And like, that alone, like... says a lot. It's Women's *Health*, you know? *Health*. Like, we're not talking about, like... I mean not to mention the fact that creating that sense that, not, not just women should be having sex, but they should be doing crazy positions and, like, not really spending enough attention on like safe sex, finding men that you actually should be having sex with, you know? I mean... yeah.

No, it's hard to say that that's... it's rather, it's... clear that those kind of messages create like an atmosphere of this is something that's acceptable and this is something you need to be doing to fit in.

**H.C.** I guess, I'm curious because you were talking about how when you first had sex it wasn't good, but it was right for you, right?

**A.K.** Yeah.

**H.C.** Is there, like, is there a right time in general for someone to have sex, is there a point where you're gonna be like, too old to be a virgin? Like there's this imperative to not be beyond a certain age and still be sexually inexperienced.

**A.K.** Um... that's hard for me to really answer, because I'm speaking from a viewpoint of someone that does have sexual experience. Um, I think that if I were to be my age and to have never had sex before, I feel like there'd be a huge area in my mind that was like, like a huge grey area in my mind, like what is that? People talk about sex all the time. And I just feel like to not have that um... to not have had that experience would make me like a little bit—I don't know if I wanna say like confused, or... um... just, and I don't wanna say like “missing out” because then that sort of implies that you should start having sex as soon as possible so you're not missing out. I don't agree with that. But, I think that—I don't know as far as when a time would be, as far as like “Oh, you waited so long, you just need to just have sex.” Because... [exhales] um... I think that... if someone is completely comfortable in their, like, virginity, like if they still feel completely fulfilled in it, then there's no reason for them to have sex. But if they have met someone that they want to experience that with, then I think that they should. I mean, then that gets into the whole religious thing, but I don't subscribe to that, I mean, that didn't really have any affect on my decisions. But I, um, I feel like if someone wants to, I

don't think that there should be something holding anybody back. But at the same time, if it's just that a person hasn't found someone that's like, willing to have sex with them... I mean, I don't know if it's a really high percent of the population that's like *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, I mean, like, he kinda just gave up after a while. But, it's a hard question, because I feel like there's a million different answers to it. And they could all be right.

**H.C.** Well what's your answer? What do you think?

**A.K.** I think... for some people, that point is marriage. And I think for other people that point is... when they feel physically mature enough or emotionally and physically mature enough to handle it, and I think for other people it's when they find the person they want to share that with. For me, I found a person that I wanted to share that with. But I think those are generally like the three realms that it falls into. (end first section of recording)

**H.C.** What is your current sex life like?

**A.K.** Lately, I've been actually like... well, first of all I've been really busy so it's been hard to... I haven't been really going out a lot enough to meet guys, but I feel like lately the last few weeks I've been sleeping with Andrew, the first guy I ever had sex with, which is weird, because, that's weird. Like, to still be sleeping with a guy that was your first love, first person you lost your virginity to, but you aren't actually dating them, and you know, haven't. Ever. But, so that's weird, but um... it's... um kinda nice, cause I feel like now I'm in a place where I can deal with it, I can, like we can be together and we can have intimate moments and we can have sex, and I don't feel like an emptiness when he's not around. But I don't feel like that makes me like a shallow person, like someone who can just throw sex around or whatever, 'cause it is special when you do it, but I don't, I'm not relying on him for that, um... that like sense of completeness. Like that sense that like... when I feel like he's near me, when I feel like he wants to be with me, that makes me feel like more whole. 'Cause that's kind of how I felt when I was 16.

**H.C.** When in a relationship is it appropriate to have sex? How do you determine that?

**A.K.** Like with a new guy?

**H.C.** Yeah, for you personally. When do you think it's appropriate for you to have sex with him?

**A.K.** Um, I mean, assuming that I don't, like, mistakenly... like hook up with a guy...

**H.C.** What do you mean "mistakenly"?

**A.K.** I mean like, in, 'cause in my, in the past I have had like drunk hook ups with guys. Um, is that like included? Because like in those situations, it's not like all that many, but...

**H.C.** I guess I would say in a relationship, which would be, for me, excluding one-night-stands or hook ups. (1:10)

**A.K.** Okay. Okay. Um... I guess... for me... I don't know, I guess I just kind of feel like when it's right. Like if I feel comfortable enough with a guy... that I feel like I am attracted to him, and I feel like I feel comfortable opening myself up to him in that sense, then... I would be open to like having sex, but... um... it's... I mean, it's really is different for, it really is different for every guy, I think. Every relationship, the past like few relationships that I've had um... it's been different every time. Like I don't know. Like my first time, was a completely different story, and then um, my first boyfriend in college was um... we probably waited... I don't know, a couple months before we had sex for the first time—like a couple months from when we first met. Um. And then... and then my boyfriend from last year, we kind of like slept together for a while, but we didn't have sex, and then like finally we did have sex—it really is like, it really is dependent on the circumstances, I think. I don't think that there's a hard fast rule in my mind, or any one thing that really makes me feel like “Okay, it's time.” It really is like, dependent on a lot of different things.

If I met a guy who... you know, was hesitant to have sex and wanted to get to know me really well, and, and you know, wait, even though I felt ready and he wanted to wait, then I would wait. If I felt like he was the one for me.

**H.C.** So you don't have, like, “No kissing on the first date,” “No like sleeping together after—“ it depends on the person?

**A.K.** Yeah, like, I'll kiss on the first date, but I don't... If I... usually if I'm into a guy, I don't mind kissing on the first date 'cause I want them to know that I'm into them. Um. But I don't really have, I don't, I tend to not, I don't want to get too physical right away because I think that sends the wrong sort of message about what my intentions are with the relationship.

**H.C.** What kind of message do you think that sends?

**A.K.** It, I mean, it, this didn't really click to me until... you know, very recently, but um, I just know like, from the past if I um... you know, hold back even like my physical urges to do more than, you know, kiss or whatever, then I think it kind of sends a message to a guy that that might be all I'm interested in or that maybe all that I'm all *they* might be interested in me for.

**H.C.** And that's bad?

**A.K.** Yeah. Typically. 'Cause then it's sort of just a waste of my time. If it's a guy that I'm not really like... you know, interested in getting to know more, then... why am I, like, why am I wasting my time I guess.

**H.C.** Okay. So... my next question is, how does sex make you feel? Emotionally. Currently.

**A.K.** Um... I think... I th—I don't know I don't know how to say this because it's really, it really is like, dependent on what I... um sort of like prepare myself for. I'll use an example. Um, last... last um... I guess it was in August, um, I met up with an old... I'm not gonna call him a friend, but he was an old, a *prior* hook up from my... freshman year. I met at a party. He's you know, long graduated, graduated like three years ago. And... um, you know, there was sorta this like instant interest, like attraction thing happening... [A.K.'s roommate walks into apartment, makes A.K. uncomfortable. Stop interview]

... But, um, this was an interesting case, and why I am choosing to tell about it is because this guy, who I was like into, but I *knew* that we were just gonna... like, I knew that it was just gonna be a one time thing. And so I sort of just prepared myself for this. And um... and when I... when everything was all said and done, and you know he had said something to me like "You know I have a younger sister and..." he said something along the lines of like, "I don't want you to do anything that you're gonna regret, or your gonna, it's gonna make you feel bad later on," or whatever, and I think he meant like, "I don't want you to get attached to me." Like, "I don't want us to hook up tonight and then you to like, call me tomorrow," 'cause he like, lives in California. So... um, it was sort of this weird like, Freudian thing happening, and I didn't really understand putting me in his like sisters place, or whatever, but um, I remember being like, "Yeah, yeah I'm fine with that," being, feeling like "Oh yeah, I've got so much power now," and whatever, and um... and like, when he left, he left around like, you know, he left like early in the morning, he left like six or seven or whatever, it was like, really early. And um, and I remember being like "[Sighs] this kinda sucks." [Laughs.] And then, being like, but wait, I like asked for this, I told myself I was gonna be fine. And I knew that this was—I knew that I like have these kind of feelings for him, but I knew at the same time, that I had to kind of like turn those feelings off if I was gonna be okay with us just having a one night hook up thing. So. I... did, but all the next day I felt like crap. I like, I just like, felt like... I kinda like opened myself up and kinda started to like him for that night, and then when he left it was like [exhales deeply], like my heart hurt a little bit? And, and I kinda like, or that was, it was kind of a moment in time where I kind of decided if, I actually feel... like... like there are guys that I have since just like hooked up with, but I don't actually have like, they don't do *that* somethin' special to me? And he like, kinda did. So, I kinda decided if I ever meet a guy that has that something special, I'm not gonna just hook up with him because I know that I'll feel bad about it later.

And I guess that kinda like gets to your question about how does it make me feel emotionally. It sometimes makes me feel very emotional, and sometimes, it doesn't at all. And... lately I've decided if a guy tells me... or somehow makes it very apparent to me that this is completely just physical and not gonna turn into anything, and I don't... not care about them, then I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna like have sex with them because it's just not worth my, my emotional like... heartache. You know?

**H.C.** Mhmm. And when you say "prepare for that"? What do you mean by that?

**A.K.** I mean, well I though I had prepared. I kinda like, gave myself like a pep talk like “Okay. He’s gonna come here. And he’s gonna look good, you know, I’m gonna have all these feelings, and... I’m gonna... relish the moment, and then be able to move on from it after.” And I kinda like told myself that. But. You know. The next day I still kind of— [Roommate’s friend walks in, AK gets uncomfortable and stops talking again.]

Like, I just kinda like, was like, “Okay, this is what’s gonna happen, and I’m prepared for it,” but I really wasn’t prepared for it. And, and it was actually a good thing that I had that happen because—it taught me that... I’m not...you can’t just make yourself strong, you... it’s like *normal* and it’s *good* to have, like, emotions, and like you—when you have sex with someone you like share hormones or whatever, all that kinda stuff that like is supposed to make you be attached to the person that you have sex with. I just feel like when you already have those like actual feelings for someone, that are there, that have like that seed planted, and then you have sex, then you’re just like asking for trouble if that’s not gonna be something you’re gonna be able to like, sustain with that person. Especially if you know that that’s not gonna be, you’re not gonna sustain that with that person and you still do it anyway. ‘Cause then you’re like, “Why’d I do that to myself?”

**H.C.** These might be a little redundant, but they’re necessary to what I’m trying to figure out, um, I guess I wanna ask you why do you have sex, as opposed to waiting to have sex when you’re married? If it’s a very emotional experience where you become attached to an individual, why have sex now before you’re married, or before you’re with someone that you know you’ll be with?

**A.K.** Um, I feel like... Like, sex, like sex is something that I enjoy doing. I mean, it’s like, really not all that complicated beyond that. I like the... I mean I guess like the actual act of sex is not something that I—it’s, I mean it’s more, you know, everyth—foreplay and everything leads up to sex, is like probably more fun for me than, than actually doing it, but I mean there is like a certain release that comes from... the like, being with someone like that. And... as far as like *waiting*, I just, I just feel like I would never wanna... I don’t know, I don’t wanna say like *deprive* myself of that, but I think it’s a, you know, expressing your sexuality is something that if you feel like you... are feeling drawn to do, I don’t think that’s something you should like stifle. That’s just how I feel.

**H.C.** So what do you hope to get out of sex?

**A.K.** Um... well. Usually... pleasure. And also, I guess like the satisfaction of knowing that you, knowing that I gave someone else pleasure, makes me, it just like makes me feel happy. Like, if I made someone else that I care for, or you know, that I enjoy being with or whatever, have like that satisfaction, that just like makes me, it like provides happiness for me.

**H.C.** So you’d say that like... first of all, do you have a vibrator?

**A.K.** Yeah. [Laughs.] You’re really diggin’ deep!

**H.C.** Um, another part of my paper, so you do have a vibrator, well how is... I guess I would be like, when... I kind of wanna be like, when do you decide to use your vibrator, and how does that differ for you than sex with a man? And which do you enjoy more?

**A.K.** I probably... [Giggles as more people walk through the apartment, make her uncomfortable. Stop interview again.]

Um, okay. Physically, I would rather, I get—I'm able to have more pleasure using my vibrator. [giggles.] But um, but as far as that whole, the satisfaction part of making someone else feel good, I don't, obviously, have that when I... am not with anybody else. It's two different sorts of happiness. One is sort of like a satisfaction, the other is like a pleasure.

**H.C.** And would you consider someone who's never had sex with a man but has used or uses a vibrator regularly to be a virgin?

**A.K.** Yes.

**H.C.** Why?

**A.K.** Because they've never had sex.

**H.C.** Can you elaborate your logic?

**A.K.** I just if you've never had sex, if you've never had intercourse, I don't understand how you couldn't be a virgin.

**H.C.** These next questions are a little more abstract: What makes you feel sexy?

**A.K.** I mean [laughs] I don't know the answer to this. Um... I... get, like if I'm wearing, like if whatever I'm wearing or whatever I feel like accentuates the good parts of me, and you know, downplays the parts of me that I don't find to be as... uh... whatever, like attractive or whatever. So something that like, really plays up my... chest area and like, you know. Makes me look skinnier. That's when I, feel like, sexy.

**H.C.** So would you say it has a lot to do with what you're wearing?

**A.K.** Yeah, probably. Or not wearing. [Laughs.]

**H.C.** So when do you feel least sexy?

**A.K.** When I'm wearing something that makes me look fat.

**H.C.** Can you talk about when you're getting ready to go out, what you do to make yourself, well what is your mission when you're getting ready to go out, and what do you hope to do when you get to where you're going?

**A.K.** Like go out to a bar?

**H.C.** Yeah. Just take me through your thinking.

**A.K.** I mean, like, pretty much what I said before, like I... try to wear make up that like plays up my eyes, 'cause I feel like my eyes are generally something that people complement or comment about, or whatever. Um... I try to, like, wear things that I think make me look slimmer and... like, make my... curves look the most curvy and like, good... I don't have a whole lot of things that I usually wear, so I typically know like what's gonna look good on me and what's gonna look bad on me. So. I just go to one of the old standbys, typically.

**H.C.** And who would you say that you're dressing for?

**A.K.** I mean, I'm not like... I usually just dress for... what what I feel like makes me look good and what I feel like I'm most comfortable in. Like I don't like to wear things that are gonna make me look super sexy if I'm gonna like feel really self conscious at the same time. Um... but generally... I feel like if I'm dressing for anybody it would be for... you know, like I was saying like last time, there is obviously a part of me in the back of my mind that's like, "Well, I'm gonna go out tonight and I can meet a guy, and blah blah blah." So. Like, yeah in the back of my mind I'm sort of thinking that I would wanna wear something a prospective... you know, boyfriend, mate, whatever, would find like attractive.

**H.C.** When do you feel most like a woman?

**A.K.** Um... I feel most like a woman... I mean, I know this is really what you're getting at, but I probably feel most like a woman when I'm... um... when I'm like babysitting? I mean, like, I babysit, so, when I'm like cooking, and when I'm picking the kids up from school, and like, doing grocery shopping and doing those kind of like... stereotypical like, woman, like, uh, wife-mother roles, like, it makes me feel most like... fulfilling my womanly duty. I feel like I feel the most... I feel like I feel like a huge female when I do that kind of stuff. Cooking and being domestic.

**H.C.** And how do you feel about that?

**A.K.** I mean... I don't really feel all that bad about it. Just because it's a part of my life that—and I like to do that kind of stuff, and I hope to be a mother one day. And it's something that I'm... I'm, I feel fine with, I feel comfortable with. It's something that I... but no, I feel definitely comf—good about it. Like I feel, like I mean obviously there're some days where I'm just like, "Ugh. I don't wanna do this." But that's mostly just 'cause I'm, don't wanna do that job like in general, but like when I'm actually in the midst of... acting like a housewife, I... kinda enjoy it. I think.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Cosmopolitan Magazine, June 2009, Cover



## Women's Health Magazine on Twitter, Accessed 6 April 2010



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