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# Pure Expectations: Examining the Meaning and Implications of Virginity Culture

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# Pure Expectations: Examining the Meaning and Implications of Virginity Culture

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This retrospective qualitative investigation seeks to understand the messages that youth received about virginity from their families and communities. Utilizing a narrative approach, seventy (n=70) young adults wrote a one-page, single-spaced narrative (approximately 650 words) in which they reflected on the messages they received about virginity throughout childhood and adolescence. A feminist theoretical framework guided the development of this study and informed the data analysis, which was conducted through an intensive constant comparative process of open, axial, and selective coding techniques. Members of the research team separately reviewed each narrative before coming together to discuss codes and create a unified, yet flexible, coding scheme that revealed how virginity was discussed, policed, and challenged in their families of origin and local communities. Preliminary findings suggest a tension arises between what youth are told throughout middle and high school, and what they come to believe through their own experiences that lead to a critique of the earlier messages they were told about virginity. Embedded in family systems as well as social systems, including schools and churches, expectations of virginity were pervasive. Are participants' bodies their own? Or do they belong to their parents? Teachers? Faith communities? Peers? Findings reveal a culture exists in which a young girl is presented with seemingly two options: a) choose virginity until heterosexual marriage, which is enforced in a plethora of manners, including signing a contract with her father, attending a mandatory Rings and Things or Love Waits lecture at a public school, purchasing a purity ring, signing a virginity pledge, or attending a purity ball, or b) not choosing to save virginity for marriage. Findings reveal a collective effort between families and communities to promote a false sense of agency amidst a backdrop of prevailing expectations that, if not followed, could hurt not only the young woman, but her family and community, as well.