

Valuation of Women's Virginitv in the Philippines*

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Abstract

Despite increasing sexual liberalization, virginitv and its *lws* persist as contested and highly gendered concepts in many parts of Asia. According to theories in feminism and sexuality studies, virginitv may be socially constructed as either a gift, a stigma, an act of worship, or a process. This paper examines the socially constructed values and meanings ascribed to women's virginitv in the context of the Philippines. We synthesize findings from quantitative sources and original qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with Filipino women and men. Subsequent analysis of these findings indicated that a strong, widespread importance is ascribed to women's virginitv. While men endorsed female virginitv as important prior to marriage, women reported even more restrictive views—including legitimizing beliefs linking virginitv to women's worth and to the avoidance of marital conflict. Filipina women expressed disapproval of sex for unmarried women, but less for unmarried men, and placed less importance on male virginitv. The evidence indicates the presence of a sexual double standard and supports the argument that women themselves may endorse cultural belief systems that restrict female sexuality. Female virginitv was dominantly constructed either as a gift (an embodied resource given by women to men) or, more often, as a prize to be claimed by men from women within the context of heterosexual marriage. Male virginitv, in contrast, was largely viewed as a stigma. Virginitv loss was not construed as a normative developmental process, nor, despite the predominance of Roman Catholicism in Philippine culture, a sacred act with religious underpinnings.

Key words

virginitv, virginitv loss, sexual double standard, Philippines

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Introduction

Attitudes, norms, and behaviors related to sexuality have been increasingly liberalized in many contemporary societies (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Rates of heterosexual marriage in the West have declined, giving way to other patterns of adult relationships such as civil unions and cohabitation. Delayed marriage, rising singlehood, and increasing acceptance of sex prior to marriage have been observed in many parts of Asia (Jones, 2007). Women's sexual and reproductive health rights are being claimed and pursued in the public sphere, as demonstrated in the Philippines (Ruiz-Austria, 2004). Lesbian and gay partnerships are gaining increasing visibility in popular culture and recognition in state laws, with full marriage equality now available in more than twenty countries globally (Carroll & Mendos, 2017), including, recently, Asian countries like Nepal and Taiwan.

Despite this liberalization, traditional valuations related to women's and men's sexuality persist. This paper aims to contribute to the literature in sexuality and women's studies by revisiting an issue that remains a contested and highly gendered concept in the Philippines—virginity and the transition to sexual activity, often referred to as virginity loss (Blank, 2007; Carpenter, 2005; Delgado-Infante & Ofreño, 2014; Ofreño, 2007). We apply a critical realist perspective (Gunnarsson, Martínez Dy, & Van Ingen, 2016) to the problem of women's virginity and sexual double standards, and present evidence of the persistence of a sexually restrictive valuation of women's virginity and its so-called loss in the context of this Southeast Asian developing country using national survey data from the Philippines as well as from originally collected field-based accounts from Filipino women and men.

Literature Review

Virginity: Contested Meanings

The definition of virginity, which determines whether or not one is a virgin, has long been debated in gender and sexuality studies. One simple definition refers to individuals who have not yet had sex (Blank, 2007). This definition, however, hinges on one's definition of sex and sexual activity (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Sanders, Hill, Yarber, Graham, Crosby, &

Milhausen, 2010). What counts as *sex*—only penile-vaginal intercourse, or also lesbian or gay sex? Does *sex* include oral sex, masturbation, and technology-mediated behaviors such as cyber sex and phone sex? And what about rape and other forms of coerced sexual activity? Empirical evidence from surveys indicate that *sex* is prototypically defined in the minds of people as heterosexual intercourse, but there is less consensus for other sexual behaviors such as oral sex, genital touching, or anal intercourse in both Western (Bersamin, Fisher, Walker, Hill, & Grube, 2007) and Asian, specifically Philippine (Ofreneo, 2007), samples.

An equally important issue concerning virginity is who gets to define it. Virginity has traditionally been located at the nexus of powerful social institutions that vie for the ability to define the parameters of sexuality, especially women's sexuality. These institutions include: Biomedicine (e.g., by defining virginity in terms of embodiment and anatomy, such as women's hymens—thus giving rise to medical procedures such as hymen reconstruction that purport to *restore* virginity; Cook & Dickens, 2009), the state (e.g., provisions in the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines that make reference to the crime of “qualified seduction of virgins,” cf. Article 337), and religious institutions like Islam and Roman Catholicism (e.g., in the Catholic Bible, in passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:34, “There is also a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.”).

Aside from these definitional debates, relevant to the current study is how virginity is socially and individually constructed and ascribed meaning to by women and men. Previous research using Western samples of women and men has identified four possible social meanings surrounding virginity and virginity loss, as shown in Figure 1 (Carpenter, 2001, 2005; Eriksson & Humphreys, 2014; Humphreys, 2013).

First, virginity is socially constructed as a gift. In this meaning, virginity is a valued but impermanent embodied resource, a unique, one-time gift from the self to one's very first sexual partner (whether in the context of marriage or otherwise). This construction of virginity gives rise to the discursive notion of *giving one's virginity* to someone, or conversely, of *saving* it for a particular occasion such as a committed relationship or marriage. Second and in contrast, virginity may be a stigma—a negatively valued social condition that renders its bearer contemptible in the eyes of others. Here, virginity status is an undesirable state, shameful and to be concealed,



Figure 1. Meanings of virginity model (based on Carpenter, 2001, 2005).

until it is immediately shed as one enters the world of adult sexual activity. A third meaning ascribed to virginity is that it is an act of worship. Virginity and its loss, from this perspective, are imbued with sacred and spiritual significance. Sexual debut is reserved as an experience that takes place only within religiously sanctioned marriage (Ogland, Xu, Bartkowski, & Ogland, 2010). This meaning is an extension of the otherwise secular meaning of virginity as an interpersonal gift, but takes it further by constructing virginity as an embodied resource that is sacred and blessed, while its premature (i.e., premarital) loss constitutes a sin or moral transgression. Finally, a fourth social meaning frames virginity as a part of the normative developmental processes of growing up and becoming an adult. Here, virginity is simply a period of one's life, a pre-sexual activity phase usually associated with childhood and adolescence. The transition from being a virgin to being sexually active is construed as being simply one of many developmental milestones along the pathway to adulthood.

Virginity: Gendered Valuations

Apart from the diverse social meanings and accompanying valuations ascribed to it, virginity is also highly gendered. Etymologically, the word *virgin* has roots in the Latin *virgo* or *maiden*, indicating that virginity was synonymous to premarital womanhood. The archaic English word *maidenhead* is

classically defined as synonymous to virginity as well.

Women and men's sexualities are valued differently across cultures, especially in the context of heterosexual relations (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Vohs & Lasaleta, 2008). Moreover, female and male virginity are valued very differently, even oppositionally. This suggests the existence of a sexual double standard (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Marks & Fraley, 2005). Sexual double standards are said to be in operation when individuals and cultures apply different standards for sexual restrictiveness or permissiveness for women versus for men in the context of heterosexual activity (Crawford & Popp, 2003). This can include: The negative labeling of girls who show interest in sexuality, but allowing or even encouraging the same for boys; beliefs that categorize women, but not men into a madonna/whore dichotomy; and social norms that punish married women for extramarital sex, such as adultery laws, but permit or even encourage men to do the same (Crane & Crane-Seeber, 2003). From a gender equality perspective, sexual double standards are problematic in and of themselves. From a critical realist perspective (Gunnarsson et al., 2016), sexual double standards are also consequentially problematic as they have been shown to be associated with negative outcomes in sexual health, e.g., increasing women's risk for unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection by discouraging preparedness and restricting access to sexual health resources (Crawford & Popp, 2003).

Sexual ideologies such as the sexual double standard are given structure and legitimacy through laws, social norms, and public attitudes, which then influence beliefs of individuals. If women's virginity (but not men's virginity) is highly valued in a culture, this valuation is theorized to be made legitimate by practices and beliefs of the people endorsing it (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), including by women themselves. This leads to the possibility that women, being socialized into the same cultural ideologies about sexuality and about female and male virginity, may themselves internalize and endorse such beliefs. These normative beliefs then function to restrict their own sexuality, including beliefs like sexual double standards regarding virginity (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002).

Filipino Sexual Culture as Context

Classified by the World Bank (2017) as a lower-middle-income economy,

the Philippines is a developing country in Southeast Asia, marked by a long history of colonialism under Spain and the United States, with a generally high degree of sexual conservatism (Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 1998). A quarter (25.2%) of the population of 100.1 million Filipinos currently live below the national poverty threshold (defined as living on less than 192 USD per month). The majority of Filipina women are born in low-income rural areas (58%), with more than half of the adult female population participating in heterosexual unions (46% married and 15% cohabiting). The fertility rate is about 3.0 births per woman, and teenage pregnancy is a major concern, with 22% of young women already bearing children at age 19 (PSA & ICF International, 2014). As a Spanish colony from the 16th to the 19th centuries, Roman Catholicism remains the most popular religion (practiced by more than 80% of the population) and has exerted significant influence on policies related to sexuality and sexual regulation. Sex work, abortion, same-sex marriage, gender identity recognition, commercial pornography, and even divorce are all illegal. On the other hand, the Philippines is a signatory and state party to international treaties like CEDAW and has passed legislation to advance women's human rights and gender equality, such as the Magna Carta of Women, which prohibits discrimination based on gender, and more recently, the Reproductive Health Law, which provides for sexuality education in public education and women's access to contraception.

Focusing on women's and men's sexuality in the Philippines, gendered meanings, including those ascribed to virginity and virginity loss, are visibly represented in women's writing, popular culture, and legal discourse. In her influential 1940 poem *Revolt From Hymen*, the pre-World War II Filipina poet Angela Manalang Gloria likened virginity to a patriarchy-enforced seal that signifies a woman's virtue, which equates the worth of women to their sexual bodies (Santiago, 2007). In the 1972 Filipino film *Ang Gangster at ang Birhen* (The Gangster and the Virgin), directed by Celso Ad Castillo and starring Dante Rivero and Hilda Koronel in the two title roles, there is little disagreement among Filipino audiences about which part, gangster or virgin, was played by the lead actress. In the 1984 film *Virgin People*, also directed by Celso Ad Castillo, the virgin people turn out to be three young women in a remote village whose sexualities are awakened when a man (whose own virginity status is not problematized) comes into their lives.

In Philippine jurisprudence, virginity has been defined, in a landmark case from 1985, as “the condition of a female who has not experienced sexual intercourse and whose genital organs have not been altered by carnal connection” (Moreno, 1988, p. 996). In contrast, another term “virtuous female” exists in Philippine legal discourse, referring to “an unmarried female *who is a virgin*” (emphasis added). Equating female virginity to female virtue, alongside a discursive silence on male virginity, indicates that virginity is dominantly constructed as gendered in many aspects of Philippine culture, offering basic evidence of a sexual double standard.

Such sexual double standards have been documented by qualitative research on Filipino sexuality. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with 50 young Roman Catholic women in semi-urban Kalibo, Aklan, Ellwood-Clayton (2006) documented a strong gift meaning ascribed to women’s, but not men’s, virginity in the context of heterosexuality. Her respondents spoke of women’s virginity as “the best gift you could give to your husband” (p. 10). A secondary meaning was related to virginity as an act of worship; being a virgin was associated with religious ideals of purity and self-control. This notion of being a *good girl* sexually-speaking was also documented in a small study by Delgado-Infante and Ofreneo (2014) who employed memory work with eight middle/upper-middle class women in Manila. Based on their study, Delgado-Infante and Ofreneo argue that Filipina women may construct first heterosexual sex (i.e., relinquishing virginity status) as an avoidance of sexual agency, which is associated with emotional pain and the shame in losing “what is most prized in women by society” (p. 399). On the other hand, Filipino men, according to their analysis, are largely outside this bind of having to accommodate cultural norms that restrict sexual desire and agency. The influence of Filipino sexual culture continues even for Filipinos in diaspora. In a qualitative study of middle-class Filipinos who had migrated to San Diego, California, Espiritu (2001) found that despite—or perhaps because of—contact with the more liberal American sexual culture, Filipino parents made an effort to raise their daughters *the Filipino way*, i.e., valuing virginity and marking sharp contrast to what they perceived as white female sexual promiscuity.

These studies, though suggestive of how women’s virginity may be valued in Filipino society, are based on small, opportunistic samples, mostly

of women, from semi-urban and urban settings, and middle to upper-middle class backgrounds. In this paper, we attempt to compensate for prior studies' limited application by using a mixed-method analysis of two datasets—one a nationally representative survey and another, qualitative accounts of Filipino men and women from lower socioeconomic classes who make up a significant proportion of the country's population (World Bank, 2017), but are largely underrepresented in local social science research on sexuality.

Research Problem

We examine the problem of how virginity, especially female virginity, is socially constructed in Filipino sexual culture by examining both nationally representative public opinion and original field-based qualitative accounts from focus groups and interviews with Filipino women and men in order to answer two research questions. First, how much value do young Filipino women and men place on female virginity? Second, what social meanings do young Filipino women and men ascribe to female virginity? By integrating quantitative and qualitative sources, this paper contributes to the literature in gender, sexuality, and women's studies with an empirical analysis of the social construction of women's virginity in a Southeast Asian culture.

Method

Quantitative Survey Data

We reanalyzed archival survey data from the Third Young Adult Fertility & Sexuality Study (YAFS3), a large questionnaire-based interview study conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute in 2002 that aimed primarily to provide information on sexuality and reproductive health among young Filipino women and men. YAFS3 is based on a nationally representative probability sample of young adults from 16 administrative regions of the Philippines including the National Capital Region and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, from 894 barangays (local administrative units), using two-stage cluster sampling. A follow-up study called YAFS4 was later conducted in 2013; this dataset has not yet

been made public, so the YAFS3 dataset remains the largest and most comprehensive publicly accessible source of information for Filipino sexuality and health outcomes (Raymundo & Cruz, 2004).

A total of 19,728 respondents (10,528 women and 9,200 men) from 15,463 households were included in the original YAFS dataset. For the purposes of this study, an analytic sample of sexually active Filipinos ages 15 to 27 years old (3,540 women and 3,467 men) was used. This was because we were primarily interested in respondents who had transitioned from the virginity to the nonvirginity status and whose views toward virginity were based on lived experiences of partaking in sexual life, rather than a mere hypothetical perspective on what would happen upon virginity loss. The average age of the sample pool was 22 years, and most respondents were married (63%). Twenty-six percent (26%) were high school graduates, 28% had spent some time in college, and only 9% had graduated from college. More than half (53%) were living in rural areas, while 47% were residing in more urban localities during the time of data collection. We analyzed responses by demographic variables via cross-tabulation using standard X^2 tests of association, with p values set at .05.

Qualitative Accounts

Ten focus groups and 67 interviews were conducted in 2007 with Filipino women and men ages 15 to 35 from poor to very poor areas of Metro Manila, Isabela, Pampanga, Oriental Mindoro, Sorsogon, and Albay, as part of a larger project titled *Filipino Rationalities: Exploring the Gap Between Knowledge and Practice in Family Planning and Contraceptive Use* through a grant provided by the Philippine Center for Population and Development (PCPD) to the second author. The original study examined Filipino beliefs surrounding contraceptive use and non-use to provide guidance for intervention strategies to increase use of modern contraception. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and focus group discussions between 1.5 to 2 hours. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that they would be asked questions about family planning. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants had an average household income of 6,000 PhP per month. Thirteen percent (13%) were elementary school graduates, 38% had some

high school education, and 22% completed high school; the rest had less than an elementary education, and none attended university. The participants' number of children ranged from 0 to 8, and the average age at first child, among the women with children, was 20.7. On average, the men begin cohabiting or were married at the age of 21, and women, at the age of 19.

For this paper, we examined the interview and focus group transcripts for insights on Filipino women's and men's views about virginity and virginity loss, using the meanings of virginity model (Carpenter, 2001, 2005; Eriksson & Humphreys, 2014; Humphreys, 2013) as an initial analytic lens, but retained an openness to other themes based on the data. We coded transcripts based on the four meanings posited by the model and noted constructions of virginity articulated by participants that were outside this framework. We then selected illustrative quotes that exemplify the social meanings and valuations Filipinos ascribed to women's virginity.

Results

In the following section, we present an integrated narrative of the quantitative and qualitative data in order to explore how Filipino women and men place value on female virginity and what social meanings they ascribe to virginity and virginity loss, including the presence of a sexual double standard. This mixed-method approach to secondary analysis allows us to combine some of the advantages of national survey data (i.e., its representativeness and generalizability) and of the qualitative accounts (i.e., its focus on providing voice to the most economically marginalized subpopulations). It should be noted, however, that while we interweave the findings to present an overall narrative, all quantitative results are from the national survey, while all qualitative findings are from the field-based interviews and focus group discussions.

Women's Virginity as Highly Valued

Female virginity remains highly valued among Filipinos (see Figure 2). In response to the question, "How important is it for a woman to be a virgin until she gets married?" more than half of Filipinos (60%) said it

was *very important* and approximately 3 out of 10 respondents (28%) considered it *important*. Only 12% believed it was *not important*. The valuation of women's virginity was widespread across demographic characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, urban/rural locale, and educational attainment (which in YAFS3 serves as a proxy for socioeconomic status). Cross-tabulation analysis using X^2 tests indicated no significant associations between valuation of women's virginity and demographic characteristics (all p 's > .1; see Table 1).

Table 1.
Filipino Valuations of Women's Virginity until Marriage by Demographic Characteristics

	<i>Very important / important</i>	<i>Not important</i>
Age ($p = .10$)		
15-17	0.93	0.07
18-20	0.89	0.11
21-23	0.85	0.15
24-27	0.82	0.18
Sex ($p = .52$)		
Female	0.89	0.11
Male	0.86	0.14
Marital Status ($p = .22$)		
Never Married	0.89	0.11
Married	0.83	0.17
Locale ($p = .66$)		
Urban	0.87	0.13
Rural	0.89	0.11
Education ($p = .63$)		
None to elementary school graduate	0.87	0.13
Some high school	0.89	0.11
High school graduate	0.90	0.10
Vocational or some college	0.87	0.13
College graduate and beyond	0.83	0.17
Total	0.88	0.12

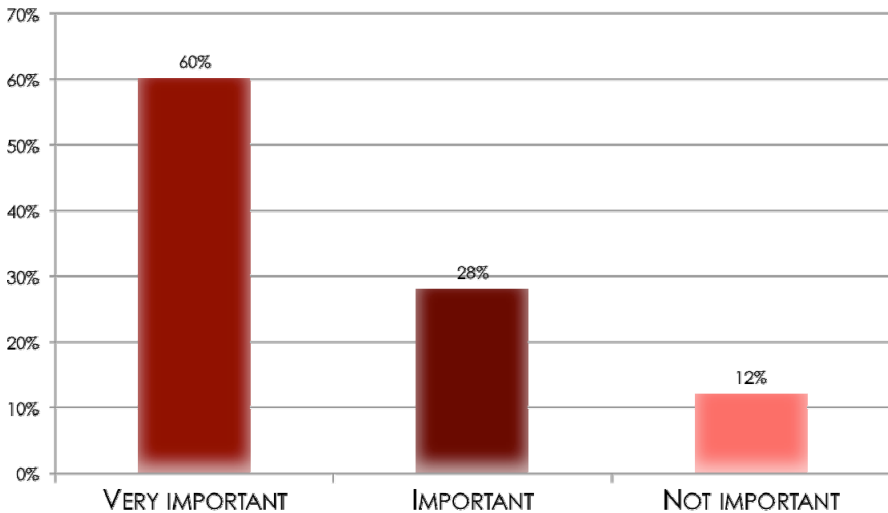


Figure 2. Filipino valuations of women's virginity.

Women's Virginity: Meanings by Men

Since valuation of women's virginity appeared to be widespread across demographic variables using nationally representative data, we looked at qualitative accounts from Filipinos in economically marginalized areas to give "voice" to meaning-making around virginity. Similar to previous findings in the literature, women's virginity was often construed as a valued gift to be offered by women to men in the context of heterosexual relations. Virginity was equated to a woman's worth and overall personhood, hence its remarkable value as a gift. Note the following focus group exchange with urban married Filipino men (all names pseudonyms):

Facilitator: *Mahalaga po ba yung virgin ang babae?* [Is it important that a woman is a virgin?]

All participants: *Oo* [Yes]

Facilitator: *Bakit?* [Why?]

Jose: *Sa akin kasi isang karangalan sa isang lalaki pag siya ang nakauma sa babae. Kasi yung buong pagkatao nung babae binigay niya. Yung pinakaingatan niyang bagay, binigay nya dun sa lalaki. Pinagkativalaan niya sa yo.*

[To me it is an honor for a man if he is gets to be first with a woman. Because she gave her entire being. That object that she kept safe, she gave to the man. She entrusted it to you].

In addition to and beyond construing women's virginity as a gift, our qualitative data indicated that men also considered female virginity as a kind of prize to be claimed in the context of heterosexual competition for women. These interview excerpts exemplify this particular construction of virginity, which surpasses the previous gift metaphor:

Interviewer: *Sa tingin niyo po ba, mahalaga yung pagka-virgin ng babae?*
[In your opinion, is it important, the virginity of women?]

Carlos: *Oo siyempre. Iba pa din yung ikaw ang nakauna sa kanya.*
[Yes, of course. It's still different when you get to her first.] (35-year-old man, married, urban)

Interviewer: *Sa mga araw ngayon, tingin mo importante pa rin na virgin pa ang babae kapag nag-asawa?* [These days do you think it is still important that a woman is still a virgin before marriage?]

Jun: *Importante talaga yun. Para satisfied ka na, uy ayos, ako ang nakauna.* [It's really important. So, you're satisfied that yeah, I got to her first.] (21-year-old man, married, urban)

Construing women's virginity not as gift for women to give but as a prize for men to claim for themselves served to shift agency away from women. In this construction of women's virginity, men are the active agents of sexual pursuit, competing against one another in a game of heterosexuality to be *the first* to initiate a woman into the sphere of sexuality. Unlike in the virginity-as-gift construction where a woman's worth was often reduced to a one-time embodied resource that she could theoretically choose to bestow or not, in the virginity-as-prize construction a woman was positioned as a static object, valued for the fact that no other men was able to get to her first (*nakauna*), sexually-speaking.

- Facilitator: *Hindi na importante na virgin pa yung babae?* [Is it no longer important that a woman is a virgin?]
- Jon: *Importante* [It's important]
- Toks: *Depende naman sa lalake yun. Kung mahal mo naman yung babae, kabit hindi na virgin.* [It depends on the man. If you love the woman, it's okay if she's no longer a virgin.]
- Facilitator: *Pero sa inyo, importante pa rin ba na virgin pa?* [But for you, is it still important that she's still a virgin?]
- Toks: *Oo, importante pa.* [Yes, it's still important.]
- Allan: *Kabit ako yun ang paniniwala ko eh. Basta ikaw makauna sa babae, lamang ka na.* [Even me, I believe that. As long as you get to a woman first, you're ahead.]
- Jon: *Sa 'yong sa 'yo na yun.* [She's all yours]

Filipino men in focus groups, like in the above extract, made multiple references to having sex with a virgin as getting to a woman first and, thus, staking some kind of heterosexual male claim on a woman—an ownership that other men would not be able to steal away. And as a one-time prize, women could not give away their virginity to any other partners they so choose.

- Alfie: *Magloko man yung babae, wala na eh, nauna ka na eh.* [Even if a woman sleeps around, it's done. You got to her first.]
- Nato: *Debado siya.* [She's disadvantaged]
- Jon: *Lugi na yung babae* [The woman is the loser]
- Facilitator: *So mahalaga na virgin ang babae? Tapos, magloko man yung babae, debado na siya?* [So it's important that a woman is a virgin? And if she ever has sex with someone else, she's at a disadvantage?]
- Nato: *Nakauna ka na eh* [Well, you got to her first]

Men believed that women would be at a loss or disadvantage (*debado*) if they even had sex with men other than the first man who obtained the prize of virginity. This belief was reinforced by a stigma they ascribed to women whose virginity had already been claimed. Such women were re-

ferred to as *latak*, a Tagalog word meaning dregs or worthless leftovers.

Filipina Women Endorse Views on Virginitv that Restrict Women's Sexuality

While Filipino men endorsed virginitv as an important characteristic of women prior to marriage, Filipina women reported as much or sometimes even more stringent and restrictive views about female virginitv status. In fact, survey data indicated that Filipina women ascribed importance on women's virginitv as much or even more than men do. Of the young women in the survey, 63% consider women's virginitv to be *very important*, in contrast to 56% of young men (see Figure 3). Overall, 89% of women considered virginitv to be either *very important* or *important*. This was not significantly different from the proportion of men who believed likewise (86%).

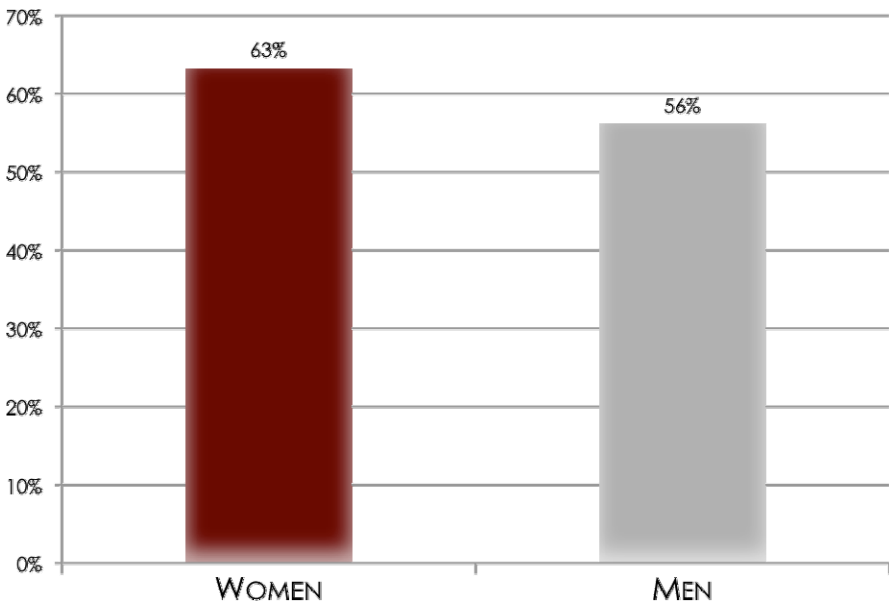


Figure 3. Filipino women's versus men's valuations of female virginitv as *very important*.

Qualitative accounts corroborated how and why Filipina women ascribed value to virginitv status prior to marriage. Women considered virginitv to be a kind of sexual capital (Hakim, 2010), an embodied resource that was a source of pride and a gift to be offered to a husband or partner. As one

interviewee remarked:

Kasi yun lang ang maipagmamalaki mo talaga. Sa babae, yun lang ang maipagmamalaki nya. [*It's the only thing you can be really proud of. For a woman, it's the only thing she can be proud of.*] (24-year-old woman, unmarried, rural)

As a gift, virginity was also perceived as a means to ensure a happy marriage. Women, both married and unmarried, positioned their concern for virginity in terms of their relationship with a current or future husband—pleasing him and making sure he is not disappointed. This concern meant that the absence of virginity status at the beginning of a marriage was expected to be a cause of conflict, as one woman explained:

Nakaririnig po ako kapag nag-iinuman, sinasabi nila, 'Ano ba yang asawa mo, hindi mo nakuha ng virgin, ano ba yan!' Kasi kapag nag-away, yan ang maisusumbat hanggang sa pagtanda. [I hear things, like when the men are drinking, they say 'You didn't get your wife as a virgin, what the hell is that.' Because if a couple fights, it will always be brought up until they grow old.] (19-year-old woman, married, urban)

This frequently cited reason—that husbands will always bring up the issue of a woman's (non)virginity when they have arguments—was a compelling belief for women in their valuation of virginity. This belief was not entirely without reason; men in the focus groups also believed that non-virginity of wives would be a source of strain in their relationship:

Jong: *Kasi, kung nakuha mo siyang hindi vigin, magkakalamat ang inyong pagsasama* [Because if you get her when she is no longer a virgin, there will be cracks in your relationship]

Edler: *Latak na lang siya* [She is just leftovers]

Facilitator: *Magkakalamat ang relasyon ninyo nun?* [Your relationship will be damaged then?]

Efren: *Oo, magkakalamat* [Yes, there will be cracks]

Jong: *Oo, masakit yun* [Yes, that will be painful]

As an embodied resource, virginity was even thought by some women to compensate for lower social status in other domains. If virginity signified a woman's worth, then it could contribute, as a one-time resource, to a woman's status despite other hardships like poverty:

Syempre kapag mahirap ka, yun lang yung pangangapital mo, di ba? Yung virginity mo, capital mo na yun. [Of course, if you're poor, that's the only thing you can use as capital, right? Your virginity, that's your capital.] (26-year-old woman, unmarried, urban)

Interestingly, women in our qualitative interviews and focus groups rarely invoked religion as the basis for their valuation for virginity. Also absent were worries about community norms, about what other people would think. Women only expressed concern about what their husbands would think and how it would reflect on their husbands' social status. They expressed these androcentric concerns by saying that it was important that men's friends and family would think that a man married a woman who was a virgin.

Sexual Double Standards: Women's versus Men's Virginity

We found empirical support for the hypothesis that women themselves might internalize and endorse ideologies that restrict their own sexuality, especially in relation to virginity (see Figure 4). More than half of men in the national survey (60%) disapproved of women having sex prior to marriage. Most women, on the other hand, disapproved of men having sex before marriage (66%) and of women having sex prior to marriage (76%). That is, two-thirds of Filipina women held the opinion that women should restrict their sexual activity and remain virgins until they get married. In contrast, less than half of men (45%) disapproved of men having sex before marriage, indicating an in-group bias where men tend to be permissive and allow themselves to be sexually active, a bias we did not find among women. These findings suggest that a sexual double standard exists when it comes to premarital sexuality in Philippine sexual culture, one that women themselves may support and sustain.

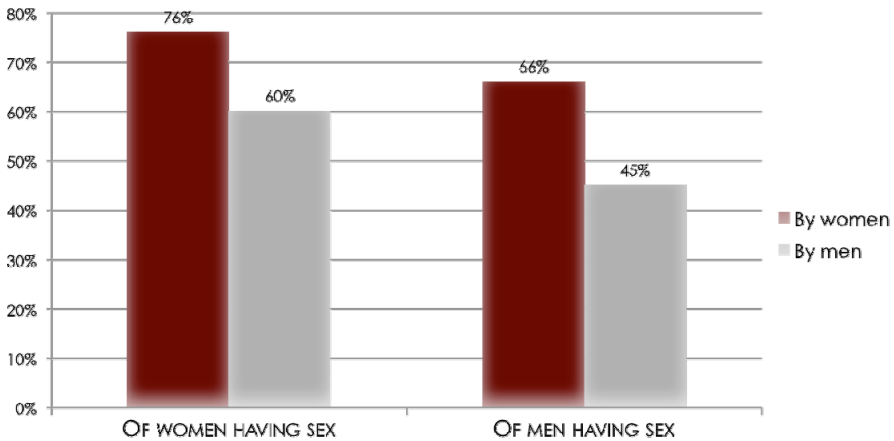


Figure 4. Filipino women's versus men's disapproval of women and men having sex prior to marriage.

In terms of meanings ascribed to men's virginity, Filipino men often considered their own virginity to be a stigma and source of ridicule. Adult men who remained virgins were laughable, according to men in our focus groups:

Interviewer: *Yung lalake naman, yung pagkavirgin ng lalake?* [What about men? Men's virginity?]

Jomar: [Laughter] *Pagka virgin ng lalake? May barkada akong ganyan. Natatama kasi ako virgin pa rin siya.* [Men's virginity? I have a friend who's like that. I'm amused because he's still a virgin.] (22-year-old married man, urban)

When compared side-by-side, women's and men's virginites were perceived to be clearly diametrical. Women virgins were ideal and prized; men virgins were sexual failures and shameful, not just to men but also to women:

Interviewer: *Sa lalaki importante ba na virgin?* [For a man, is it important to be a virgin?]

Roland: *Kung parehas kayong virgin, unang round niyo pa lang, wala na. Parehas kayong magtuturuan.* [If both man and

woman are virgins, the very first round will be a failure. You'll both be instructing each other.]

Interviewer: *So tingin mo dapat lalaki yung magtuturo?* [So you think the man has to be the one to give instructions?]

Roland: *Kasi mahirap naman yung babae yung magtuturo. Pagtatamanan ka nun.* [It's difficult if it were the woman who gives the instructions. She'll be laughing at you.] (19-year-old unmarried man, urban)

Interestingly, a man's virginity was recognized as carrying some value in only one very specific circumstance: When his sexual partner was another man.

Facilitator: *May virgin ba sa lalaki?* [Are there male virgins?]

Jayson: *Wala* [None]

Allan: *Meron* [There are]

Toks: *Meron* [There are]

Facilitator: *Sino?* [Who?]

Toks: *Yung wala pang experience* [Those with no sexual experience yet]

Facilitator: *Importante ba yun?* [Is that important?]

Toks: *Hindi importante sa lalaki, pero sa bading importante yun. Sasabihin ng bading, may experience ka na ba? Wala pa, pag sinabi mong wala, tuwang-tuwa yun. Gustung-gusto ka nyan.* [It's not important for straight men but for gay guys, yes. A gay guy will ask you, have you had sex already? When you say not yet, the gay guy will be pleased. He will be really into you then.]

This point suggests that the social meaning of virginity as a prize might also apply to men but only if they become the sexual object-choice of another man. Otherwise, men's virginity was largely a stigma to be shed, especially for those intending to have sexual relations with women.

Finally, in contrast to the findings in previous studies, neither meaning of virginity as a sacred act of worship or virginity loss as a developmental milestone into adulthood appeared in the data. A handful of women did

bring up religious prohibitions against sex before marriage and mentioned the concept of *kasalanan* (sin), similar to the findings of Ellwood-Clayton (2006) and Delgado-Infante and Ofreneo (2014), that Filipina women who are Roman Catholic and religious view premarital sexuality as a violation of their religious upbringing. However, women's virginity loss in our data was neither problematic nor morally transgressive—as long as a woman eventually ended up marrying the man to whom she *lost* her virginity. This prescriptive belief led many women to think that once they have had sex with a particular man, ideally, they should marry him. Otherwise a woman would have forever doomed any chance of a happy marriage to a different man because she would no longer be a virgin. No such prescriptions were imposed on men. Relationship fate or satisfaction was not predicated on the prior virginity of men, who were expected to have some experience and *lead* a woman through sexual initiation. This illustrates that sexual double standards do not just mean that women will be viewed differently than men for their virginity status but also that women accrue more social costs when they pursue sexual life outside the narrow confines of the virginity-marriage nexus.

Discussion

Women's virginity continues to be valued in Philippine sexual culture by Filipino men and women. Both men and women construe virginity—especially women's but not men's virginity—as a kind of embodied resource, a gift, or a prize, for men, in the context of heterosexuality. For virginity in relation to marital and premarital heterosexuality, a sexual double standard appears to exist—one that women themselves, ironically, may endorse.

With respect to the model of meanings ascribed to virginity used currently in the literature, our findings show how women's virginity, on one hand, was construed to be a gift to men and even more so, a prize for men, in the context of heterosexual marriage (see Figure 5).

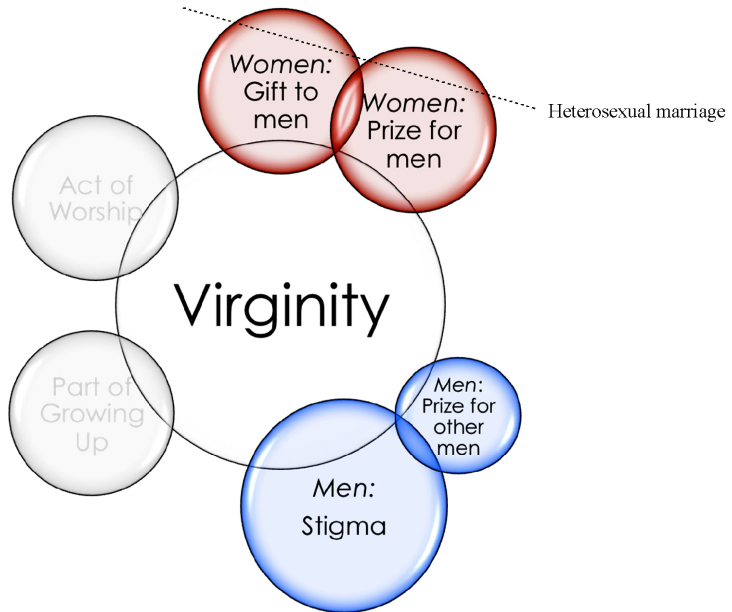


Figure 5. A revised model of meanings ascribed to virginity.

Men's virginity, on the other hand, was largely a stigma, rendering men as undesirable sexual partners (Gesselman, Webster, & Garcia, 2017). Male virginity, however, may take on a more positive valence—as a prize—in the context of same-sex sexuality. Interestingly, the meaning of virginity loss as a developmental milestone into adulthood was not found in our data. Likewise, virginity as a sacred act of worship did not figure centrally in our findings, unlike those of previous studies of Filipina sexuality (e.g., Delgado-Infante & Ofreño, 2014). This may be due to the very specific samples utilized in previous work (e.g., middle/upper-middle class, highly educated, religious Roman Catholic urban women; Delgado-Infante & Ofreño, 2014).

Our findings also support observations made by other sexuality researchers that, unfortunately, women themselves may endorse cultural belief systems that restrict female sexuality (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002) and that both men and women socially construe virginity, particularly female but not male virginity, as an embodied resource to be given by women to men within or even towards heterosexual marriage. Filipina women learn that virginity is one important sexual capital resource they can offer to a man

they would marry. Once it is *lost*, given away, or taken, they often believe that they no longer have anything to offer. Moreover, our study shows that Filipina women endorse beliefs that link virginity strongly to marriage and positive marital outcomes, while non-virginity among women is associated with a loss of status and sexual capital. As suggested by others (e.g., Tan, Batangan, & Cabado-Española, 2001), nowhere in this confluence of life lessons do women appear to learn that sex with a man can be made safe from unwanted pregnancy through contraception, or that the first heterosexual sex experience can be enjoyable and expressive for women, who are sexual subjects and not just sexual objects to be defined or controlled by heterosexual men. We do note, however, that women's views of their own sexual agency are influenced by the expectations of men (and women) around them, and they accurately perceive these expectations to be largely restrictive.

As in any study of women's sexuality, a number of limitations of the current study should be considered. First, we relied on self-reports about socially contested topics like virginity and sex, which can sometimes be fraught with ambiguity and biased responding. Second, our analysis is focused primarily on heterosexual, cisgender virginity and noncoercive sexuality; future studies can look into lesbian and transgender perspectives into virginity as well as the problem of sexual violence and coercion in virginity loss, as other researchers have begun (e.g., Delgado-Infante & Ofreño, 2014; Ho & Sim, 2014). Finally, our analysis is based on data from young adults in the Philippines. We know much less about how virginity is valued and given meaning to by adults from older cohorts (e.g., 40s to 60s), as well as by young girls and boys, who will be confronting the valuations, meanings, and sexual double standards surrounding virginity in the years to come. Despite these limitations, our analysis contributes to the literature on Asian women's sexuality, going beyond previous studies that relied on small, non-representative samples (e.g., Delgado-Infante & Ofreño, 2014) by integrating insights from nationally representative quantitative data and field-based qualitative data from both women and men to provide a snapshot of the socially constructed values and meanings ascribed to female virginity in a specific Southeast Asian culture. We offer this analysis as part of a starting point for building a critique of sexual double standards in Asian women's sexuality toward more egalitarian valuations of virginity and less androcentric views of sexual agency.

Conclusion

Women's virginity continues to be valued by Filipino men and women. Both men and women construe virginity—especially women's but not men's virginity—as a kind of embodied resource, a gift to be given or more often a prize to be taken by men, in the context of heterosexual marriage. For virginity vis-à-vis marital and premarital heterosexuality, a sexual double standard continues to exist—one that Filipina women themselves, ironically, may endorse.

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