

Enter [this op-ed](#) in the *New York Times* from Amanda McCracken, a 35 year-old writer who also happens to be a virgin. She gives intriguing reasons for not going all the way: Withholding sex from an Ironman world champion, she says, was “empowering.” (Virginity: a source of status, implying men’s unfulfilled/continued longing?) She says she is “a saver,” someone who stashes away Halloween candy, unopened jars of exotic jam, and sealed French perfumes. (Virginity: a psychological condition akin to mild hoarding?) Mostly, she says, she wants to avoid feeling empty, undignified and out-of-control, which is what would happen if she slept with someone whose interest in her didn’t match hers in him. This last one rings true. Surrendering to another person is always hard and delicate work, whether that surrender takes the form of physical intimacy or in something else, like couples karaoke.

McCracken may hint that she’s living a chastely romantic fairytale—“Friends who happily have sex with men they don’t love are adamant that I hold out for ‘the one,’” she writes—but she seems acutely aware that the pendulum of social acceptability has swung in the other direction, away from her. Sexlessness implies hang-ups, while lots of (possibly unattached, emotionally low-stakes) sex means you are transcendently liberated, positive, exciting. This is overall a good development, since erotic desire counts as a basic human appetite. But, like all appetites, horniness varies from person to person. I hope we aren’t marking our progress against slut-shaming by turning around and virgin-shaming.

Look at all the ways McCracken qualifies her choice to hold out. “I’m not a prude,” she says, knowing that there’s nothing worse than attracting that label. (Even [women who publicly renounce intercourse](#) do so to feed their numinous sexuality, not starve it.) “I might be a candidate for a Guinness World Record: virgin who has come close to having sex the most times.” (Are you getting this? Plenty of men have *wanted* to have sex with McCracken—she’s not undesirable or anything.) “I like being naked with boyfriends.” “I’ve happily taken on a dominatrix role and men have enjoyed it.” It goes on and on. A friend even tells McCracken that “her virgin status is not 100 percent pure” because she’s had an orgasm.

You know what? It would be OK if McCracken had reached the unfathomable age of 35 without having orgasmed (if that was her preference). [The average woman loses her virginity at 17.4](#) (compared to 16.9 for men), but a CDC study shows that rates of teenage sex are declining: Almost 10 percent [fewer 15- to 19-year olds are knowing each other biblically now than in 1988](#). Furthermore, in our culture of postponement, [we are already leaving home, finishing school, marrying, and bearing children later](#). It makes sense that a subset of us would delay having sex too, particularly if we are able to get pleasure in less traditional ways— as McCracken says she does.

Some people long for passionate physical aerobics. Some long for board games and cuddling on the couch. I long for the day in which no woman’s (legal) sexual preferences are deemed outlandish enough to warrant a quasi-defensive opinion piece in the *New York Times*.

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