

Last week, The New York Times ran an op-ed piece by Amanda McCracken, a 35-year-old self-described “[token virgin](#)” among her group of friends.

“I knew I would much rather endure the pain of missing out than suffer the deeper loneliness of having given myself out of love only to realize that the feeling wasn’t reciprocated,” McCracken explained to readers of her decision to remain a virgin. “However, I was willing to give up a certain sense of pleasure to avoid feelings I feared: betrayal, emptiness, the loss of dignity and control.”

McCracken’s story is nothing new. In a global context and amid our own swiftly changing social climate, it’s difficult to define what even constitutes a virgin anymore. At one point, McCracken notes that feminists are likely to fault her for not taking advantage of her sexuality.

It’s true, the bewildered critics of McCracken’s decision may be misinformed. The decision is after all, hers and hers alone. However, one of the core tenets of feminism is not to shame women for what they choose to do with their bodies but to embrace it, as long as they’re aware of and content with their decisions.

McCracken’s narrative opens up a door for conversation about our society while simultaneously highlighting a core problem: There is still a disturbing lack of real dialogue occurring for young people regarding their own sexuality and virginity.

Instead of turning young people’s virginity into a “gift” or a burden to be shouldered, we should continue opening up avenues for conversation, as McCracken and Shechter have done.

However, instead of McCracken having to make excuses for her virginity and sexual preferences, we should begin fostering a world where this behavior will no longer warrant a column defending her actions in the New York Times.

It is only by listening to the experiences of real individuals in our lives and in our social spheres that we can truly begin to shatter any delusions we have that force us to place these rites of passage on a pedestal where they do not belong.

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