

# WORLDmag

## Confessions of a 25-Year-Old Christian Virgin

When I was in eighth grade, “girl talk” meant blushing cheeks and coy smiles over the latest crush. We passed heart-filled notes marked in glittery pens, agonized over whether the boy returned our affections, and strategized plans to sit next to him. “Being in a relationship” meant linking hands whenever the couple thought nobody was watching.

I’m now a senior at a secular university in Los Angeles, and “girl talk” has grown up. We’ve traded giggles for X-rated foreign words about bedroom activities that leave me feeling like a naïve schoolgirl gawking among adults.

I’m a 25-year-old Christian virgin squirming in a secular world where sex is both ordinary and essential. Even though asking about virginity is considered intrusive, the unspoken understanding is that everybody has already “done it.”

Even Christians.

I recently sipped a mint julep at a new bar in Hollywood, during a meet-up with close girlfriends. One of them brought her new boyfriend along. They’d been “dating” unofficially for a couple of months. She huddled us together and declared, “Oh my God, gals, I lost my virginity!” Cue giddy screams and squeals of excitement, squeezed hands of congratulations, and tight hugs of celebration.

At 23, she was the last one in our group to lose it—besides me, of course. Meanwhile, I had to turn away to shield my expression of worry and disappointment—worry for my friend who used to talk about the virtue of chastity. And disappointment, colored with just a tinge of loneliness, that I was now the oldest virgin in the gang.

At that moment, I realized with shame that the culture I so self-righteously tried to buffer had already infiltrated my heart—today’s accepted “hookup culture,” which trivializes sex and dating.

I’m not the only Christian young woman living in a hyper-sexualized culture. And it’s not just non-Christians who “hook up” regularly. It’s the Christians too—even those we would deem “strong believers.”

According to a December 2009 study conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 80 percent of unmarried evangelical young adults between

ages 18 and 29 admitted to having had sex. Compare that to 88 percent of all unmarried young adults who said they have had sex, and consider this dismal question: What’s the difference between Christians and non-Christians?

Well, for one, Christians typically have to deal with the aftermath of guilt and shame.

One of my friends, Christine, revealed to me recently that she lost her virginity to her college sweetheart—a student fellowship leader with whom she served in ministry. They broke up countless times, but always ended back together, in part because she couldn’t let him go after giving him something so precious.

“Sleeping with someone leaves an emotional scar and attachment in you,” she said, adding seriously, “Don’t ever do it before marriage, Sophia.”

Yet others, while struggling with initial guilt, eventually learn to desensitize themselves from it. Mary, 23, told me she lost her virginity when she was 18 to her first boyfriend. The first time left her “crying a lot” because of the guilt. But that didn’t stop her from continuing to have sex, and “the crying and the guilt has slowly vanished over the years,” she said. She doesn’t “lose sleep over it” anymore. In fact, given today’s sexual landscape, she’s pretty sure her future husband will have been even more promiscuous than her—so who is he to judge? He must accept her wholly, hookup record and all.

Another Christian friend, Kim, told me she doesn’t think premarital sex is any graver than other sins because we are all sinners: “People make it a bigger deal than it really is,” she said. She then leafed through Bible verses, pointing out that the Scriptures never clearly define a stance on premarital sex. Yes, the Apostle Paul urged the faithful to flee “fornication” and “sexual immorality,” but what does that mean, exactly? And what gives Christians the right to condemn other people?

“To focus so much on the behavior and using that to define somebody’s relationship with God is legalism,” Kim said. “I think the heart is most important. Who of us doesn’t sin? It doesn’t help anybody to dwell in guilt over something that is already lost.”

And then there are Christians who wear their pledge of chastity with pride. Another Christian friend of mine, Jane, recently flashed me her chastity ring, but told me she's willing to do "other bedroom activities" that don't involve going "all the way." To her, there's nothing wrong with testing the waters with a serious boyfriend before they get married. In fact, it's the prudent thing to do—after all, how else would she know if he can sexually satisfy her after marriage?

Such is the level of disconnect between our religious beliefs and our sexual behavior. How do Christian women find the truth between these clouds of mixed messages?

Mindy Meier, an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship staff member in the Chicago area, has heard every question imaginable after years of working with students in fraternities and sororities. In her book *Sex and Dating*, Meier tackles real-life conflicts and honest questions that aren't publicly voiced in most churches.

Some of the questions came from one-on-one coffee dates. But most came anonymously through text messages and note cards. Such questions have always existed in young Christians' minds, but platforms to express them honestly are rare. Many parents and youth leaders share the mentality that if they don't talk about it, young Christians won't engage in such activities—which only leaves them floundering, Meier said.

"I think there's a lot more going on among Christians, even among students at Christian schools, than we know, but less opportunities to talk about such things," she said. "I wrote this book to get the dialogue going." Some Christians, though disturbed about the culture today, suffocate under what Meier calls "an invisible gag order" to stay silent because "that's just the way it is, so get with the program and don't try to swim upstream."

But more and more young adults, even secular ones, are voicing disenchantment with today's hookup culture.

No matter how depraved and twisted the world becomes, human beings know deep down that sexual sin is wrong, Meier said. That's because God created us as sexual beings. Sex affects us not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually, too. And like any gift, it can be hijacked and abused.

"I do think people have much deeper regret with sexual sin," Meier said. "Sexual sin is very deep, because we know in our gut that it's something precious and sacred. There's a soul component to sex."

The problem with the hookup culture is that it obliterates that precious and sacred component. Absent a lifelong commitment, the pleasure we experience in sex turns to dust, revealing just how much we've sacrificed for a temporary thrill. A few weeks after my friend announced she'd lost her virginity, she and her boyfriend broke up. Not long after, she was sort-of dating another guy.

But my other friend, Christine, is engaged to another Christian man who knows about her past. They are waiting to have sex until after they're married.

As I observe the stories unfolding around me, I'm reminded of Meier's portrayal of a Christ who is righteous yet merciful. God isn't a killjoy who wants us to go against our prime desire as sexual beings. In reality, God's high standard on sexual purity protects us from ourselves.

The truth is, we're all broken people, living in a broken world. Human emotions and relationships can get complicated and confused, but Christ's grace for redemption never does.