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Virginity Beliefs Scale

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The Virginity Beliefs Scale (VBS) assesses beliefs and motivations for engaging in sexual intercourse for the first time.

Description

The statements contained in the VBS were developed using Carpenter’s (2002) qualitative study of virginity loss. Carpenter found that individuals generally perceived of their virginity loss in three different ways: as a gift, a stigma, or a process. Gift individuals were proud of their virginity and considered it to be a valuable gift to their first partner. Those identified as perceiving their virginity as a stigma were anxious to lose their virginity, believing it to be an embarrassment. Process individuals saw their virginity loss as a step in their natural development towards becoming an adult. Carpenter suggested that these three frameworks influence first intercourse experiences. For example, those identifying virginity as a stigma were more likely to choose their first sexual partner based on opportunity, whereas those identifying virginity as a gift chose their partner based on love and commitment. Carpenter presented support for the notion that how individuals perceive their virginity loss may shape their sexual development and behavior in the years following their first sexual intercourse experience. For instance, individuals identifying virginity as a gift take a risk when deciding to lose their virginity. If their partner does not reciprocate, it is likely that these individuals feel that their experience was a mistake.

Response Mode and Timing

The scale can be completed either in paper-and-pencil form or as an online survey. In both modes, individuals indicate their agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The VBS can be completed in approximately 10 minutes.

Scoring

The three frames contained in the VBS are scored separately. Items are scored 1 for Strongly Disagree and 7 for Strongly Agree. Mean gift scores are calculated by summing Items 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 and dividing by 10. Mean stigma scores are calculated by summing Items 1, 6, 8, 11, 15, 17, 19, and 21 and dividing by 8. Process mean scores are calculated by summing Items 4, 9, 13, and 22 and dividing by 4. Mean scores on all three subscales can thus range between 1 and 7.

Reliability

In a sample of undergraduates (N = 243) from a small university in Ontario, Canada, reliability was .89 for gift, .92 for stigma, and .80 for process (Eriksson & Humphreys, 2009).

Validity

Gift individuals tend to engage in intercourse for the first time for reasons related to improving their relationship with their partner and therefore choose their first partner with care (Carpenter, 2002). The concept of virginity as a gift is compatible with mainstream religious conceptions of virginity. As such, we expected that individuals scoring high on the gift subscale would generally hold less permissive attitudes towards sexuality and be more religious. As expected, gift individuals reported having had fewer lifetime sexual partners, r(243) = −.267, p < .001. These individuals also reported less sexual permissiveness as measured by the permissiveness subscale of the Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006), r(243) = −.495, p < .001, and greater involvement in religion (i.e., frequency of religious services/activities), r(242) = .144, p = .025 (Eriksson & Humphreys, 2009).

Individuals perceiving of their virginity as a stigma hold more traditional sex role beliefs as indicated by the Double Standard Scale (DSS; Caron, Davis, Halteman, & Stickle, 1993), r(243) = −.316, p < .001, and also hold more hyper-gendered beliefs as measured by the Hypergender Ideology Scale (HIS; Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, & Dawson, 1996), r(243) = .356, p < .001. The concept of virginity as a stigma is closely tied to traditional masculine beliefs having to do with greater sexual readiness and activity. Along the same lines, individuals scoring high on the stigma subscale are also more sexually permissive (Hendrick et al., 2006), r(243) = .436, p < .001.

Individuals perceiving their virginity as a process typically fall in between gift and stigma individuals in terms of traditional gender roles. Although their agreement with such roles is not as strong as stigma individuals, significant relationships exist between process scores and the HIS, r(243) = .190, p < .003, and the DSS, r(243) = −.183, p = .004. They also hold more permissive beliefs than gift individuals, but less permissive beliefs than stigma individuals, r(243) = .266, p < .001.

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Virginity and Virginity Loss

Other Information
Permission to use the Virginity Beliefs Scale may be obtained from T. Humphreys.

References


Exhibit

Virginity Beliefs Scale

Instructions: Please think back to the first time you engaged in sexual intercourse. Indicate on the following scale how much you agree with each statement in regard to your first sexual intercourse experience.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat Disagree
4 = Neutral
5 = Somewhat Agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

1. I actively tried to hide my status as a virgin.
2. I chose the person I lost my virginity to with care.
3. I planned my first time carefully.
4. I saw my virginity loss as a natural step in my development.
5. It was important to me that the circumstances under which I lost my virginity were perfect.
6. I felt my virginity was a burden that I needed to get rid of as soon as possible.
7. It was important to me that my first time was romantic.
8. I felt embarrassed over being a virgin.
9. I considered virginity loss to be an inevitable part of growing up.
10. I dated the person I lost my virginity to for a long time before we engaged in intercourse.
11. I was worried about what others might think if they found out I was a virgin.
12. The reason I did not lose my virginity earlier was because I had not found the right partner.
13. I felt that losing my virginity was an important step towards becoming a man/woman.
14. I believed I would stay in a relationship with the person I lost my virginity to for a long time.
15. I lost my virginity later than I would have wanted.
16. I felt in love with the person I lost my virginity to.
17. I regarded my virginity as something negative.
18. My virginity was a gift to my first partner.
19. I was afraid my partner would find out I was a virgin.
20. I planned my virginity loss with my partner.
21. I was afraid to tell my partner that I was a virgin.
22. I felt losing my virginity was a step in the transition between adolescence and becoming an adult.