

# how to lose your virginity



screening  
tool kit

Connect with the film ▶▶





## how to lose your virginity screening tool kit

Hello!

Thank you for screening **How To Lose Your Virginity!**

This screening tool kit is a discussion document appropriate for high school, college and adult audiences. It can be used in whole or in parts, depending on your time frame and goals.

Note: All URLs in the guide are clickable

In order for us to continue to improve our outreach materials, please fill out a simple feedback form after your screening at <http://virginitymovie.com/feedbackform>.

I wish you a wonderful event!

*Therese Shechter,  
Trixie Films*

### **How To Lose Your Virginity**

Color, 67 minutes

Directed by Therese Shechter

Produced by Therese Shechter & Lisa Esselstein

The film's website: <http://virginitymovie.com>

Distributed in the US & Canada by Women Make Movies

<http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c858.shtml>

Distributed internationally, outside US & Canada by Cat & Docs

<http://184.154.233.15/~catndocs/dir2/index.php/categories/women/401-how-to-loose-your-virginity>



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## About the Film

It has launched both purity balls and porn franchises, defines a young woman's morality—but has no medical definition. Enter the magical world of virginity, where a white wedding dress can restore a woman's innocence and replacement hymens can be purchased online.

Filmmaker Therese Shechter uses her own path out of virginity to explore why our sex-crazed society cherishes this so-called precious gift. Along the way, we meet sex educators, virginity auctioneers, abstinence advocates, and young men and women who bare their tales of doing it—or not doing it.

**How to Lose Your Virginity** uncovers the myths and misogyny surrounding a rite of passage that many obsesses about but few truly understand. **Get info at <http://virginitymovie.com/get-the-film>**

## Interactive Multi-Media: The V-Card Diaries



**The V-Card Diaries** is an interactive crowd-sourced story-sharing project. It features over 200 crowd-sourced long-form essays about 'sexual debuts and deferrals' in a unique interactive interface. This project was recently on exhibit at The Kinsey Institute Juried Art Show.

This collection allows users to consume and contribute to an incredibly diverse array of experiences of becoming sexual. Our audience engages in a broad spectrum of sexual activity, and many with little to no experience report they feel ignored by most other online discussions about sex. In addition, a significant number of contributors are survivors of rape and tell their stories in this forum. By seeing how others tell their own

stories, and sharing their own, our audience can see there's no 'right way' to do sex.

Find it at <http://virginitymovie.herokuapp.com>

## Reusable V-Cards



Inspired by coffee punch cards, users can track and punch multiple virginity losses to challenge and subverts the idea that virginity loss is a one-time before/after thing. Soon to be mobile app!

Get your card at <http://virginitymovie.com/get-a-v-card>



## **How to Prepare for the Event**

### **1 month before: Purchase or Rent the Film**

Get purchase or rental information at <http://virginitymovie.com/get-the-film>

Preview the film and determine which parts of the film and guide you will use:

Ask yourself:

Who is your audience?

How much time has been allotted for the film and discussion? Will you screen the whole film, or portions?

What is the goal of your discussion? (Examples: sharing personal stories, critiquing attitudes towards female sexuality, queering virginity, discussing how the film was made.)

Based on your answers, choose which of the guide's areas to focus on. For example, select one or two questions from each section, or quickly steer the discussion towards a particular section.

Take a look at our interactive story-sharing project, The V-Card Diaries, at <http://virginitymovie.herokuapp.com>  
Consider incorporating the diversity of experiences we've collected into your discussion.

### **1 month before: Invite Partners**

Bring in others to take part in the conversation after the film, or to provide resources for the event:

Professors, Sexual Health Educators, Campus Health Center Representative

Peer Counsellors, Student Groups, Other Departments with intersectional interests

Director of the Film, Therese Shechter. More information at <http://virginitymovie.com/book-screenings>

### **Three weeks before: Order Supplies**

Order V-Cards through our website <http://virginitymovie.com/get-a-v-card>. Our reusable V-Cards are not only a popular takeaway, they can help subvert the virginity construct and give your audience information to access our website and other resources. *Allow 2 weeks for delivery*

Ask your partners to bring their materials to distribute after the screening. Make sure there are enough for your entire audience

Serving snacks and drinks = bigger audiences. Be sure to promote that in your outreach.



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### One month to two weeks before: Promote the Event

Use your organization's **website and bulletin board** to let people know about the event.

**Send out emails** about the event two weeks in advance, with a follow up one week and then a reminder one day before the event. People are busy and will need an extra nudge.

Promote your event through **Twitter** and include **@virginitymovie** in your tweets. Promote your event through **Facebook** and link to our facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/VirginMovie>.

**Download our posters** at <http://www.virginitymovie.com/pressimages/VirginityPoster.jpg> and display them at your organization.

Don't forget to **include your partners** in outreach and promotion. They have their own networks where they can spread the word.

**Email us** at [info@trixiefilms.com](mailto:info@trixiefilms.com) with details of your event and we'll blast our networks for you.

### Up to one week before: Set Up the Room

Make copies of the **Mailing List Sheet** and **Action Sheet** found on pages 12 and 13 of this guide. Make sure there are enough Action Sheets for all attendees.

Check the room you will be screening in:

Is it a theater or a classroom or a meeting room?

Where will the projector and screen be?

Can chairs be moved into a circle after the screening?

Are there areas where the audience can break up into smaller discussion groups?

How will that affect your discussion?

**Important:** Do a technical check of your projector, speakers, and DVD at least an hour before the screening so there are no surprises.

### Now you're ready for your event!



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### **Introduce the Screening**

When your group has had some refreshments and is settled in, you can begin with these conversations:

#### **A. Create a safe space**

Establishing the ground rules can lead to a safe and open environment

If the group is small, do introductions.

Set goals for the group (areas of discussion and focus).

Set ground rules for discussion. (eg, are people called on or can answers be shouted out freely?)

#### **B. Engage and get to know your audience.**

Explore preconceptions and write answers on a board or flip chart. Ask your audience:

What comes to mind when you hear the words “virginity” or “virgin”? Define virginity.

What have you been taught about being a virgin or losing virginity?

If no one mentions these ideas, you may want to add:

hymen breaking, bleeding, virgins fall in love with their ‘first,’ virgins know nothing about sex, virgins are losers/prudes, having sex makes you a dirty, other myths, etc.

Where did you learn this (peers, family, school, religious institutions, media)?

How much of this is universal, and how much is particular to your religious/cultural/ethnic group?

Is virginity important? For women? For men? Why or why not? What’s the difference?

Is there such a thing as queer virginity loss? (if one doesn’t engage in heterosexual intercourse)

Now that your group has been able to express their opinions, knowledge and experiences about virginity, watch the movie as a way of learning how ideas about virginity play out in our culture, and how they affect how we think about female sexuality.

**Follow the journey of filmmaker Therese Shechter as she explores issues around virginity, both personally and in the larger society...**



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### Watch the Film

#### A. Watch 'How To Lose Your Virginity'

The film is 67 minutes long. Please watch to the end of the credits, so your group can see how many people it takes to make a documentary (plus the song is great)

[OR]

#### B. Select excerpts of the film to screen and discuss

Recommended if your time is limited, or to honor audience sensitivities. For example, some religious groups may find parts of the film too explicit. Better to watch parts of the film than nothing at all.

### Reflect, React and Share

After your screening take a few minutes to allow the audience to reflect on their immediate reactions to film. You can also use this time for the audience to get more refreshments.

Now is a chance to discuss what the group has just seen and their feelings and thoughts about virginity and sexuality.

Optional: To establish trust and draw out people who are hesitant to talk about themselves, consider telling your own story, as Therese does in the movie: How I became sexual, How I navigate being a sexual (or non-sexual) person, Personal challenges or Revelations

If your group is large, break into smaller groups and have them report back.

#### A. Connect with the movie and its issues.

##### Some questions for discussion:

What scene from the film drew you in? What most surprised you? Why?

Talk about a scene or a character that spoke to you personally. How?

How do the ideas in the film affect you personally? How would it affect others you know?

Are people in your school or peer group judged for being or not being virgins?



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### B. Discuss quotes from people in the film

Select a few of these quotes based on what direction you want to steer the conversation. Or assign 2-3 questions for each small group to discuss and share.

Feel free to choose your own quotes from the film. These are just suggestions.

Hanne Blank: You always have to ask the question when you see an apparatus of control like this: who is at the reins? Who is doing the controlling? And who benefits from that control being done? (policing of women & their bodies)

Sara DiMuro: Some people are fascinated with someone that decides not to have sex, and they really look for that thing that's wrong with you. Like, well she's not fat, she's not Mormon. (challenging stereotypes)

Henia Dakkak: Families will pay money to make sure that there is some sort of a bleeding happening at the night of the wedding. In these situations you do one stitch between the two labias, you will have two drops of blood and both families will be happy. (the myth of the hymen)

Therese Shechter: Isn't this just the story of sleeping beauty, a passive girl who can't become a woman until she's sexually awakened by the right man? (women & sexual agency)

Hanne Blank: If you're not talking about penises and vaginas and potential of reproduction and babies and all of this, then how do you decide whether you've lost your virginity or not?' (queer virginity)

Student: I don't think there's a number a limit for guys. For females I can say the most is five. (discussing number of partners, double standard)

Sady Doyle: A woman doesn't have to have sex to be called a slut. The only criteria for being called a slut is that one's sexuality or one's perceived sexuality is threatening to some onlooker. (slut shaming)

Ally Sheedy (in The Breakfast Club): It's kind of a double-edged sword, isn't it? Well, if you say you haven't, you're a prude. If you say you have, you're a slut. It's a trap. (virgin/whore double-bind)

Erica McLean: That was a horrible first experience, and I'm sure many other girls have had the same experience. And it wasn't as if I was wearing low cut things. It was just that he thought that I had sex with this with my boyfriend, and I didn't. (rape)

Therese Shechter: When I set out to understand why virginity still has so much value, I didn't expect it to still be so...transactional. (women as commodities)



## **Gather people's learning**

Engage the entire group in a discussion to evaluate if there is any change in people's perceptions. Refer back to comments gathered prior to film.

Now when you hear "virginity" or "virgin" what do you think?

Has your thinking and definition changed?

What, if anything, do we 'lose' when we lose virginity? Should we get rid of the concept?

What are people in the film concerned with or fighting for?

If small groups have discussed quotes, have a representative share their thoughts. Expand the conversation to discuss the larger issues raised in the film. Write down responses.

What do you think are the most pressing issues (eg. sex education, sexualization in media, pressure to have/not have sex, double standards, reproductive rights, rape, global issues).

How do these issues impact or affect your life? How does it affect other people's lives?

## **Take Action on the Issues**

What kind of support do people need to address these issues raised (eg. policy change, media criticism, peer-to-peer conversation, social media campaigns)

What other initiatives that come to mind?

After hearing ideas on how to take action, what do you think you could do to get more involved in these issues?

What is one simple thing you can do right now? This week? This year?

**Right Now:** Distribute V-Cards and discuss how the cards encourage the view that virginity loss is a series of experiences, not a one-time life and body-changing event.

**Right Now:** Ask your audience to fill out an Action Sheets and take our New Virginity Pledge (found on Page 13 of this guide). After the sheets are filled out, give audience members their top half and collect the bottom half.

**This Week:** If you have access to a computer, introduce audience to our interactive story-sharing project, The V-Card Diaries, at <http://virginitymovie.herokuapp.com>



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### Wrap up

#### Thank your audience:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences around sexuality. We're not usually encouraged to speak openly about sex, so congratulate yourselves for committing a radical act!

If they are present, introduce representative of an organization for their outreach pitch.

Ask your audience to sign up for our **mailing list**. (found on Page 12 of this guide)

Encourage social media posts about the film, the issues and the audience's experiences:

- Our Twitter name is [@virginitymovie.com](https://twitter.com/virginitymovie.com).
- Our Facebook page is called 'How To Lose Your Virginity' at <http://www.facebook.com/VirginMovie>
- Our Tumblr home is <http://www.virgin.tumblr.com>

### After the Event is Over

We would appreciate if you could do two follow-up activities to support the ongoing social outreach of the film:

#### 1. Fill out moderator survey

It can be found at <http://virginitymovie.com/feedbackform>. Your feedback is invaluable and helps us to continue to improve our outreach activities.

#### 2. Send bottom half of Action Sheets and Paper Mailing List to:

Trixie Films, 223 Jay Street, Suite 202, Brooklyn NY 11201, USA

Or scan them and email them to [info@trixiefilms.com](mailto:info@trixiefilms.com)

### Thank you!

We welcome your feedback! If you have any questions or comments about the film or discussion guide, contact us at [info@trixiefilms.com](mailto:info@trixiefilms.com)

For more information go to <http://virginitymovie.com>





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## Action Sheet!

### TAKE OUR VIRGINITY PLEDGE:

“Whether I am having sex right now or not, I will not judge others for their sexual choices or try to control their sexual choices. If I am sexually active, I pledge to make sure the sex I have is safe, consensual and pleasurable, and based on good communication with my partners. I understand that we’re all different and that’s okay. However, I will call out behavior that is unsafe, non-consensual or shaming that I see in the people around me or in the media I consume.”

### PLACES I WILL CALL THIS OUT ARE (check as many as you want):

- Speak up in school, at my religious institution or with my family
- Post things I find online on social media
- Like ‘How to Lose Your Virginity’ on Facebook [facebook.com/VirginMovie](https://facebook.com/VirginMovie)
- Follow [@virginitymovie](https://twitter.com/virginitymovie) on Twitter
- Follow [virgin.tumblr.com](https://virgin.tumblr.com) on Tumblr
- Submit my own anonymous story to the V-Card Diaries [virginitymovie.herokuapp.com](https://virginitymovie.herokuapp.com)
- Comment on blog posts at [virginitymovie.com/blog](https://virginitymovie.com/blog)
- Share any other ideas I have with Therese & Trixie Films at [info@trixiefilms.com](mailto:info@trixiefilms.com)

*\*With thanks to Abby Rose Dalto for this sentiments in the pledge*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

KEEP THIS PORTION FOR YOURSELF

RETURN THIS PORTION TO YOUR DISCUSSION LEADER FOR TRIXIE FILMS

### I’VE TAKEN MY PLEDGE! LET’S KEEP TALKING...

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL/ORGANIZATION \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE \_\_\_\_\_



## A Q&A with director Therese Shechter

*Excerpts from two interviews originally published on the Her Film Project blog. Reprinted with permission.*

**HF: With the feature documentary film *I Was a Teenage Feminist* under your belt, you are now focusing on a new project, *How to Lose Your Virginity*, which is another feature doc. Can you discuss how you came to concentrate your efforts on this topic and how your two films might relate?**

TS: I think all my films look at the world through a feminist lens. Of the two shorts I've done, *How I Learned to Speak Turkish* is about sexuality and power and *Womanly Perfection* is about body image. Taken along with *I Was a Teenage Feminist*, which I think is about finding a political and personal identity, they all feed into the ideas I'm playing with in *How to Lose your Virginity*. I also would say that the virginity project is similar stylistically to *I Was a Teenage Feminist*—it's funny, there's a lot of intimacy with subjects, and I use my personal experience to make universal points.

When my editor and I were cutting *I Was a Teenage Feminist*, we watched a lot of those old 'Now You Are A Woman' films from the 1950s. I was struck not only by how useless the information was, but also how they kept telling girls that the only way to avoid social and physical ruin was to be a 'good' girl (read: a girl who doesn't have sex). The abstinence-until-marriage programs (which the government still funds, by the way) are really just a present-day extension of those ideas. I started to wonder what we were telling young women about their sexuality, especially given that pop culture is full of highly sexualized girls that seem to be the polar opposite of this 'good girl' expectation.

I realized that it all comes down to the same message: that women should model themselves on images of male desire. In trying to mold themselves into either virgin or whore (or an impossible combination of both), women are constantly working to fit someone else's needs instead of pursuing their own sexual identities.

On a personal note, I was planning my own wedding at the time of the shooting, and was getting a little freaked out by all the chastity-based wedding rituals and coded wedding accessories. What would it mean for me to embrace the white dress, don a veil, and be 'given away'? What would that say about my own sexual autonomy and identity? It echoes the narration of *I Was a Teenage Feminist* where I refer to myself as "a woman who feels incredible pressure to conform to an ideal that I don't even buy into. Is it possible to be who I want to be without judgment, or apology or compromise?"

**HF: In American culture, virginity experiences a dichotomous treatment. The social state of virginity is also binary in nature — you either are or you aren't, at least socially. What differences do you see between gender, age and sexual orientation when the topic of virginity is discussed?**

TS: Virginity is basically a complex social construct that's always been more about female sexuality than male. There's actually no medical definition, and our conventional concept of 'losing your virginity' through penis-in-vagina sex is incredibly narrow. Is a penis really the only way to turn a woman into a sexual person? How then do lesbians lose their virginity? Do we suddenly become sexual beings or is it gradual? When we lose our virginity, what specifically are we losing, if anything at all?

In queer communities, the concept of virginity loss is far more nuanced and individualistic because it doesn't fit into established hetero understandings about sex. But although ideas about how a person loses his or her virginity might vary, there is still some point where most of us cross a threshold of sexual initiation. It may be a construct, but it's still an important defining moment – however we define it.

You can see how important it is when you speak to older virgins who for whatever reason haven't yet had sex. I hear from a lot of them through my blog, and there's a lot of shame and secrecy around being an older virgin (which I think can begin as young as your early 20s). Everyone thinks everyone else is having sex but them, but it's just not true.



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**HF: Please talk a bit about your experiences with interviewees... [and] tell us a bit about your production team and how you work with a crew when dealing with people's (interviewees') deeply personal experiences?**

TS: When I interview someone, I want it to be as casual and as intimate as possible. I want them to talk right to the audience, so they look directly at the camera, not off to the side. And I like to shoot them in their natural environments as much as possible. We have a tiny crew. Sometimes it's just me, and at most it's my DP and one PA and minimal if any lights. We give up on some of the beauty, but like I said, I want it to be intimate so subjects can talk about really personal things and feel safe doing it. I'm always humbled by the things they're willing to share. I'm also very open with them about my own experiences during the interview. I figure I should be just as willing to talk about whatever I'm asking of them.

**HF: I've taken a few looks at the blog you have to support the storytelling and sharing around the topic of virginity, and you include many first-person pieces. It's amazing and inspiring to see how many people are willing to share information about something so personal as their virginity and sexuality. What inspired you to introduce this type of "confessional-style" blog post?**

TS: I love *The V-Card Diaries*, and since we launched it in 2009, it's become the most popular thing on the blog. I was inspired by fellow virginity geek Kate Monroe who writes a blog called *The Virginity Project* in the UK. Aside from her work, most everything else I found was very mainstream and almost nothing outside of religious sites addressed people who weren't sexually active. I could tell from our blog comments I had a lot of folks out there whose experiences—and even definitions of virginity—didn't conform to the black-and-white stereotypes of pop culture. So I started building this collection of what I like to call “sexual debuts and deferrals.”

We've run stories from a woman who lost her straight, gay and three-way virginity in one night (hey, it worked for her); a Mormon college student who wrote about being a virgin and then did an update after she had forbidden premarital sex (verdict: meh); and we get quite a few submissions from guys in their 30s and 40s who talk about what it's like to be an older male virgin (not good). We've also run several First Persons by women who had intercourse for the first time because of sexual assault, and they want to share their experiences and recovery with others.

My favorites are the “update” submissions that I get when a previous poster starts having sex. One woman said the first three people she told were her roommate, her best friend and me for the blog. I kind of love that There's a lot of silence around how and why and if we become sexual and I think these stories really help us all feel less weird and alone. I really could have used this when I felt like the very last virgin in art school.

**HF: Are there differences in what you've learned through the actual filming of the documentary and the interactions you have with people online through your blog or twitter, for example?**

TS: When I started working on the film, I was really focusing on young women being shamed for being sexual and the value that's place on virginity. It was in the zeitgeist and was getting all the attention. But when I started getting the *V-Card Diaries*, I was surprised at how many were coming from people in their 20's who were ashamed of not being sexually active and that became a much bigger part of my film and the blog.

I think it goes without saying that it's far, far easier to get candid stories from anonymous writers than getting people to talk about the same things on camera. I'm really grateful to the people agreed to be filmed. They're very smart and thoughtful about their intimate lives, and they provide an antidote to the way we usually hear stories about sex that are more fabrication or fantasy, like Reality TV and porn.

In the same way that we give people the space to be sexual beings on their own terms, we also tell people who don't feel ready for sex (or aren't into it at all) that they're not freaks. I get a lot of letters along the lines of: “I generally feel like I'm harboring a shameful secret, and before I found your blog was pretty convinced that I was the only woman in her mid-twenties who had never had sex.” Speaking as someone who became sexually active only after college, I can really relate.