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# Hymenoplasty surgery result of sexist society

## OUT OF THE SHELL

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"Your virginity: would you pay to get it back?"

I did a double take when I read this teaser on the cover of the March 2004 Latina magazine.

I'd heard of born-again virgins, but I seriously doubted anyone could actually ever get their virginity back. I mean, once it's gone, it's gone -- right?

Well, sort of.

There is a procedure, called hymenoplasty, which reconstructs the hymen.

So, virginity can be superficially restored. In other words, as far as the guy can tell, he's the first.

According to the article, titled "The Immaculate Deception," the highest demand for the procedure are among Korean, Middle Eastern and Latina women.

The hymen is the "thin membrane that partly seals off the opening to the vagina until it is ruptured, typically during a first act of sexual intercourse," the article says.

According to labiadoctor.com, "The hymenal ring normally gets disrupted after a woman has had sexual intercourse or even after strenuous physical activity or tampon use."

In a PowerPoint presentation on obgyn.net, a medical site for women's health professionals, Dr. Mohammed El-

Hennawy said that the hymen can also be broken "while participating in sports like bicycling, horseback riding, gymnastics ... or while masturbating. A girl may not even know this has occurred, since there may be little or no blood or pain involved when this happens."

He continues to say that, "In some societies, the hymen must be intact in unmarried women as proof of virginity. Without it, -- women are shunned as whores -- in extreme cases even murdered by male relatives to restore family honour."

El-Hennawy said in some cultures, if a woman experienced pain and bleeding on her wedding night, it was proof she was a virgin.

In Egypt, he says, "It is not unusual for a rape victim to marry her rapist to maintain at least the appearance of honor. In fact, according to Egyptian law, once a rapist marries his victim, charges against him are dropped and honor is restored to the woman and her family."

El-Hennawy said honor killings still occur in some Arabic countries and that gynecologists often have to explain to "a whole horde of male relatives" why a woman didn't bleed on her wedding night.

"You always have to favor the girl, because if you don't, she'll be killed by her family. ... So you tell the male relatives the bride had an elastic hymen, which many women do anyway, and in such cases she wouldn't bleed," he said.

El-Hennawy said hymenoplasty "quite honestly saves lives" but it is illegal in most Arab countries.

According to labiadoctor.com, "the surgery is usually performed under local anesthesia. ... After the surgery, it is recommended to avoid sex, tampons, and douching for six weeks."

The Latina article says patients are also advised to avoid exercise for two weeks and sexual intercourse for about a month to allow for healing.

A Dominican teen who underwent the procedure said in the article, "To Hispanic parents, to have an unmarried daughter who is a virgin is something sacred."

Before I fully read the article, I thought this procedure seemed ludicrous.

"Are we living in the Dark Ages?" I wondered.

Now, it seems that hymenoplasty itself is not the problem, but rather a symptom of the problem.

As American women, we tend to take for granted the rights we have.

Yes, we still earn less money than men and we've yet to see a female president.

But we've come a long way and, for many of us, the thought of facing death if we don't bleed on our wedding night has never crossed our mind.

Hymenoplasty is the result of a culture that still looks at women as less than men. There are obviously double standards.

As far as I know, there is no way to tell if a man is still a virgin or not. Furthermore, it doesn't seem to matter.

Even in America, if a woman has had several partners, she is labeled as a slut or whore, two words which contain the word "woman" in their definitions.

Promiscuous men are labeled as "players." The difference in the implications of these words says a lot.

Women have proven they can do anything a man can do.

We're members of Congress, doctors, lawyers, CEOs, professional athletes and more.

But in some parts of the world, women are still being persecuted for engaging in something as natural as sex. And some of these dishonored women may, in fact, still be virgins who broke their hymens by using tampons or riding a horse, or who simply weren't born with one at all.

In the 21st century, these double standards are irrational and unacceptable, and we need to take a stand against sexist attitudes that encourage practices such as hymenoplasty.

**Tammy Krikorian is the Spartan Daily executive editor.**

**"Out of the Shell" appears every Wednesday.**

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