

# Voices

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## Like a Virgin

As he waits for the right guy to initiate him into manhood, Vadim Liberman explains why he's saving part of himself for that final transformation.

"LET'S HAVE SEX," I whispered as he ground his body against mine.

"Anal?" he asked.

I nodded.

"No, I have to feel comfortable with a person to do that," he explained.

In the heat of that moment, I chilled to the reality that to my friend, with whom I'd fallen in love, I remained just "a person" in bed. Sadly, we never made love.

Years later, I still consider myself a virgin.

I'm 25, I'm out, I'm cute (says Mom), I'm horny, and I want to get laid. Yet in a city teeming with men willing to unlock my chastity belt, I'm constantly explaining the hows and whys of my virginity to a community always ready for sex. "Like you've never been fucked (why must they always assume I'm a bottom?) or sucked cock!" some have skeptically proclaimed.

While some might argue that the very concept of virginity grows out of heterosexuality and has no relevance to gay people, I disagree. We too have a right to mark our metamorphosis into gay men. Some of us emerge from our virginal cocoons as butterflies, soaring with a new way of looking at ourselves and relating to other men; others mutate into moths, confined to the dullness of low self-respect.

I want to be a butterfly, but I remain a virgin, which I define as one who has yet to perform one's personal pinnacle of sexual acts. For me, that's anal penetration. Some have said that I must be fearful of AIDS—or foolish, insecure, and repressed. Some even claim I'm not gay because I have not engaged in an act that many

gays and straights insist defines sexual orientation. Trust me, I know I'm gay. I like Britney Spears.

Still others insist that I must harbor some internalized homophobia because I refrain from this supposedly most homosexual of homosexual acts. I'm not a self-hating gay, I'm a gay-hating gay—at least in that I abhor fellow queers incapable of separating sexual activity from sexual orientation. I'm comfortable being a fag and know better than to identify who I am by how I ejaculate. I'm also mature enough to recognize my sexual immaturity and defy what sometimes seems to be our gay culture's sex-centricity: "I'm here, I'm queer, let's screw."

What's important is that no other sexual act demands greater mutual trust, respect, and intimacy than penetration—one reason that many gay men will take or place a penis in the mouth before the anus. Regardless of which hole is in play, there remains an emotional hole that only love can fill. Forget the K-Y; for me, love is the ultimate lubricant. Unfortunately, in the 12 years I've been out, I've never been with anyone whom I liked—let alone loved—enough to allow him in me (all right, so I probably am a bottom). I've had my share of one-night trysts, trashy AOL tricks, and weeklong relationships, but none of my other "firsts" were special—not kissing, not





mutual masturbation, not oral sex, not rimming, not anything. Like a prostitute, I've stroked, licked, and sucked enough people enough times that I've cheapened the intimacy currency of many sexual acts. And like a prostitute who will not kiss a john in order to keep that one act special, I continue to hold on to my virginity to ensure that my first time will be emotionally priceless.

This is my last chance to "get it right"—to ensure that anal intercourse doesn't join the list of other sexual acts that I now frequently do simply out of habit. It's become too easy to barter the right to experience deeper emotions for instant sexual gratification. Had I ensured that my "firsts" were with people who were special to me, perhaps now I'd respect myself more by respecting what I do in bed more. In recognizing this, I'm learning to pay greater attention to what my heart yearns to feel than what my cock craves. And since sexual acts lose their emotional potency when done often in the con-

text of meaningless encounters, I refuse to similarly depreciate anal intercourse. I refuse to make that too easy as well. Otherwise, it's just sex without the sexual healing.

So I wait. And wait. And wait. Am I proud of my decision? No. Nor am I ashamed of it, because quantity of sexual experience should never be a source of embarrassment or pride. But I am frustrated. Not because my libido rages incessantly (it does) but because I haven't found love. Looking back, I'm happy my friend denied me sex. Being in love with someone isn't enough; he must feel the same way about me. Thus I'm not a cliché, holding out for that one special person. More selfish than that, I'm saving myself for and from myself. In fact, the loss of virginity will cause no loss at all. Instead, it will spark a gain of confidence and a renewal of my sexuality. In the meantime, I'll remain a caterpillar, content in knowing that one day I'll fly. ■