

MAXIMIZING HER

Navigating Life After Girlhood

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You vs. Them

My virginity. That's what I pledged to maintain until meeting my husband. My insistence was less based on my religious convictions, and more so about my interest in maintaining my power as a woman. In a society where most girls are convinced to believe that their only real power can be drawn from their sexual prowess, I chose to reject that. I believed that there too was power centered around a brand built on intelligence, kindness, and empowerment. And I felt most empowered by having certain freedoms such as comfortably navigating through any room in my city without feeling embarrassed or ashamed about the narratives that may have existed about me. Or the freedom to occupy the head of the boardroom and not consistently be undermined due to a past sexual encounter that left a taxing assault on my professional reputation. Growing up I witnessed the social prejudices against women that often spoiled opportunities though they may have been qualified. Whether spoken or unspoken I knew women had to be twice as better—and twice as guarded—if they wanted to be respected. And if not careful, I knew—as my father consistently repeated to

me—sexual scandals had a more adverse association with women, making it harder to recover despite her merits. For me, I didn't find power in challenging that; instead I found my power warped in my discipline to guard against such happenings. Most of the confidence I embodied was knowing my identity could never be relegated to mere horny ambitions a guy had boastfully conquered. From a young age I knew that not every man that inquired about you was worthy of inserting himself in your story. And as a woman I knew this was powerful because it meant I was always in control of my own narrative in a society that disproportionately encouraged women to believe their only power came from being hypersexual.

I privately reveled at the quiet but clear defeat I watched men swallow when they realized much to their disappointment, I would not be added to the list of women who fulfilled their sexual desires. My satisfaction in their failure ultimately came from rebranding these men's ideas of women and our worth. I forced them to see that painting all women with one stereotypical broad stroke, because they had been successful with a small subset of the female population, was...eh, presumptuous, unhealthily ambitious, and well, straight up wrong. First it ignored the reality that every woman is unique, existing with her own particular set of thoughts, and virtues that are kindred to her life experiences. Second it dismissed the humanity of women by insinuating that we were disposable—to be disregarded after they've lived out their series of pleasures through us. (Don't worry this book isn't a bind of pages bashing men or reprinted social injustices taught in sociology 101.) Many of the guys I encountered were convinced my no was the beginning of a long-term negotiation. I used each attempt to challenge their misogynistic beliefs and remain true to my

principles. This allowed me to maintain control of my narrative and impart knowledge along the way.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once famously quoted, "*There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.*" Though my next assertion may not be particularly popular among many, it is what I have found to be true throughout my experience of life thus far. The word "conscience" has a Greek origin meaning "to be with knowledge." The knowledge I have acquired from life and the women I have met has walked me into this belief:

(Ready? Here goes...)

It is my deep belief that all women are not the same nor are equal in merit—and honestly, nor should they be. (Now, before you make any premature judgments about me I do incite you to keep reading.) There is this empty comfort that I hear many people recycle that offers all women are the same, and they are all equally worthy of the same rewards. While one would think I, a woman, would subscribe to this theory... I do not. Instead, I find it quite dismissive and troubling. A metric of this nature places all women on the same level and leaves them nothing to strive for. This metric ignores the reality that we un-equalize and disqualify ourselves from opportunities each day with the decisions that we make. If this were not true then the power behind grace, forgiveness, and mercy would be rendered obsolete because everyone would be entitled to it despite their imperfections. If a promiscuous woman announces that she is getting married, most persons knowing her

would be caught off guard, simply because her set of character traits oppose the very thing that's needed to make a marriage work—monogamy. Many may view her newfound candidacy for marriage as an unmerited opportunity especially when there were other women possessing greater wills to practice monogamy.