"Hymen Wars: The Two-Thousand-Year Battle over Women's Bodies and the Diagnosis of Virginity"

featuring

HANNE BLANK
Writer and Historian

Has she or hasn't she? Only her hymen knows for sure. Or does it? The presence, absence, and condition of this storied membrane have been considered so definitive a diagnostic of female virginity that reports of its condition have long been admitted as evidence in courts of law. So sturdy is the hymen's reputation as a diagnostic that many, including contemporary medical and legal professionals, assume the reputation is both iron-clad and age-old. Nothing could be further from the truth: the physical existence of the hymen wasn't so much as confirmed in dissection until 1546, a late-breaking and still ambiguous entry in the annals of what has become a two-thousand-year debate. A curious saga of projection, paranoia, paternalism, and medical mystery, the history of the hymen and its purported meanings astonishes and alarms to this day.

Hanne Blank is a historian and author of several books including Virgin: The Untouched History, Unruly Appetites and Straight: The Surprisingly Short History of Heterosexuality.

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