

Sex and History

Talking sex with objects from the past

“I was expecting to just sit down and have people telling me about everything, and then be like oh we already know this, but it wasn't...like, the history and everything, it was really interesting. I had no idea about any of it.”

Student participant





Key Questions

When might it have been made?



What is this?

What was it used for?

How would it work?

Who would wear it and why?

Historical Information 1

- This chastity belt a metal gusset made of two panels hinged together, designed to be fitted to a waist strap to prevent sexual access to the genitals.
- The two openings allow the woman wearing it to urinate and defecate.
- It has been dated to the 15th or 16th centuries.
- Today we associate chastity belts with Medieval knights and the quest to ensure that their wives remained faithful while they were away at the crusades...

Key Questions

Do you think people ever really wore these?

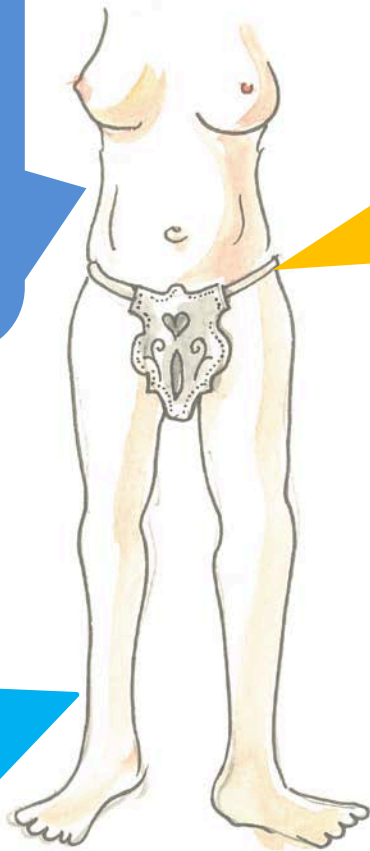
Would a woman be happy to wear this?

Why does society place value on fidelity and virginity?

Why might someone want to control sexual access to a woman?

Who would have held the key?

What difference does it make?



Historical Information 2

- The belt is almost certainly a fake made in the 19th century, and never worn.
- The whole idea of the chastity belt was probably an 18th invention.
- The concept of the “chastity belt” is found in medieval literature, but only as a metaphor for women’s virtue and virginity. You’d say: “she still had her girdle of chastity intact”.
- Only in the 18th century was it thought of as a real object that someone might wear, and fakes were made pretending to be from the Middle Ages or Renaissance.

Key Questions



Does the idea of the chastity belt seem very alien today? Or are there modern day parallels we can think of?

Why might someone want to invent the idea of the medieval chastity belt?