



The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women

Jessica Valenti

Download now

Read Online ➔

The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women

Jessica Valenti

The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women Jessica Valenti

From the bestselling author of *Sex Object*, a searing investigation into American culture's obsession with virginity, and the argument for creating a future where women and girls are valued for more than sexuality. The United States is obsessed with virginity - from the media to schools to government agencies. In *The Purity Myth*, Jessica Valenti argues that the country's intense focus on chastity is damaging to young women. Through in-depth cultural and social analysis, Valenti reveals that powerful messaging on both extremes - ranging from abstinence-only curriculum to "Girls Gone Wild" infomercials - place a young woman's worth entirely on her sexuality. Morals are therefore linked purely to sexual behavior, rather than values like honesty, kindness, and altruism. Valenti sheds light on the value - and hypocrisy - around the notion that girls remain virgins until they're married by putting into context the historical question of purity, modern abstinence-only education, pornography, and public punishments for those who dare to have sex. *The Purity Myth* presents a revolutionary argument that girls and women are overly valued for their sexuality, as well as solutions for a future without a damaging emphasis on virginity.

The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women Details

Date : Published December 29th 2009 by Seal Press (first published March 21st 2009)

ISBN : 9781580053143

Author : Jessica Valenti

Format : Paperback 263 pages

Genre : Feminism, Nonfiction, Sexuality, Gender, Gender Studies, Sociology



[Download The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women Jessica Valenti.pdf](#)



[Read Online The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women Jessica Valenti.pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women Jessica Valenti

From Reader Review The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

There is not a soul alive who wants to be told what they are and are not allowed to do sexually, but there are definitely a lot of people out there who want to tell other people what they are and are not allowed to do sexually. Specifically, there are people out there who think women shouldn't be having sex at all unless they are married and doing it for reproductive purposes (in the U.S., these people are usually Republicans), and then there are other people out there who think women are basically sex objects with no other defining characteristics (oddly, in the U.S. these people are also usually Republicans). Either way, women are reduced to their sexuality and everything else about them, including their own sexual agency, becomes irrelevant. This is a complicated and wide-ranging problem, and Jessica Valenti tackles it ably in this relatively short book.

Like her *Full Frontal Feminism*, *The Purity Myth* seems to be geared more toward younger women who may not have thought about these issues before. As Naomi Wolf has astutely pointed out, our culture is so saturated with one-dimensional depictions of women that it's all too easy to develop a self-image from the outside in rather than from the inside out. Valenti expands on this point by emphasizing how harmful it is to reduce women to their physical and sexual characteristics when there's so much more to them than that. The sooner we can get young women to think about and question all of this, the better off they, and our culture at large, will be.

So there's no doubt that I would recommend this book for teenagers and young women, but unfortunately I have the same problem with this book that I had with *Full Frontal Feminism*: The writing is just so casual and meandering that it sometimes diminishes the impact of what's being said. I used to think this was a bug in Valenti's writing, but I'm beginning to think it's a feature. It's a shame, because her books would be so much more powerful if the writing were a little more pulled together. But Valenti clearly speaks to a lot of people, and her message is undeniably valuable. Even though I suspect her books will never be my favorites, I'm grateful for Jessica Valenti's persistence and the good she does in the world.

Navessa says

This past weekend I visited a theme park with some friends. While I was strolling through said theme park, I overheard the conversation of two high school aged girls. It went something like this:

Girl A: "Did you hear that Kathy slept with Rick?"
Girl B: "That loser she's been seeing?"
Girl A: "Yup."
Girl B: "God, that girl is such a slut."
Girl A: "I know, last year I heard she slept with Todd too."
Girl B: "Who's Todd?"
Girl A: "That college guy she was dating."

That's right, in the context of these few sentences, Kathy is a slut for sleeping with her boyfriends. Unable to stop myself, I began to butt in. Because I apparently I'm *that* person. Going off the limited information I'd

been given, and playing the role of the meddling stranger who has no business being in this conversation, I said:

“And why do you care who she sleeps with? Because you’ve been brainwashed by the media to believe that a woman’s worth is dictated by her virginity? Or maybe you’re jealous that Kathy doesn’t give a shit about society’s rules and lives by *gasp* her own moral compass, one that has nothing to do with antiquated religious scripts or the outdated beliefs of the patriarchy that has done nothing but shove this ridiculous moral codex down the throats of the women they’ve been oppressing since...”

I didn’t get to finish my sentence, because a pair of hands appeared on my shoulders and began to gently pull me away. My fiancé has been living with me for nigh on seven years and understands that if given the opportunity to gain a stable footing on my soapbox, it becomes incredibly difficult to dislodge me from it. So, like the intelligent man he is, he quickly apologized to the blushing (likely with a mixture of embarrassment and rage) teenagers, and steered me away.

“Not that I don’t admire your gusto, but is this really the time or the place?” he whispered in my ear.

It was then that I came back to myself and realized that the friends we’d gone to the park with were all looking at me strangely. The men (two dudes I served in the military with and have known for seven years) wore uncomfortable but slightly amused expressions. Their girlfriends (WHO I HAD JUST MET NOT AN HOUR BEFORE) seemed like they were questioning their boyfriend’s taste in female friends. I doubt I’ll ever see them again.

The moral of the story is this: if I’d had this hot little book in my hands, I could have done something different. Instead of coming off like an overly aggressive feminist who suffers from some sort of severe social handicap, I could have pressed this book into the hands of those young women and whispered:

“It will set you free.”

If you’re a woman under twenty five, you should read this. If you’re a woman over twenty five, you should read this. If you’re a man who considers himself a feminist (aka, recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men), you should read this.

[Blog](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Pinterest](#)

El says

Update: March 3, 2014: I found the article I mention below that I couldn’t find at the time of writing this review! Because I’m a rock star. Silly rabbit, I didn’t go back to look at The Toast. Long story short - On Not Having a Story About Losing Your Virginity. *Finally*.

Original Review:

Abstinence-only sex education.

There have been a couple articles I’ve read lately on the interwebz about virginity that have really caught my attention, and now after reading this book, those articles have come back into my mind. And now, because I

can, I share them with you:

Living Myths About Virginity, *The Atlantic*, Feb 4, 2014

The Word You Are Searching for Is *Rape*, *slate.com*, Feb 13, 2014

There was also this great article I read... somewhere... about how we talk too much about "first times" in society, and how we shouldn't put so much attention on the topic because some (or many) first times were under really inappropriate circumstances. If I find that again, I'll add it here because it was right on and I can't give it the right justice by paraphrasing.

Society as a whole *does* talk an awful lot about sex and virginity and what does it all mean, and there are these awful double-standards we're all aware of that no one really does anything about, like how if a woman has multiple sexual partners they're considered a slut, whereas if a man has multiple sexual partners they're considered a winner at life. We all know the problems. But they continue to be problems and that, in and of itself, is the biggest problem.

Well, *that* and the fact that there are still, in 2014, disagreements and arguments about what certain words mean: "virgin", "pure", "moral", "good", "rape".

Why are we still debating these definitions? Why do we still not know? There's still a lot of victim shaming and blaming. We see it all the time in the news, women who are raped on university and college campuses or in their high schools, and how the number one question is "What was she wearing?" or "Why did she put herself in a position where drugs and alcohol were being served? Didn't she know better?" What?

There are stories like Daisy Coleman's in Maryville, Missouri, and of course, we're all familiar with what happened in Steubenville, Ohio. These stories keep coming up in the media because no one knows how to handle them. What Valenti points out in this book is that there's a lot of social confusion going on in the media - we *know* it's not okay to rape a woman, but we're also told that "boys will be boys" and Miley Cyrus is twerking on some lame-o singing about "blurred lines".

Valenti also talks about some seriously messed up shit that a lot of people aren't that familiar with yet, things like "purity balls" where young girls pronounce they will give their virginity, in essence, to their fathers, who will in turn protect said virginity until their daughter is ready to get married, at which time said virginity will be passed on to the new husband. That's some seriously creepy stuff, *and* take note: it's federally funded.

A girl's or a woman's worth should not be dependent on their bodies. Bottom line. We should not be afraid to ask for contraceptives to protect our bodies, and yet we are still often told it's not our place. Legislation still is rather backwards when it comes to reproductive rights - women who are raped are still denied abortions, are still denied (illegally in many cases) Plan B (the morning-after pill) because some "well-meaning" pharmacist refuses to provide it, are still questioned in sexual assault and rape cases in a way that makes the woman feel it's her fault - we're told in various ways that we cannot make decisions about our own body. In 2014.

Valenti touches on all of these topics and then some. I even learned a few things (like "2 girls, 1 cup" - no, don't look it up, sometimes ignorance *is* bliss). All important topics about how women are treated in the media, from commercials to attention received on their blogs (just another forum for women to occasionally be "put in [their] place").

So why just the three stars? I agreed with everything Valenti said here, so why isn't this a five-star read?

Because I am the *exact* person this book is meant for. Valenti is preaching to the choir here. Abstinence-only sex education helps no one, the legislation needs to be fixed if we're ever going to get anywhere, these double-standards and gender roles we're all so stuck on need to be broken down. I'm in full agreement. So I'm not the one who needs to read this book. The people who do need to read this book are not going to, sadly. It's not quite an academic enough book for someone with a differing viewpoint to want to read and it's certainly not bias-free so that someone who is on the fence would read it and be all "Oh, wait, *now* I get it, this shit is *real*." That's just not going to happen.

Valenti is a part of the blogosphere, and these chapters read like various blogs she might already have written. Not wrong in and of itself, but again, her audience is going to be limited. You have to *want* to read her website, otherwise you're not going to go there. That's just the nature of blogs.

As a result of the less academic approach, this book is accessible to younger readers, and I do hope it reaches some of them. The ones who are told if they have sex they will get pregnant and die, but have an inkling that piece of advice might not actually be entirely true - *this* is the demographic who would benefit the most from this book. For the rest of us, it's a quick read, but we know all of this already, and some of us are equally just as irate as Valenti.

Additionally, and this just came to mind right now as I'm finishing up this review, the subtitle ("How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women") bothers me. Because it's not just hurting young women, it's hurting young men as well. Valenti does write a bit about that, but that's not her primary focus.

Recommended primarily for people who say feminism doesn't matter and/or there's no longer any need for feminism (ie, people who don't understand what feminism means - another word that people still have difficulty defining). And for people who think sex-ed in schools doesn't matter.

Dray says

Whoo! My first book on feminism! I heard about this book a couple of years ago and was intrigued, simply because I grew up in a world where purity was everything.

...everything.

Your virginity/purity was your worth. Not if you were funny, not if you were kind, not if you had great ideas...even if you had all those things, if you were not a virgin before marriage then you were ruined. So anyway, I've casually been on the lookout for this book for awhile. This past week my fiance and I went to Portland on vacation (yes, together) and went to Powells every day of the vacation, naturally. By our last day there I hadn't gotten my "I-can-only-buy-ONE-book-at-Powells" book yet, and this one came to mind.

And everything Valenti says about the Virginity Movement? I absolutely know it's true because I lived it. I had a "Modest is Hottest" baby tee. (that, yes, was skin tight) I was told that good boys wouldn't marry a girl who was like "a piece of gum that had already been chewed." I was told that birth control didn't work. (wtf?) And yes, the standards were ridiculous. Girls were essentially supposed to be sexy virgins. Valenti gives Jessica Simpson as a perfect example of this dichotomy. In the early 2000s she was used as a sex symbol, but

yet preached about how she waited until marriage. You can't win!

Of course you can't. That's the point. You are a woman and therefore cannot win.

So obviously I agreed with almost everything in this book. The only reason I took off a star was because I wish it had been edited a bit more thoroughly. Valenti had a pattern of going off on other feminist tangents and then in the last few sentences of the chapter saying, "I bet you're wondering what this has to do with the purity myth..."

But good for her for seeing this problem and speaking out. Maybe a bit too much information about to happen here, but I guess that's why I only use my first name on Goodreads. The truth is, teaching girls that they are not allowed to have sexual feelings is harmful. I cannot count the number of times (but easily over 20) that as a preteen/teen I, sobbing, asked God for forgiveness because I had masturbated and felt so guilty. That disturbs me so much now. I hope this book/movement catches on and that girls stop 1. feeling guilty for being sexual beings and 2. know that their worth has NOTHING to do with sex. It has to do with who they are on the inside.

Lina says

I want to start off my review by stating that I don't think this book is anti-abstinence. It is against the idea that being abstinence makes you a more moral woman than those of us who did not wait till marriage to have sex.

This book frustrates me because proves to me how despite all the progress women have made around the world, we are still bound by archaic principles when it comes to our sexuality. The examples that these abstinence-only places are teaching is not only insulting, but de-humanizing. Calling a sexual active woman a dirty strip of tape or a used lollipop is just horrible.

As I was reading The Purity Myth I couldn't help think of all the YA PNR that has been popping up with these "pure, virginal" female protagonists and the whole propaganda of a sexually active teen being "sluts." The idea that being a virgin until you find the one is out there and people take it to heart: we see it in our media all the time. Victim blaming (which is talked about in the book) is something we see every time a young woman is assaulted for walking outside after dark. As if we expected to hide in our homes in order to not be raped.

Purity Myth manages to be informative and fair in its analysis of the content. Each point is well-argued and you can tell that Valenti is trying not to fly into a rage at some of the facts presented.

Overall, the message of The Purity Myth are (1) individuals should not be defined as good or bad, by how much sex they have (or have not) had and (2) we should teach teens proper sex-ed [which does include abstinence] so that when they do become sexually active they can lead healthy sexual lives.

To add my own two cents to the book, I have to say that in my experience, victim-blaming is a huge issue. I was in high school when the Chris Brown-Rihanna incident happened and there were so many women who were jumping to defend Chris Brown, saying that Rihanna was at fault for being abused. Many of my classmates who grew up catholic and were against abortion said that a girl who got raped should go to the hospital to get the pill right away, ignoring the fact that this woman might be going through trauma of her

own. Even myself, when I was a pre-teen can remember watching an episode of Degrassi, where the character of Paige was raped and wondered what she had expected when she went up to his room dressed up. On the other side, an episode of the hit show Glee had the character of Holly Holiday tell two teenage girls they were prudes for being part of a celibacy club.

The issues in this book are real and the mentalities that foster due to misinformation will not end until we collectively choose to be informed.

Chris says

Here's the thing that bugs me, really bugs me. You ready for it? This idea that women and sex are two completely unrelated in any way, shape or form ideas. I mean, I thought that whole close your eyes and think of England thing was gone. I've read letters collected by women's groups in the late 1800s and early 1900s. You know, actually you most likely don't know. But in some of these letters, young women didn't even know they were in labor! I have nothing against virginity or being chaste. If that is your choice, it's your choice. But you should have all the correct information and not be pushed into your choice to conform to someone else (ie man's) view of what you should be. Do we really want to go back to those days of no real sex ed, because that's no good.

Thank god, for Jessica Valenti.

Her book examines the at times seemingly conflicting issues surrounding girls and virginity. She actually makes a very good and compelling argument that the virginity pledge movement is simply another way for sexualizing young girls. (And I have to agree, the term cover, whose breeding meaning I knew prior to this book, is just icky when used that way). Take for examine the following quote in Valenti's book

Katie giggles as she waits for her date to come around and open the car door. The pair enters an ice cream shop. She sits down at a table as her date gently pushes in her chair. He takes her hand from across the table and asks, "What flavour would you like tonight, Sugar?" Katie smiles and says, "I'll have chocolate, Daddy". More and more fathers are becoming aware of their influence and are regularly dating their daughters.

Why would you date your daughter? Valenti is right. It is creepy. (It freaked out my brother when I made him read it).

I would have liked to see some more statistics on women being charged with crimes related to what they did or did not due pre-childbirth. The stories Valenti gives in this regard are enough to make anyone want to smack a male lawmaker, but shocking and upsetting stories work emotionally. I agree two are two too many, but exactly how often does this occur would be nice to know.

I liked the fact that Valenti included discussion questions at the end of the book. This is not a PS reader's group section, but a list of questions to promote thought and discussion.

Deborah Markus says

"No man's getting into my bed unless he puts a ring on my finger."

A neighbor of mine was in the habit of saying this. It made me uncomfortable because, first of all, nobody had asked. I mean, seriously, she would throw this into a pause in the conversation the way some people might make idle observations on the weather.

Second, when she put it that way, it didn't sound like, "I don't know about the rest of you gals, but *I have standards*," which I'm sure is how she meant it. It sounded uncomfortably economic: pay the fee and you can take home the prize. Which was exactly the opposite of the kind of woman she was trying to prove herself to be.

Third, and most disconcerting of all to me, this statement seemed to rule out any desire *she* might feel. She didn't seem to be saying, "I can't wait to get married and share the kind of ecstatic closeness that I'd only be able to experience in the bonds of holy matrimony. I mean, seriously – talk about wedded *bliss*." Instead, she seemed to be saying, "If a man were willing to marry me, I'd be willing to let him do that to me."

Ew.

This neighbor moved from my apartment complex years ago. We fell out of touch, but I found myself thinking about her as I read *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*.

The Purity Myth, as you guessed from the title, is about the worship of a physical state. The subject matter is depressing as hell. Initially, I found myself irritated by Jessica Valenti's frequent interjections of snarky humor; a few chapters in, I found myself clinging to them for dear life. Valenti doesn't spend the whole book talking about "purity balls" and abstinence education; she explores the logical consequences of equating female virginity with virtue. And those consequences are pretty dire.

I think it's odd that she specifies "young" women in her subtitle. The idea that female morality should be defined entirely by what a woman does in the bedroom and when she does it damages *all* women. My neighbor was in her late forties when I knew her, and was not physically beautiful. She was one of the wittiest, warmest people I've ever known. I found myself spending lots of time with her, and I'm antisocial. She was extremely in demand as a friend. She could make people feel pampered and cozy even if all she had to offer was water and a half-empty bag of potato chips. She was a terrific conversationalist. She was educated without being pedantic, compassionate without condescension.

And so it made me sad that when it came to finding a spouse, she seemed to think that all she had to offer was that one-time shot at her total lack of experience between the sheets. "Who wants virginity? I got virginity right here!" She had a lot more than that, but she didn't seem to think it mattered.

Jessica Valenti makes an excellent point about virginity in her book, one I've never seen spelled out in so many words: we don't really have a working definition of virginity. Not one that seems to (ahem) cover all the bases. Is a lesbian who's had an active love life with other women, and only other women, a virgin? What if she marries a woman and decides to become a biological mother via donor? Has she experienced a virgin birth? Shouldn't that have hit the papers by now? Wouldn't the Bible need a new chapter?

(Valenti doesn't bring up the virgin birth thing, btw. That's all me. Thank you. I'll be here all night.)

Valenti doesn't spend the whole book on the subject of virginity per se. Rather, as I said, she draws connections. You can read this book to find an excellent analysis of how sexism is intertwined with very specific ideas about sex. You can also read it for the "Oh my cow, they did WHAT?" anecdotes about

“integrity balls” (the mother-son equivalent of “purity balls”), daddy-daughter dating (it’s as creepy as it sounds!), and abstinence-only education (one teacher’s lesson involved “tying up a male volunteer from the audience and dangling a cinder block precariously over his genital area to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of condoms against HIV/AIDS”).

Whatever grabs you about the book, you’ll finish it with a lot to think about. I plan to hand this to my teenage son next. We’ll have quite the conversation when he’s done.

Literary Ames {Against GR Censorship} says

Is America a dystopian society when it comes to its neglectful and abusive nature towards its women?

I ask this question honestly, not to shock or offend, but because I genuinely want to know. I'm not saying America is the worst country in the world for a woman to live, just that the 'virginity movement' comprising of powerful conservative, Republican and Christian groups, have a worrying number of ideals in common with Al-Qaeda.

As a Brit, I'm spoilt. I take my country for granted for its forward-thinking laws and policies concerning women. I'm extremely lucky to be living here; my mother's parents could've decided to travel west in the 1950s instead of east from Barbados. Thank you, grandparents. The state of equality in the UK is better than I realised, though far from perfect. And of course, we still get the ridiculous comments spouted by those who should know better.

Defining virginity and sex is difficult, but the former's invention seems to be about determining paternity, placing value on and commodifying a woman who's never had sex. Tell that to this 15 year-old Saudi girl who barricaded herself in her bedroom after being married to her **90-year-old groom** for a **£10,000 dowry**. This kind of thinking encourages paedophilia, human trafficking and prostitution.

Fetishizing virginity implies that any woman who has had sex is less important, less discriminating in her choice of partner, because she's seen as "dirty". But there's still hope for them. 'Secondary virginity' was invented for those that've sinned to redeem themselves by pledging abstinence until marriage. For many pledging abstinence isn't a choice, expectations from parents, peers, church and/or the local community, puts pressure on the child to conform.

Language used in the father's pledge to help their daughters stay chaste and the daddy/daughter dates, yes *dates*, are unbelievably **pseudo-incestuous**. That the girls are supposed to replace a sexual partner and relationship with hugs and dates with their fathers, is unequivocally *creepy* inadvisable.

As **95% will have pre-marital sex**, it behooves us to teach factual sex education and methods of contraception, unfortunately the pervasiveness of federally funded abstinence-only sex education sees children being taught to 'believe **drinking a cap of bleach will prevent HIV**, and a shot of Mountain Dew will stop pregnancy,' that all contraception is ineffective against STIs, abortions are harmful, and shaming them into doing their will. Not surprisingly, STI rates have increased since abstinence-only's inception.

I fail to understand why grown adults will spread false and misleading information to children who will ultimately have sex, will do so without being armed with the information to keep themselves and their partners safe from pregnancy and disease, and feel ashamed about it afterwards, as they were taught.

Confoundingly, if they don't use contraception, they may have an easier time obtaining an abortion (which is difficult in itself) than the morning-after pill. *Sigh.* I was pleased to read that parents and pupils are **fighting back** by complaining to school boards, setting up Facebook groups and surreptitiously filming these "lessons" and posting them on YouTube.

For anyone interested in truthful sex education, Valenti recommends <http://www.scarleteen.com/>.

I believed we British were completely safe from abstinence education and was momentarily frightened by Nadine Dorries' abstinence bill which was thankfully withdrawn in January 2012. Phew. I'm not surprised this came from the woman known for abandoning her job as a Member of Parliament to eat ostrich anus in Australia for a few weeks, and yet I *am* surprised and horrified to see it had reached a second reading in Parliament before the outcry quashed it.

'In 2006, *Playboy* listed **Lolita**, Vladimir Nabakov's novel about a **pedophile** who falls in lust with his landlady's twelve-year old daughter, as **one of the "25 Sexiest Novels Ever Written."**'

chokes

Blatant sexualization of children. My guess is they'd approve of the **legal online kiddie porn** showing child model photos in bikinis since they basically founded the modern porn revolution in the 1950s, and was accelerated with the help of the internet, video cameras and webcams.

Usual complaints about the degrading and debasing nature of porn against women are present, and to combat this, **woman friendly porn** is something Valenti is very much in favour of, but objectification and dehumanization has taken on a new face: **Real Dolls -woman replacements for the men who buy them.** They're tailored to a buyer's exact specifications and can basically do whatever they want to them without consequences. An interview with a repairman is disturbing: 'he spoke about badly mutilated **dolls with their breasts hanging off, their hands and fingers severed.**' Whether they're men turned off real women by porn, simply intimidated by independent women, or unable to attract a woman for their misogynist attitudes, isn't clear but the danger they *might* represent to a real woman in future, is.

An antidote to porn culture are **Disney's purity porn stars** like Britney Spears and Miley Cyrus who embody the 'desirable virgin'. The '**desirable virgin**' is sexy, young, white, skinny, passive, middle class, girl-next-door. So if you're fat, of a low income, independent, disabled, a lesbian, or a woman of colour -you are not desirable.

In fact, **lesbians don't exist** to those of what Valenti calls the 'virginity movement', perhaps because most involved in it are conservative/Republican and/or religious (Abstinence Clearinghouse and the National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) are the major players), viewing homosexuality as "unnatural". **Sex for pleasure** also doesn't appear to exist to those of the movement, **only pro-creative sex with your husband is valid or allowed.** Most feminists disagree, and therefore they're the natural enemy of the virginity movement, by promoting equality and sexual liberation (i.e. casual sex).

I was shocked by the mistreatment of some pregnant women and the **antiquated prioritization of the life of a foetus before the life of the mother** and the tragic consequences. The reverse is true for the UK. The former risks the life of mother *and* baby, while the latter risks the life of the baby alone. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.

One woman in labour had her legs shackled together and an unnecessary c-section was performed on her against her will. Though devoutly religious and pro-life she gave a talk to a pro-choice audience declaring she had been "raped by the state." I completely agree with her. That's a reprehensible way to treat a pregnant woman.

When I started reading Rape Is Rape: How Denial, Distortion, and Victim Blaming Are Fueling a Hidden Acquaintance Rape Crisis the author quoted Valenti (multiple times, I later learned) which prompted me to brush off my copy of this book to read before continuing, and the Public Punishment chapter is what I was waiting for. Women and children punished and blamed for their own rapes. Both Valenti and Rape Is Rape reference the Cassandra Hernandez case, the Air Force airperson raped by three colleagues who were all **given immunity for sexual assault if they testified against her on an indecent acts charge**, which included underage drinking. 'In effect, she was charged with her own rape.'

'Women get raped because *someone raped them*' and for no other reason. Alcohol and clothing aren't factors, 'the presence of a rapist' is. Sickeningly, a 'judge in Philadelphia ruled that a sex worker whom multiple men had raped at gunpoint **hadn't been raped at all -she'd been robbed.**' It was "theft of services."

The Department of Justice estimates 'half of all victims will not call what happened as rape.' As long as it was against your will, forced or coerced, it's still rape no matter what the victim thinks. Or a judge. **One judge disallowed the use of the word 'rape' because it was prejudicial.** 'In a heroic move (if you ask me), she refused to abide by the judge's rule: "I refuse to call it sex, or any other word that I'm...encouraged to say on the stand, because to me that's committing perjury. **What happened to me was rape, it was not sex.**"'

"The tragedy of machismo is that a man is never quite man enough." ~ Germaine Greer

"Femiphobia" - the fear of being feminine, is often used to punish men e.g. forcing male prisoners to wear pink to offend their **hypermasculinity**, because 'nothing is worse than being a woman.' Some men 'revel' in the never-ending struggle for 'dominance and "seduction,"' which can become predatory -is par for the course among young men. And it's not just what's defining their sexuality, it's what's defining them as *men*.' But this is deforming men, narrowing their emotional range and depth and reinforces the purity myth because they're defining themselves through and controlling women's bodies and sexuality.

Ariel Levy's Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture was critiqued by Valenti. She agreed with me when she says, 'she fails in that she seems to have little sympathy for the women she interviews' and 'telling young women they're being taken advantage of isn't necessarily the best way to effect change.' And she goes on to say 'there is a middle ground between rabid antiporn Dworkinizing and Girls Gone Wild vapidity.'

Girls Gone Wild - a popular example of deplorable "**humilitainment**" and exploitation Valenti condemns as one of 'the most sexually predatory groups in America today...it's a roving band of would-be rapists and assaulters who get treated like celebrities wherever they go.' Here, it's shown a few of those employed by GGW were in fact criminals, one of which was a serial rapist.

Valenti postulates **the virginity movement's repressed sexuality has unwittingly created the very thing it seeks to eradicate: raunch.** Repressing sexuality and shaming people for having it creates a guilty hunger for outlets, like porn (oh, the hypocrisy), thereby encouraging sexual liberation to fulfil those needs. And

that the movement requires the prevalence of raunch to stay relevant, because if they succeed by sanitising the world and abolishing women's rights, what more do they have to campaign for, or against? If they no longer have a cause, they have no power. I'm not entirely sure about this last part. Maintaining the new social order of oppression (with dissemination of propaganda, and so on) would require effort and resources, and someone has to be in charge of that, right?

Criticisms

You didn't think I'd have any, did you?

*It occurs to me that when [vaginal rejuvenation] surgery is performed on women in Africa, we call it female genital mutilation, but in the oh-so-enlightened United States, we call them designer vaginas. You know, American women are *empowered*.

A footnote has never made me so angry. There should be no sarcasm or snark in that paragraph. American women ARE empowered. They CHOOSE to have surgery by TRAINED SURGEONS in CLEAN HOSPITALS. In Africa, the barbaric practice of FGM primarily consists of a clitoridectomy forced on millions of girls between infancy and age 15 often in unsanitary conditions by butchers, leaving them with long-term serious consequences. Tell me, **what American woman would choose to have their clitoris removed?** I recommend she read Alice Walker's The Color Purple.

Another footnote is also not quite right, criticising an anti-choice columnist 'who actually asserted that abortion providers and **Chinese people eat foetuses!**' This is true. Mary Roach visited China to find they actually do. Just because it sounds outrageous, don't dismiss it as untrue.

I wonder if Valenti has ever read Mary Roach because their evocative informal writing styles are quite similar, containing many, many footnotes and personal choices and accounts of their lives. Personal taste will dictate if readers will like this style, for me, it worked like a charm.

Bias. Although I've never encountered American abstinence-only sex education or the other explored issues, I'm sure there is some degree of bias. I can't say for certain how much because Valenti does a brilliant job of reinforcing her points with as much evidence as she can find, but her frustrations prevented her from researching my first two points of criticism. What else has she overlooked, or perhaps exaggerated?

There's no question Valenti makes an impassioned plea to the public to change attitudes. However, understandably, **her use of exclamation points increases** with her frustration and incredulity at the people, institutions and cultures she criticises. **Snark** becomes more noticeable, translating into an attack on the "enemy" rather than a call to open dialogue with them. Though it's quite clear previous clashes between sides show few are willing to understand the points Valenti makes and that this book is actually a way of bypassing The Enemy to the public, the very people she wishes to inform, hoping to ignite discussion and encourage meaningful changes throughout society.

Those in power to change the dynamic who are currently doing real damage are the abstinence teachers, well-funded organisations, judges, and legislators.

Ideally **I'd like to see this book studied and discussed in schools** and universities to combat the dangers this age-group faces from the outset. I'd advise them to read it over a number of days because I got whiplash

and headaches from all the head-shaking and frowning I did in response to horrendous opinions on and the treatment of the women within these pages.

The Purity Myth is a passionately urgent and profound call-to-arms to all rational minds, male and female, young and old, to take up the cause of women and equality to finally give women power over their own bodies and sexuality once and for all.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

This book review is entirely voiced with my own cranky perspective and personal interpretation of Jessica Valenti's more scholarly and researched book. Valenti wrote a 'just the facts' book, but after completing her book I am snarling with rage.

Valenti pulls together in one book all of the insane purity fads and institutional policies and social mores and laws and religious bullying and pseudo-science surrounding the issue of American female sexuality. If your daughters are scared of their bodies and resort to weird, neurotic behaviors or religious extremism, you might want to read this book. Unfortunately, the parents who most need to read this book I don't think will see the logic but will see it as an attack on their faith or as feminism, which some believe as morally suspect.

The book certainly points to how some American parents and religion-based customs and male prejudices fail to present any kind of sex education or social rationality based on scientific or logical reality which helps lead girls to sexual normality. Certain society and legal institutions and church/school/parents teach little girls that their vagina is dirty and responsible for all the 'sin' on earth (completely ignoring the male penis' contribution other than an assumed guiltless lack of responsible self-control or give it complete ethical absolution just because it is the male sex organ and not female). No wonder some females scourge themselves consciously and unconsciously with self-hate on their sexual natures since they are taught their own vaginas are so vile and corrupting. Mix into that psychological stew that despite the utter necessity of untouched vaginal purity by avoiding sex, females of all ages must look, act and dress as tarty and sexually tempting as a succubus.

Size DD breasts and tight, crack-showing jeans are promoted to girls in advertising, but woe to those girls if they feel stimulated by the sexual interest they might incur! To complete the impossible role American women face, close down all the birth control clinics and limit all access to 'the morning after pill' and force women to raise unwanted children as 'punishment' for having sex, because somehow love and affection will grow in the reluctant mother's heart after feeling dirty, despised and being taught that she is certain to suffer in Hell for eternity, plus teach her it was all her fault despite the necessity of sperm being present as well. What a terrific mother she will be! Additionally, on top of the complete insanity of cultural approval of girls dressing like prostitutes, let's refuse her most legal protection or justice if raped, because she was asking or it. Of course, if she is not a white female of virginal purity, but a person of color, then she is almost by definition without ANY legal protections against rape because purity cannot be assumed in any circumstance by females of color.

Much of the information in 'The Purity Myth' isn't really new, although the Purity Ball details shocked me. The fathers keep the key symbolic to their daughter's intact hymen? OMG! And while daddy's little girl is handing over the said real key to her pink little real box to her father, she's wearing her tight, body-hugging, short dress and push-up padded bra, perfumed, high-heeled and made up for seduction, I suppose? And religious folk wonder why the rest of us don't go to church or buy into their asinine claims of modernity or

supposedly relaxed paternal dictatorship that is benign! In any case, while all of this information is out there in one form or another, in newspaper articles or magazines, it's all together in the book, which for me was like turning on a light bulb in a dark room, and also at the same time, organizing all of the papers in a messy desk. Suddenly, the pattern is visible and the crazy irresponsible lack of coherent education or policy is made plain.

While I think the majority of us women somehow find our way though the muck of sexualized advertising, photoshopped pictures of models, anorexic film stars as idolized deities, porn, wearing tight scraps of cloth that nearly cover our body parts, trying to maintain a fictional virginal purity while humping everyone that appeals, and teaching our children to wait, use protection if they can't, there are those families and individuals who obviously attempt to force a real state of being as a virgin in a society that demands virginity officially, while at the same time that society demands sexually stimulating behavior and dress, while being sexually dead to real sex. Children are a penalty of sin and always a result of a criminal female behavior in this paradigm, the crime being female desire. My words, not the author's, who is more delicate and circumspect in her book.

HaQuyen says

I agreed with a lot of Valenti's positions and her critique of various interrelated issues such as rape culture, pro-abstinence education, media hypersexualization of women and hypermasculinity as related to how our culture treats women's sexuality, but I found the writing and organization to be uneven (wobbling between blog-like snark and academic semistructures), and the tone, frankly, was often annoying. Valenti advocates in her last chapter for people to build dialogue and keep an open mind, but a lot of times I felt I was reading an overly long pamphlet with undertones of propaganda painting "the enemy" (variously right-wing religious conservatives, politicians and men in general) in broad, monolithic strokes, without much nuance. It was unclear what audience Valenti was writing for, but if she was trying to build bridges and dialogue with the communities that most needed to hear her (very legitimate) arguments about moving toward a healthy, honest view of women's sexuality, this was *not* the way to go.

Conclusion: good message, poor delivery.

Elevate Difference says

Let me begin this review by professing my support for Jessica Valenti's overarching purpose in *The Purity Myth*: to expose the trope of sexual purity as deeply entrenched in American culture and to demonstrate the harmfulness of this trope on young American women. I agree with her assessment of the state and nature of "purity" (indeed, race theorists and sexuality theorists have long since questioned the value of the concept of purity), and I applaud her commitment to the social, psychological, sexual, and ethical flourishing of young women.

It disappoints me to be disappointed in this book. *The Purity Myth* is best suited to affirm the beliefs of someone already in agreement with Valenti's main points and is unlikely to have much effect on someone who is either on the fence or who might require sound arguments, solid reasoning, and logical coherence to appreciate the efforts made in this book.

Valenti's prose sparkles in her blog writing. She is witty and humorous. Though in this book it is unclear precisely what point her humor is meant to make. Is it meant to make palatable an insidious social problem that, without humor, might be ignored because of its crushing ubiquity? Perhaps. Her pot shots at previous boyfriends, her droll tales of her own sexual experiences, and her unsubtle eye-rolling when discussing other people's research all have the effect of obscuring and dulling her otherwise sharp observations and assessments.

Worse, when Valenti discusses the research done on young women's sexual habits, she unproblematically scoffs at those who report that women who engage in sexual activities at younger ages report higher incidence of depression. Perhaps she criticizes these studies because they don't differentiate between women who were molested or assaulted at young ages (who might be expected to report depression); women who consented to sexual activities believing that the 'magic' of sex would solve their other insecurities and uncertainties (who might also be expected to report depression); and healthy, happy, well-adjusted women who freely consented to sex with a reasonable expectation of what sex is and what sex is not (who might not be expected to report depression). Unfortunately Valenti doesn't make this clear, and she runs the risk of implying that reports of depression linked to early sexual activity are fabrications of the pro-purity faction, which effectually undermines women's reports of depression and makes women who do report depression related to their sexual experiences into the dupes of the pro-purity movement. Further, had she discussed this research in greater depth, she could have convincingly argued that the authors she critiques help to support one of her own points: women report depression not because of sex itself, but because of past sexual trauma or the accumulated moral meanings sex has taken on in our purity-obsessed culture.

One of the reviewers of this book delighted in Valenti's "wit" and "sass," which helped to convince the reviewer that feminism isn't boring. One of her best-stated, most concise points appears in a footnote: "a young woman's decision to have sex, or not, shouldn't impact how she's seen as a moral actor." If such strong statements as this one were not swaddled in pages of "sass," this would be a book that could support future academic endeavors as well as popular movements and conversations in order to undermine the myth of purity. As it stands, *The Purity Myth* is a comfortable affirmation for feminists who already know that feminism is not boring.

Review by Kristina Grob

Tope says

Valenti makes a number of good arguments in *The Purity Myth*: that it's dangerous and damaging to teach young women that their morality or lack thereof hinges on whether or not they have sex, rather than whether or not they are kind people living ethical lives; that obsession with sexual purity infantilizes women; that the virgin-whore dichotomy enables the abuse and marginalization of women, and pushes a view of masculinity that is toxic to both women and men. Valenti is right on the mark in calling for an understanding of female sexuality that respects female autonomy and encourages sex-positivity.

However, the book is mostly for the converted. I doubt anyone who doesn't already have serious reservations about the abstinence-only movement would find this book convincing. There's a real need for books and other media that address young women raised in the abstinence movement where they are, with arguments that take their beliefs seriously and come from people who understand those beliefs.

Valenti's tone also veers into the casual and even flippant a bit too often for my tastes. The book at times

reads like a long form blog post, which is not surprising given that Valenti is a blogger, but it would have been nice if she had taken some time to polish her prose a bit. Again, I don't think this is particularly conducive to reaching an audience that takes teachings on abstinence so seriously that they're literally a matter of life and death.

ETA: Forgot to mention that the book uses some interesting sources, and the footnotes/bibliography seem like a good place to start to compile a reading list on contemporary issues around female sexuality. I plan to go back through the footnotes to find more stuff to read.

Christy Stewart says

Reading the book was like being lifted of a burden because with every chapter I was SO relieved that what I felt helpless to argue about anymore was covered so succinctly and eloquently in this book. I don't tend to like to read nonfiction books I agree with (because what's the point? I might as well sit in the bathroom and talk into the mirror) but I've never been more pleased to agree with a book in my life, if someone asked me what I felt about feminism and/or sexuality I could hand them this book and say 'This is what I think.'

I didn't read the book expecting to have this reaction to it. As a virgin myself I expected more of the 'progressive' material that would advice me to liberate myself and give it up, but the book wasn't at all judgmental of women who make the independent and mature decision of virginity.

I'd like to end by further complimenting the author on the section on gender issues. I feel deeply and postulate loudly (to my TV) about how gender expectations are becoming detrimental to not only women but men as well. I would recommend that section to men, if the hymen stuff bores them too early on.

Regina says

Very interesting read. The author puts forward the argument that defining women and labeling their morality by their sexual activity and choices is problematic. Valenti argues that overvaluing virginity is on the same continuum and spectrum as labeling women "sluts". In the end, Valenti is not promoting promiscuousness. She is not promoting prudishness. She is not discouraging men from finding women attractive. What she is arguing is for an identification of women that is separate from their appearance and separate from the judgment of how much sex they have. As Valenti stated so well, "Our daughters deserve a model of morality that's based on ethics, not on their bodies."

Valenti is well known for her role on the website www.feministing.org; even if I had not known that, it would be obvious from reading this book that the author is a blog writer. I think she overstates the power of blogging, but I understand why as that is who she is. The book read too much like a blog entry and every paragraph ends with a snarky comment. Which was fun at first to read, but I am not sure if that is effective over the long read of the book -- snark and cutting comments may rob the book of any broader base appeal beyond feminists and may prevent its staying power. The topic is already inflammatory, so that people who approach the topic and are not in agreement with Valenti (unlike myself), may very well put the book down from insults. She ends the book with asking for a positive and non-attacking response from the purity pushers, but I can see how the snark could turn them off. Despite my liking the message, it was my impression that Valenti attempted to cover too many topics in this book. I think it would have been more

workable had she limited it to less topics.

Great quotes from the book:

“It isn’t sex unless you’ve had an orgasm.”

“equating this inaction with morality not only is problematic because it continues to tie women’s ethics to our bodies, but also is downright insulting because it suggests that women can’t be moral actors. Instead, we’re defined by what we don’t do – our ethics are the ethics of passivity.”

“there’s no separating virginity, violence, and control over women’s bodies. When it comes to women who are perceived as ‘impure,’ there’s a narrative of punishment that underscores it.”

“[t]here’s no getting around the fact that society’s current version of sexuality makes it difficult for young women to have a healthy sexual outlook that centers on their desires raunch culture promotes inauthentic, performance-based female sexuality.”

“The thing is, naked women aren’t the problem -- a woman believing her only venue is sexual is what’s dangerous. It’s not women’s sexuality that we have to watch out for, it’s the way [it is constructed].”

“The desirable virgin is sexy but not sexual. She’s young, white, and skinny. She’s a cheerleader, a babysitter; she’s accessible and eager to please.”

Emily May says

I'm not a fan of all of Valenti's work but she gets it right with this one. Valenti addresses many important issues in *The Purity Myth* and manages to effectively make the point that a woman's sexuality shouldn't matter. She doesn't resort to virgin-shaming, that's not what this book is about, but instead suggests that women should not be judged based on whether they are having sex, how often they are having sex or who they are having sex with. A very thought-provoking and interesting book.

Thomas says

Another work of nonfiction with several quote-worthy passages. In *The Purity Myth*, Jessica Valenti argues that America's obsession with virginity hurts young women. She focuses on the idea that if we teach girls to value themselves in terms of their bodies, they will fail to cultivate true virtues: intelligence, assiduousness, and compassion.

The desirable virgin is sexy but not sexual. She's young, white, and skinny. She's a cheerleader, a baby sitter; she's accessible and eager to please (remember those ethics of passivity!). She's never a woman of color. She's never a low-income girl or a fat girl. She's never disabled. "Virgin" is a designation for those who meet a certain standard of what women, especially younger women, are supposed to look like. As for how these young women are supposed to act? A blank slate is best.

Valenti discusses purity in several different contexts, including the intersection of purity and poverty, the damaging effects of abstinence-only education, and the harmful attitudes created by gender stereotypes. Even though some of her material might appear like old news, she includes a good amount of statistics and ties all of her points back to her overarching argument. Her writing style, while snarky at times, conveys information with conciseness and directness.

What's funny is that that statement essentially echoes the same hope I have for women: that we can start to see ourselves - and encourage men to see us - as more than just the sum of our sexual parts: not as virgins or whores, as mothers or girlfriends, or as existing only in relation to men, but as people with independent desires, hopes, and abilities. But I know that this can't happen so long as American culture continues to inundate us with gender-role messages that place everyone - men and women - in an unnatural hierarchical order that's impossible to maintain without strife. For women to move forward, and for men to break free, we need to overcome the masculinity status quo - together.

Valenti could have taken her analysis of purity a little further in certain parts of the book. Still, I give *The Purity Myth* five stars because it accomplishes what I think nonfiction should accomplish: it sets out a thoughtful argument and defends it with clear writing and lots of evidence. In the last section of the book Valenti calls readers to action as well, encouraging them to blog or attend local conferences or just educate themselves about feminism and the virginity movement. Overall, I would recommend *The Purity Myth* to anyone interested in feminism, the idea of purity in contemporary society, or gender roles.

Charlotte Dungan says

This was recommended in a book discussion about sexuality. I read it because I thought it would give a different perspective than the one I was most familiar with, and that's true, but the presentation was so rude and condescending to the opposing viewpoint that it totally obscured the message she was trying to convey.*. She doesn't even have anything useful or positive to say until almost 200 pages in. If this is the way feminists paint themselves, their movement is surely doomed, even if their message is correct. Sigh. Huge waste of time and a heap of frustration.

*and for pete's sake, quit interrupting your narrative just to insert snarky anecdotes into your footnotes.

Meen says

I saw this book on an ad on this page:

<http://www.feministing.com/archives/0...>

which is making me throw up a little in my mouth every time I think about it. At some point we have to start calling some aspects of religion what they are, just plain abuse.

Ms. Online says

MORAL HAZARD

Laura M. Carpenter

Review of *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession With Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*

By Jessica Valenti

Seal Press

For decades, Right-Wing think tanks and conservative Christian organizations have promoted what Jessica Valenti calls the “purity myth”: the belief that virginity separates moral/good women from their immoral/bad sisters. In its blatant attempt to re-establish traditional gender roles, the purity movement backs restrictions on birth control and abortion and vilifies rape victims who are insufficiently chaste.

“There’s no room...for the idea that young women could *want* to be sexy, to have sex, or to express themselves in ways that fall beyond wearing ankle-length skirts and finding husbands,” Valenti writes of virginity advocates. “The idea that young women could have a sexuality that’s all their own is just too scary.”

The purity movement teaches girls that their moral status derives from their sexual (in)activity, while boys learn that being moral means making responsible, adult choices. Although its rhetoric sounds all encompassing and ostensibly includes boys, its vision of purity is embodied by white, conventionally attractive, middle-class girls. Women and girls of color, consistently hypersexualized in U.S. culture, are never positioned as “pure,” nor are women with disabilities or impoverished women. Our nation’s obsession with virginity overshadows real issues that afflict women, such as lack of affordable reproductive health care and sexual trafficking. While father-daughter purity balls, virginity vouchers and abstinence rallies are busy celebrating and commodifying virginity, our tax dollars are funding abstinence-only sex-education curricula that use fear and shame to promote chastity outside marriage and provide no (or incorrect) information about contraception or safer sex. Not only are these classes steeped in traditional gender politics that identify women as sexual gatekeepers and men as sexually out of control, they ostracize LGBTQ youth by ignoring their needs for relevant information on sex.

Ironically, the purity movement has much in common with pornography; both idealize passive, doll-like women who desire only to please men. Like pornography, it finds myriad ways to denigrate women. Those who remain virgins effectively remain girls and, as such, can’t—or shouldn’t—be trusted to make decisions about their own bodies. The fetishizing of virginity inspires grown women to embrace girlishness via vaginal rejuvenation surgeries and Brazilian bikini waxes. It’s hard to miss the connection between this glorification of “innocence” and the backlash against women’s advancement in education, work and the public sphere. My own research suggests that the women (and men) who most prize their virginity are those most likely to be disappointed, even devastated, by first sexual experiences that don’t live up to the hype (note: Valenti interviewed me for her book). But given the hullabaloo about its importance, virginity itself eludes definitions. If the first time you have sex is when you lose your virginity, Valenti asks, then what constitutes sex?

“If it’s just heterosexual intercourse, then we’d have to come to the fairly ridiculous conclusion that all lesbians and gay men are virgins and that different kinds of intimacy, like oral sex, mean nothing,” Valenti writes. She argues that the very concept of virginity is a sham perpetrated on women. With *The Purity Myth*, she urges feminists and other progressives to stop ceding the definition of morality to social conservatives

and asks that we trust young women to make their own intimate sexual choices.

LAURA M. CARPENTER is an assistant professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University and the author of Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences (NYU Press, 2005).

Crystal Starr Light says

UPDATE: Bumping this up to 4 stars after reading Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters, because this book is a lot more balanced and speaks with more facts.

This isn't really a review, more of a mish-mash of my thoughts and feelings about this book. So be warned: it's messy and unorganized.

I found the book very insightful, brimmed with thought-provoking arguments and comprehensive research. I appreciated a book that looked at the Virginity Myth from all aspects--what virginity was, how it affects women, where it is found, how pervasive it is, etc. This topic is close to me, as I was one of those women raised under the Virginity Movement (not so much by my parents, but by my church and by Focus on the Family's Brio magazine and Boundless.org website--two places that anyone who isn't 100% a virgin would want to avoid AT ALL COSTS). I was told to maintain my virginity until marriage (to a virgin male), that sex would lead to babies, STDs, and lots and lots of heartache (Uh, doesn't LIFE ITSELF lead to lots of heartache???), that women weren't as sexual as men, and other miscellaneous scare tactics that Valenti addresses. Reading a book like this opened my eyes to a lot of the myths I was told as a teenager, and more importantly, affirmed something that I've really embraced as an adult: that a woman is more than capable of being responsible for her own sexuality. That no one should tell her what her worth is based on who she has sex with or how much sex she has (I mean, MEN aren't held to that standard, now are they?). That virginity is a CHOICE that a WOMAN should choose if she wants to--not something forced on her by society or the men in her life.

Two of my favorite quotes:

"When I argue for an end to the idea of virginity, it's because I believe sexual intimacy should be honored and respected, but that it shouldn't be revered at the expense of women's well-being, or seen as such an integral part of female identity that we end up defining ourselves by our sexuality."

"For the record, I think virginity is fine, just as I think having sex is fine. I don't really care what women do sexually, and neither should you. In fact, that's the point. I believe that a young woman's decision to have sex, or not, shouldn't impact how she's seen as a moral actor."

This book wasn't perfect. In Chapter 6, Valenti notices the similarity between the Virginity Movement's agenda and the anti-abortion agenda and then suddenly uses the two interchangeably. I would have liked to see who and what were supporting abstinence-only education and anti-abortion, a deeper connection between the two houses of thought.

I found that Valenti could be very harsh to the Virginity Movement proponents. I don't doubt the abstinence-only education lies (I remember a few myself), but I have a hard time believing all abstinence-only education is that sloppy and horrible. In fact, many times it seems that Valenti is rather harsh to the Virginity Movement, in a way that goes above and beyond what is required. Is she doing that because she was hurt by the slut-shaming (which is understandably horrible and SHOULD NOT be done)? Or is she using this as a tactic to get her point across? And while Valenti makes a lot of good points in the book, not all of her beliefs agree with mine (which ones aren't the focus of this "review").

I am really glad I read this book; I found it empowering and educational, a hope to women everywhere that one day they will be judged like men--by their character, instead of how "tight like Spandex" they are.
