



# Abstinence Cinema: Virginity and the Rhetoric of Sexual Purity in Contemporary Film

*Casey Ryan Kelly*

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From the perspective of cultural conservatives, Hollywood movies are cesspools of vice, exposing impressionable viewers to pernicious sexually-permissive messages. Offering a groundbreaking study of Hollywood films produced since 2000, *Abstinence Cinema* comes to a very different conclusion, finding echoes of the evangelical movement's abstinence-only rhetoric in everything from *Easy A* to *Taken*.

Casey Ryan Kelly tracks the surprising sex-negative turn that Hollywood films have taken, associating premarital sex with shame and degradation, while romanticizing traditional nuclear families, courtship rituals, and gender roles. As he demonstrates, these movies are particularly disempowering for young women, concocting plots in which the decision to refrain from sex until marriage is the young woman's primary source of agency and arbiter of moral worth. Locating these regressive sexual politics not only in expected sites, like the *Twilight* films, but surprising ones, like the raunchy comedies of Judd Apatow, Kelly makes a compelling case that Hollywood films have taken a significant step backward in recent years.

*Abstinence Cinema* offers close readings of movies from a wide spectrum of genres, and it puts these films into conversation with rhetoric that has emerged in other arenas of American culture. Challenging assumptions that we are living in a more liberated era, the book sounds a warning bell about the powerful cultural forces that seek to demonize sexuality and curtail female sexual agency.

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