



# The Politics of Virginity: Abstinence in Sex Education (Reproductive Rights and Policy)

*Alesha E. Doan, Jean Calterone Williams*

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Abstinance is currently taught as the only form of sex education in a third of public schools. Although most Americans oppose federal funding for abstinance-only education, the federal government has spent more than \$1 billion on Title V and community-group programs that promote abstinance before marriage as the sole healthy and moral choice. Studies show that students in abstinance-only programs are no more likely to abstain from sex than their peers who are in comprehensive sex education programs. Moreover, argue Doan and Williams, abstinance-only programs perpetuate gender stereotypes that disproportionately constrain women, retail medical disinformation, and violate the separation of church and state.

Doan and Williams detail what abstinance programs teach students, expose the political and religious agendas behind them, and analyze the damaging effects to women of the resurrection of the chastity belt: including sexual disempowerment, distorted power dynamics in relationships, increased vulnerability to sexual assault, increased emotional vulnerability, increased risk of unintended pregnancy, and STD/HIV infection. By focusing on the marriage of morality politics with gender politics and of ignorance with chastity that underlies abstinance-only education, the authors fill a major gap in the literature of reproductive politics and policy.

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