



# Regulating Desire: From the Virtuous Maiden to the Purity Princess

*J. Shoshanna Ehrlich*

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# Regulating Desire: From the Virtuous Maiden to the Purity Princess

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**Regulating Desire: From the Virtuous Maiden to the Purity Princess** J. Shoshanna Ehrlich  
*Examines the organized efforts to reshape the law relating to young women's sexuality in the United States.*

Starting with the mid-nineteenth-century campaign by the American Female Moral Reform Society to criminalize seduction and moving forward to the late twentieth-century conservative effort to codify a national abstinence-only education policy, *Regulating Desire* explores the legal regulation of young women's sexuality in the United States. The book covers five distinct time periods in which changing social conditions generated considerable public anxiety about youthful female sexuality and examines how successive generations of reformers sought to revise the law in an effort to manage unruly desires and restore a gendered social order. J. Shoshanna Ehrlich draws upon a rich array of primary source materials, including reform periodicals, court cases, legislative hearing records, and abstinence curricula to create an interdisciplinary narrative of socially embedded legal change. Capturing the complex and dynamic nature of the relationship between the state and the sexualized youthful female body, she highlights how the law both embodies and shapes gendered understandings of normative desire as mediated by considerations of race and class.

"This excellent overview of changing views of female sexuality ... raises provocative questions about young women's understanding of and control over their own bodies. A valuable contribution to scholarship in sexuality studies, rhetorical analysis, public policy, and legal history, as well as to the emerging field of girls' studies ... Highly recommended." — *CHOICE*

"Extremely thorough and very enjoyable to read, this book provides an authoritative scholarly voice on its subject matter." — Alesha E. Doan, coauthor of *The Politics of Virginity: Abstinence in Sex Education*

J. Shoshanna Ehrlich is Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She is the author of *Family Law for Paralegals, Sixth Edition* and *Who Decides? The Abortion Rights of Teens*.

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