



# A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue

By Wendy Shalit

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Revised and updated, this fifteenth anniversary edition of *A Return to Modesty* reignites Wendy Shalit’s controversial claim that we have lost our respect for an essential virtue: modesty.

When *A Return to Modesty* was first published in 1999, its argument launched a worldwide discussion about the possibility of innocence and romantic idealism. Wendy Shalit was the first to systematically critique the “hook-up” scene and outline the harms of making sexuality so public.

Today, with social media increasingly blurring the line between public and private life, and with child exploitation on the rise, the concept of modesty is more relevant than ever. Updated with a new preface that addresses the unique problems facing society now, *A Return to Modesty* shows why “the lost virtue” of modesty is not a hang-up that we should set out to cure, but rather a wonderful instinct to be celebrated.

*A Return to Modesty* is a deeply personal account as well as a fascinating intellectual exploration into everything from seventeenth-century manners to the 1948 tune “Baby, It’s Cold Outside.” Beholden neither to social conservatives nor to feminists, Shalit reminds us that modesty is not prudery, but a natural instinct—and one that may be able to save us from ourselves.

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## A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue By Wendy Shalit Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

The 23-year-old author first heard of "modestyniks"--Orthodox Jewish women who withhold physical contact from men until marriage--while a freshman at Williams College. She was initially fascinated by the way in which they cleave to old ideals, especially amid a sexually saturated contemporary world. But more so, Wendy Shalit was aghast at how modestyniks are dismissed as sick, delusional, or repressed by the secular community. "Why," asks the author, "is sexual modesty so threatening to some that they can only respond to it with charges of abuse or delusion?"

In her thoughtful three-part essay, the author reveals an impressive reading list as she probes the cultural history of sexual modesty for women and considers whether this virtue may be beneficial in today's world--if not an antidote to misogyny. In an age when women are embarrassed by sexual inexperience, when sex education is introduced as early as primary school, and when women suffer more than ever from eating disorders, stalking, sexual harassment, and date rape, Shalit believes a return to modesty may place women on equal footing with men. She yearns for a time when conservatives can believe the claims of feminists and feminists can differentiate between patriarchy and misogyny and share in the dialectic of female sexuality.

While the young author's argument is often limited by naiveté and her own lack of experience, her profound intelligence and daring are undeniable. *A Return to Modesty* is a thought-provoking debut that introduces an original and exciting new feminist thinker. --Kera Bolonik

### From Kirkus Reviews

A heartfelt (and controversial) plea, insisting that the power to heal the American female's ills lies in the reinstatement of sexual restraint, resurrection of romantic ideals, and simple good manners. Twenty-three-year-old Williams College graduate Shalit, whose 15 minutes of fame arrived when her red-faced critique of co-ed bathrooms on campus reached the pages of Reader's Digest, has produced a daring book aimed at the core of contemporary gender theory. Shalit demonstrates familiarity with both conservative and feminist explanations of women's problems such as eating disorders, teen pregnancy, date rape, and stalking, but presents what she terms a "middle path" to elucidating and curing these problems. It is natural for women to be modest, she argues, and low self-esteem and disrespect from men were natural consequences of the promotion of sexual promiscuity among young people of both sexes. There is true compassion for women's sense of self in her critique of premarital sexual practices, and she insists that while male behavior is often unacceptable and degrading to women, men are only acting rationally within the constraints of popular expectations. She finds that despite the stigma placed on modesty today some traces remain, pointing towards the primordial defenses that once protected women by placing them out of reach of men who were not prepared to commit and treat them with respect. Orthodox Jewish rules of modesty and Islamic dress provide Shalit with material to show the benefits of restraint in male-female relations: it puts women in control of access to their bodies, allows them to preserve the beauty of their romantic aspirations, compels men to invest themselves in relationships, and enhances the erotic potential of eventual intimacy, she says. The message of this book is rarely heard, it is audacious, and it should not be dismissed out of hand despite Shalit's occasional reliance on women's magazines such as *Mademoiselle* and *Elle* as a source of information on the state of the American female soul. -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

### Review

"Wendy Shalit's first book, *A Return to Modesty*. . . created a storm when it was published nine years ago. . . As a veteran of pro-sex feminism who still endorses pornography and prostitution, I say more power to

all these chaste young women who are defending their individuality and defying groupthink and social convention. That is true feminism!" (Camille Paglia)

"Her book has touched a nerve in a society overdosed on sex...Shalit defends...compellingly, shame, privacy, gallantry, and sexual reticence" (Tamala M. Edwards *Time*)

"Ms. Shalit marshals impressive evidence from philosophers as well as the tabloids to make her case for a return to modesty -- as both a sexual ideal and a strategy for greater pleasure...[a] serious yet bouncy study" (Ruth R. Wisse *The Wall Street Journal*)

"A *Return to Modesty* provides one invaluable service. There is a growing body of scholarly research on young adulthood that may, in the aftermath of Shalit's booming polemic, be more difficult to ignore." (Emily Eakin *The New York Times Book Review*)

"The book of the moment...makes a compelling case for the idea that the sexual revolution hasn't been entirely good for either women or men...Social workers, health professionals and others who bemoan the loss of "boundaries" in the lives of troubled girls will find a hopeful message in the book" (Shari Roan *Los Angeles Times*)

"The first book of its kind...to blaze down the center of the postfeminist battleground between left and right." (Norah Vincent *Salon*)

"[An] earnest and serious book....A fascinating subject [brought] to our attention in a fresh way." (Suzanne Field *The Washington Times*)

"A *Return to Modesty* is...so uncompromising in voice and stance that one is tempted to think of its author as Simone de Shalit or Wendy Wollstonecraft, but make no mistake: she imitates nothing and no one...Every page of this book [is] wise, fresh, and funny, sparkling with her special brand of astringent charm" (Florence King *National Review*)

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Justin Moore:**

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open as well as read a book called A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You know beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can smarter than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have additional opinion?

#### **Jennifer Wetzel:**

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