

## CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

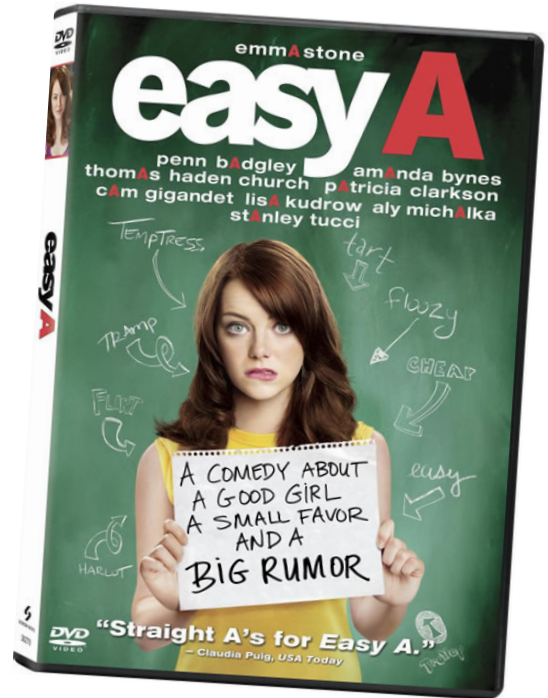
### Movie/DVD: *Easy A*

By Walt Mueller

**Background/summary:** A high school student discovers that telling a simple white lie about having a first sexual experience transforms her standing with her peers from wallflower to extremely well-known. . . for better or for worse. Released to theaters in September 2010, this satirical and humorous teen-targeted film hit stores in December. Lead actress Emma Stone was nominated for a Best Performance Golden Globe Award.

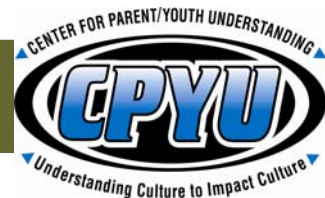
#### Discover: What is the message/worldview?

- The film opens with main character Olive Pendergast webcasting—to an audience of peers—the truth about who she *really* is and what she's *really* done in an effort to correct a series of lies that spread like wildfire through her high school's population. In an effort to get out of a weekend camping trip with the quirky and awkward family of her sexually-experienced best friend Rhiannon, Olive lies about having a date with George, a fictitious community college student. After spending the weekend alone at home, Olive returns to school. During a trip into the girls' room with Rhiannon, Olive caves to Rhiannon's pressure-filled questioning about the date, "admitting" that she lost her virginity to George. Olive is surprised when Mary Ann Bryant—the leader of the school's fundamentalist Christian club—emerges from a stall to pass judgment on what she's just overhead, and then to walk out the door to start the fast-moving and destructive chain of gossip.
- As Olive's lie spreads like wildfire, all eyes focus on her and she begins to enjoy her new-found emergence from obscurity. Olive embraces her "slutty alter-ego," dressing and talking in ways that play up to her reputation as a "dirty skank," including wearing Hester Prynne's scarlet letter "A" on her clothes. While Olive is looked down upon by her female peers, a small parade of disenfranchised males (a homosexual tired of being harassed, an overweight boy who wants to be liked, etc.) seize on Olive's new reputation hoping that saying they engaged in sex with Olive and then spreading the word will serve to increase their standing on the school social ladder. Olive agrees to say she's been sexually involved with each in order to help them out. . . in exchange for gift cards.
- When everything starts to come undone for Olive and she sees the error and consequences of her lying ways, she makes a noble effort to seek guidance and direction for the first time in her life from the church. Sadly, a confession in a Catholic church ends with Olive realizing that nobody was on the other side of the confessional screen to listen and guide. A trip to a local Protestant church brings nothing but judgment from the church pastor, who Olive quickly learns is Mary Ann Bryant's hypocritical father.
- Olive makes things right with the help of her loyal and trustworthy childhood friend, Todd, who sees Olive for who she *really* is. Along the way she discovers her love for Todd, and decides to host a webcast where she tells the truth about her own virginity, along with the fact that it's ok for others to simply be and accept who they are, regardless of who they are, what they do, or how they choose to live.
- At the end of the movie and Olive's webcast (where, by the way, disappointed viewers thought they would be able to watch Olive have sex with a guy), Olive tells her viewers that she may lose her virginity to Todd in 5 minutes, a few hours, or even after they get married. . . and, that it's nobody's business.



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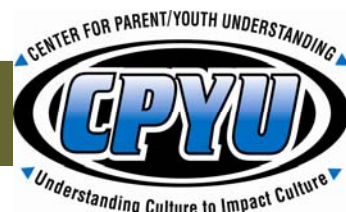
### **Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?**

- *Easy A* sends a direct message about the dangers of lying and gossip. Early on in the history of His chosen people of the Nation of Israel, God issues the Ten Commandments, which include the clear prohibition against bearing false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16). Throughout the Bible, lying (Colossians 3:9) and gossip (Proverbs 20:19; II Corinthians 12:20) are prohibited because of their sinful and destructive nature. It is admirable that Olive discovers and endeavors to correct her lies and their complications.
- While Olive should not be commended for using dishonest and deceptive means to the end of loving the campus outcasts, she should be commended for having a heart for those who are maligned by the class system and biased social pecking order that exists on her high school campus. Even though her compassion and actions are not motivated by a desire to honor and glorify Christ, she does exhibit a Christ-like tenderness to those who are victims of ostracism and injustice. The Christian is called by God to be renewed in mind (Romans 12:2) and to do justice by loving others as followers and imitators of Christ (I John, etc.). Still, just as we are to speak out against injustice, we are also to speak out against and avoid sin.
- As in many films, Christians are depicted and stereotyped in *Easy A* as hypocritical, shallow, buffoons. While those of us who are Christians might be horrified and repulsed by how we're portrayed, we shouldn't fire back by condemning the depiction. Rather, we must seek to understand the reasons why the filmmaker would portray believers in such a negative light, recognizing that the stereotype might in fact be somewhat justified from their own past experience with hypocritical Christians. Instead of verbal protestations, we should endeavor to live a life of faithful presence in our sinful and broken world (James 3:13).
- We live in a world marked by ethical relativism. This is certainly reflected in the film's depiction of human sexuality. For example, Olive takes a strong stand against the sexual advances of her male peers. But at the film's end, she is direct in her belief that she will have sex with Todd whenever she wants, and it's nobody's business but hers. Standards and parameters for right and wrong have been established by God, the One who made us and all aspects of our lives, including our sexuality.

### **Decide: What do I do with it?**

- Because *Easy A* offers a window into the world of today's youth culture, it should be viewed and discussed by parents, youth workers, pastors, educators, and others who work with adolescents. The film offers especially helpful insights into the high school social scene, adolescent development, teen sexuality, and ethics. Use the film as a catalyst for developing biblically-faithful response strategies to these teenage realities.
- It is recommended that youth workers working with teens who have already viewed the film ask parents for permission to screen and discuss the film with those students. After viewing the film, ask students to list ways that *Easy A* reflects life on their high school campus. Look for ways to discuss a Godly perspective on those realities. In addition, the film offers fodder for discussing ways to integrate one's faith into all of life, especially at the level of truth-telling, relationships, gossip, and sexuality.
- Youth workers and parents should use *Easy A* as a discussion prompt on matters of justice. The emerging generation is one that's concerned with making a difference in their world. Point to Jesus and His commands as the motivation for living justly in our fallen and broken world. Discuss Olive's care and concern for others, along with her approach to helping the outcast. What are some concrete ways to "do justice" on the high school campus?
- The film's plot and use of humor has fueled its connection with kids. Seize the opportunity to discuss the appropriateness/inappropriateness of the film's use of humor, paying particular attention to what it means to employ and respond to humor in a way that brings honor and glory to God.

*Dr. Walt Mueller is the president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.*



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