

Sex Education 101: Approachable Essays on Folklore, Culture, and History

Jeana Jorgensen

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Sex Education 101 is an edifying, wide-ranging essay collection that illuminates human sexuality and biology studies.

Sex Education 101 is professor Jeana Jorgensen's sprawling, irreverent collection of essays on the intersections of sexuality, folklore studies, and the history of teaching sex in schools, touching on subjects including the myth of virginity and panic over widespread pornography use.

An interdisciplinary academic intervention into questions of identity, social justice, cultural discrimination, and paths towards healthy inclusivity, *Sex Education 101* is erudite when it comes to the history of sex education in the United States. The nuances and cultural criticism that the discipline generates are considered as well. Distinguishing between official information and the slew of urban legends, jokes, everyday language, and loaded cultural references that contribute to a person's sexual development and understanding, the essays argue that folklore is a cornerstone for basic ideas about sex and an engaging tool for deepening sex education curricula.

The prose is marked by sarcasm, snark, and a playful sense of interpersonal speech. Even as it engages with heavy subjects, like the trauma of sexual violence, and dense, academic explanations of the overwhelming biological similarities between humans of different genders and sexes, it maintains a light optimistic tone. Parentheticals abound, often addressing the audience with familiarity, as when a brief history of sex education is appended with an introductory "tl;dr." Colorful asides are used to express exasperation over the criminalization of sex work as well. Elsewhere, engagement with bizarre online sexual discourses is used to shed light on the incoherence and bullying inherent to popular concepts like "camel toe" and "roasties" alongside clear explanations of basic human sexuality and biology. There are chapters dedicated to defining what an orgasm is and isn't, revising the ingrained societal belief in a "sex drive," and giving basic facts about the vagina too.

This is a text that is chock full of powerful arguments and little-known facts, as with those regarding the military's influence on modern sex education. It cites its sources in an accessible manner at the end of each chapter. Internally, it has a rhetorical tendency to mix its opinions with objective educational content, though, leading to momentary stalls. Some arguments, as with one against the existence of porn addictions, are constructed around reputable facts; these are undercut by discursions on greed, capitalism, bigotry, and other abstract concepts, though. This results in a sharp contrast between the essays that are rigorous and focused and those that expand far afield, if with energetic momentum.

A wide-ranging collection of essays related to human sexuality and biology, *Sex Education 101* is an astute, edifying, and inclusive text.

WILLEM MARX (June 12, 2024)

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